Digital Competence in English Language Teaching: Challenges and Perspectives for Effective Integration

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Abstract
In an era defined by accelerated technological advancement and the widespread digitalization of educational systems worldwide, the role of digital competence in English language teaching has emerged as a central pillar for ensuring both the relevance and quality of foreign language education. This paper investigates the multidimensional nature of digital competence, analyzes empirical data collected from English teachers in Uzbekistan, and discusses practical implications for enhancing digital literacy among educators to meet the evolving demands of 21st-century classrooms. By applying the IMRAD framework, the study not only outlines the current status quo but also provides insights into sustainable strategies for bridging existing gaps and maximizing the pedagogical potential of digital tools.
Keywords: digital competence, English language teaching, ICT integration, teacher training, educational innovation.

1. Introduction
In the context of global educational reforms and the ever-increasing emphasis on digitalization, the ability of educators to effectively integrate digital technologies into their teaching practices has become a decisive factor in the quality and effectiveness of foreign language instruction. The teaching of English as a foreign language, in particular, demands that teachers possess not only subject-specific knowledge and pedagogical skills but also a robust set of digital competences that enable them to design, deliver, and evaluate engaging learning experiences tailored to the needs of digitally native learners. Although the widespread availability of technological devices and internet access has opened unprecedented opportunities for innovative teaching, a considerable gap remains between the theoretical potential of digital tools and their actual, consistent application in everyday classroom practice. Recent research underscores that digital competence extends beyond mere operational skills, encompassing critical and ethical dimensions such as online safety, intellectual property awareness, and the ability to foster digital citizenship among learners. Consequently, the question of how to develop and sustain high levels of digital competence among English language teachers represents an urgent priority that requires both systemic support and individual commitment.

2. Methods
To gain a comprehensive understanding of the current level of digital competence among English language teachers, this study employed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative research instruments. A structured questionnaire was distributed among 50 English language teachers working at secondary schools in Navoi region, Uzbekistan. The questionnaire included closed and open-ended items designed to assess teachers' self-reported digital skills, frequency and purpose of using digital resources, perceived barriers to integration, and attitudes towards continuous professional development in the field of educational technology. To supplement the survey data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 selected teachers who volunteered to provide deeper insights into their personal experiences and institutional contexts that facilitate or hinder the meaningful integration of digital tools.

Quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistical analysis, while qualitative responses were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically to identify recurrent patterns, success stories, and challenges. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly observed throughout the research process.

3. Results

The survey results indicate that a significant proportion of English teachers (82%) acknowledge the pivotal role of digital competence in improving the quality and appeal of English lessons, yet only 47% reported using digital tools in their classes on a weekly basis. Among the tools most commonly utilized were language learning applications such as Duolingo and Quizlet, online quiz platforms like Kahoot!, and general-purpose tools like Google Classroom and Zoom, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when remote and hybrid teaching models became unavoidable. Despite this positive trend, more than half of the respondents admitted that they rarely engage in the creation of original digital content, such as interactive tasks, video lectures, or online assessment materials, citing a lack of technical expertise and time constraints as the main obstacles. Furthermore, teachers highlighted the insufficiency of digital infrastructure, with 64% pointing to unstable internet connections and outdated hardware as major barriers that hinder their motivation and ability to consistently implement digital practices.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study echo global trends observed in similar educational contexts, where the enthusiasm for digital transformation is often tempered by practical constraints and gaps in institutional support. It is evident that digital competence should be conceptualized as a holistic construct that intertwines technical skills with pedagogical know-how, ethical awareness, and continuous reflective practice. Therefore, enhancing digital competence among English language teachers requires a multi-pronged approach that addresses infrastructural, organizational, and individual dimensions simultaneously. Firstly, schools and educational authorities must ensure that teachers have access to reliable internet services, modern digital devices, and technical support systems. Without addressing these basic infrastructural needs, even the most motivated teachers may find themselves unable to translate their ideas into practice. Secondly, professional development programs should move beyond one-time workshops and instead provide sustained, practice-oriented training modules that focus on practical skills such as creating digital content, designing blended and flipped classroom models, and evaluating digital resources for language learning. Peer mentoring programs and online communities of practice can further empower teachers by fostering collaborative learning and the sharing of best practices. Moreover, integrating digital competence development into pre-service teacher education curricula would help cultivate positive attitudes and foundational skills early in teachers' careers, ensuring that new generations of educators are better prepared to leverage digital tools creatively and responsibly. Policymakers and school leaders must also recognize that motivating teachers to embrace digital transformation often requires not only technical training but also incentives such as recognition, additional support, and time allocation for experimenting with new methodologies.

5. Conclusion

This study confirms that while the awareness of the importance of digital competence in English language teaching is relatively high among teachers, the consistent and effective integration of digital tools into daily practice remains constrained by infrastructural challenges, limited training, and a lack of collaborative platforms. Addressing these challenges calls for concerted efforts from multiple

stakeholders, including educational institutions, policymakers, and the teachers themselves. By investing in reliable digital infrastructure, providing ongoing, relevant professional development opportunities, and cultivating a culture of innovation and knowledge sharing, educational systems can unlock the full potential of digital technologies to enrich English language learning and better prepare students for the demands of a rapidly changing, interconnected world. Future research could expand this investigation by exploring the long-term effects of specific digital interventions on students' language proficiency and by conducting comparative studies across different regions or countries to identify context-specific best practices. Ultimately, developing robust digital competence among English language teachers should be viewed not as an isolated goal but as an integral part of broader efforts to modernize education and foster lifelong learning skills in the digital age.

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