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Online technologies for language learning and teaching: innovations, practices and perceptions from students and teachers

<https://doi.org/10.1515/jccall-2024-0002>

Published online May 23, 2024

1 Introduction

In the last decade, the landscape of language education has been profoundly transformed with a surge in online technologies. This special issue investigates the expansive utilisation and development of both emerging and well-established online technologies in language learning and teaching. Interactive learning tools such as Nearpod, Edpuzzle, Mentimeter, Flip, and advancements in artificial intelligence, virtual reality, augmented reality, corpus technology, and other web-based resources, have significantly reshaped educational methodologies.

The current digital era, brimming with technological breakthroughs, necessitates an in-depth exploration of their implications for language education. This special issue aims to scrutinise the convergence and interaction of these technologies, capturing their roles in fostering innovative teaching and learning practices and shaping perceptions among learners and teachers. Presenting a diverse collection of research – from digital storytelling in young learners' classrooms and mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) to corpus-based language learning environments – we strive to highlight the multifaceted effects that online technologies have on the dynamics of language learning and teaching in various contexts and across multiple sites.

2 Scope and content

This special issue casts a wide net, encompassing studies that illustrate the innovative application of online technologies in language learning and teaching, as well as the perceptions of those who use them. We carefully selected the right articles for this special issue so that each contribution not only exhibits a clear connection to

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technology-enhanced language education but also provides empirical insights or critical analyses into the effectiveness and perceptions of these tools. The topics covered are diverse, ranging from the use of specific language learning apps and platforms to the broader implications of digital tools for facilitating specific language learning skills such as speaking, reading, writing and testing. The final selection of articles represents a variety of educational contexts, including K-12, higher education, and adult learning, and addresses a spectrum of languages and geographical settings. The issue aims to provide a snapshot of the current state of online language learning and teaching, with a focus on pedagogical innovation, student engagement, and the evolving role of the language teachers in the digital age.

3 Contributions and authors

This special issue presents an array of pioneering studies that collectively advance our understanding of online technologies for language teaching and learning. The authors, a diverse group of academics located in Switzerland, the UK, Ireland, and China, offer their unique perspectives, leveraging a range of methodologies to examine the intersection of language education and online technology. Their contributions are not only reflective of current pedagogical practices but also serve to propel the discourse forward, potentially shaping future frameworks for online language learning and teaching.

The issue commences with an exploration of “Promoting speaking in the young learner classroom through task-based digital storytelling via online technology: a case study” by Lustenberger (2024). It presents a year-long investigation into how digital storytelling can enhance oracy skills among Swiss primary school Year 4 students. The author’s contribution lies in the innovative use of video and audio recordings to capture the impact of collaborative storytelling tasks, revealing the motivating potential of digitally supported language learning for young L2 learners.

Subsequent to this, “Enhancing willingness to communicate in English among Chinese students in the UK: the impact of MALL with Duolingo and HelloTalk” by Zhao et al. (2024) provides an empirical assessment of mobile app-based language learning. The authors examine two distinct learning modalities and their effects on the communication willingness of Chinese students in the UK. This research contributes to the special issue by showcasing the role that mobile-assisted language learning can play in shaping language proficiency and learner motivation.

In “Student perceived effectiveness of task-based instructional design of data-driven synonym learning featuring ‘mini-lecture’” by Yang et al. (2024), the focus shifts to corpus-based learning and task-based instruction. The study evaluates student-perceived effectiveness of this innovative instructional design, contributing

to the issue by emphasizing the importance of scaffolding and learner autonomy in the language learning process.

In a similar vein, the article “Promoting critical reading instruction in higher education: a three-step training scheme facilitated by using corpus technology” by Yang and Mei (2024) delves into the development of critical cognitive skills through corpus-based learning methods. This piece stands out for its novel three-step corpus training scheme that intertwines corpus technology with critical reading instruction, offering a practical instructional framework that can be adopted in language teaching higher education.

The article “Enhancing students’ L2 writing skills online: a case study of an introductory English literature course for ESL students” by Shi et al. (2024) presents an interesting narrative inquiry into the online adaptation of an English literature course. The author’s investigation into Zoom-based essay consultations and collaborative writing on Padlet offers insights into improving ESL students’ writing skills, highlighting the transformative potential of online technologies in literature instruction.

In “Dynamic testing of language learning aptitude: an exploratory proof of concept study” by Du and Beckman (2024), the article embraces technological advancements in language assessment. It outlines the development of an useful online dynamic testing tool and its preliminary application with young L2 learners, providing a forward-looking perspective on the future development of language aptitude assessment.

Lastly, “A systematic review of the use of WeChat in teaching Chinese as a foreign language” by Liu (2024) synthesises research on the employment of WeChat for Chinese language teaching. This comprehensive review maps out the current landscape and identifies future avenues for technology-assisted language teaching, reinforcing the issue’s overarching theme of technology integration in language education.

Each article within this special issue not only contributes to its overarching theme but also stands as a testament to the dynamic and evolving landscape of technological applications in language learning and teaching. Collectively, these studies underscore the potential impact of digital tools on language pedagogy, offering innovative approaches that may well define future educational standards and methodologies. The diversity of approaches and findings presented in this issue promises to enhance practitioners’ understanding and stimulate further research in the field, marking a significant step forward for technology-enhanced language learning and teaching.

4 Conclusions

This special issue encapsulates the transformative synergy between online technology and language education. Each study contributes to a nuanced understanding

of how digital tools enhance learning and open new pedagogical horizons. As we reflect on the insights presented, we are reminded that the journey of language educational innovation is continuous. The convergence of online technology and language pedagogy not only reshapes current practices but also raises pivotal questions about the future of language learning and teaching. What will the next frontier of language education look like in an increasingly digital world? This issue makes us contemplate the vast potential that lies at the nexus of technology, language, and education.

Acknowledgments: We would like to express our heart-felt thanks to the following reviewers who have provided valuable, constructive and critical feedback to help improve the quality of the articles included in this special issue: Gavin Bui, Hsueh Chu Chen, Yaxiao Chen, Lok Ming Eric Cheung, Shiya Huang, Hiu Tung Hubert Lee, Yulong Li, Jing Liu, Jingmiao Lu, Tim Taylor, Mengwei Tu, Qin Xie, Zhichang Xu, Jiahao Yan and Danyang Zhang.

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