

RELIGACIÓN

R E V I S T A

The impact of digital tools on EFL speaking and writing

El impacto de las herramientas digitales en el habla y la escritura de EFL

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Abstract

This study explores the effects of technology on speaking and writing skills in English as a foreign language (EFL). Rapid technological advances, particularly during the recent shift to online learning, have transformed the dynamics of language teaching and learning. The study aims to identify the advantages, challenges, and overall impact of technology integration on the performance and experiences of EFL learners. A mixed-methods approach was employed, utilizing surveys to gather both quantitative data and qualitative insights into learner perceptions. Furthermore, the research incorporates findings from existing literature on related topics. Survey results indicated that technology significantly influences university students' learning, particularly through various applications. However, students generally perceive these digital tools as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, face-to-face classes and direct interaction with their professor.

Keywords: technology; methodology; foreign learning.

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Resumen

Este estudio explora los efectos de las tecnologías en las habilidades de expresión oral y escrita en inglés como lengua extranjera. Los rápidos avances en la tecnología, especialmente durante la transición hacia el aprendizaje en línea, han transformado la dinámica de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de idiomas. Esta revisión tiene como objetivo identificar las ventajas, los desafíos y los efectos de la tecnología en el desempeño y las experiencias de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera. Se emplearán métodos de investigación tanto cualitativos (percepciones/respuestas de la encuesta) como cuantitativos (encuesta), la investigación en el documento incluye información obtenida a partir de diversas fuentes que tengan similitud con el tema de investigación. Los resultados obtenidos de la encuesta confirmaron que la tecnología ha tenido una gran influencia en el aprendizaje de los estudiantes universitarios a través de sus aplicaciones, pero la consideran un complemento adicional a sus clases presenciales e interactivas con su profesor.

Palabras clave: Tecnología; metodología; lengua extranjera.

Introduction

This document addresses the topic, 'The Impact of Digital Tools on Oral and Written Expression in English as a Foreign Language: A Systematic Review of the Literature.' Within this context, it is important to note that technology has become an essential tool in daily life, given that most individuals currently utilize it for both work and personal activities (Escobar et al., 2021). Furthermore, technology significantly impacts the learning and mastery of foreign languages, such as English, by enabling students to access personalized and varied resources, which can improve their educational experience (Baltazar et al., 2024). English proficiency, it should be noted, has increasingly become a minimum requirement for functioning effectively in the labor market (Cisneros, 2021), largely because it is the predominant language of the internet, social networks, technology, and global commerce.

The use of technological tools has revolutionized educational contexts, becoming key allies in teaching and learning processes. Particularly in second or foreign language instruction, their contribution is significant (Royer, 2024). These tools, which range from intelligent tutoring systems to chatbots and virtual assistants, aim to enhance the teaching and learning process by providing more personalized and effective experiences for students (Garcia, 2021). However, despite the numerous advantages offered by these AI-driven tools in education, they also present challenges and disadvantages requiring consideration (Velasco & Barcenas, 2020).

Arguments exist that AI could limit students' creativity and critical thinking, in addition to raising concerns about its impact on the teacher-student relationship (Guaña & Arteaga, 2023). Such concerns often stem from the potential disadvantages of exclusive AI use. These include: inadequate personalization, which can particularly challenge students with special educational needs; over-reliance on AI tools at the expense of direct instruction and human interaction; persistent concerns regarding the privacy and security of student data; and the potential for bias within AI algorithms used in education (Wendorff, 2019).

Unlike previous studies focusing on general learning outcomes, this study aims to analyze student perceptions, emerging challenges, and the extent to which technology enhances phonetics,

pronunciation, and communication skills in real-world contexts. Consequently, a survey was administered to university students. This group was chosen to analyze the impact of technology on English language learning, given their status as ‘digital natives’ (born in the 21st century with extensive internet exposure from an early age), whose developmental experiences with technology may differ significantly from those of previous generations (Cristancho, 2022).

A mixed methodological approach was applied, which involves the collection and integration of quantitative and qualitative data, through the use of tools such as the survey with multiple-choice questions, applying the Likert scale, together with the results obtained from various sources of information. By obtaining all this data, it is consolidated and the understanding of the complete real situation regarding the impact that technology has on people during the learning of English occurs.

This study adopts a multi-theoretical framework:

Krashen’s (1985), Input Hypothesis posits that effective language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly beyond their current proficiency level. Technology facilitates adherence to this hypothesis by providing access to a vast selection of authentic and meaningful language input. Separately, Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis suggests that emotional variables such as anxiety, stress, low self-confidence, and lack of motivation can hinder language acquisition (Krashen, 1985). While not explicitly part of the original theory, some argue that technology may serve as a useful tool to potentially lower this affective filter by, for instance, allowing private practice or reducing performance anxiety compared to face-to-face interaction, thereby mitigating some emotional states that can impede learning.

Vygotsky’s (1978), Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the critical role of social interaction in cognitive development, including foreign language learning. Learning is viewed as a social process, mediated by cultural tools and interactions with more knowledgeable others. While seemingly focused on human interaction, this theory does not preclude a significant role for technology. Technology can serve as a powerful mediating tool, facilitating interaction and learning through virtual platforms, collaborative online tools, and access to diverse social contexts. Consequently, Vygotsky’s framework supports a student-centered approach where knowledge is co-constructed through meaningful activities within social environments, whether physical classrooms or technologically mediated spaces.

The influence of technology on foreign language learning has evolved alongside societal technological advancements. However, its integration saw a particularly significant acceleration during the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated a rapid shift towards digital solutions. Proponents suggest that the sustained use of digital tools, including video conferencing platforms like Zoom and Google Meet, alongside various online applications, has contributed to the development of speaking, listening, and writing skills by offering new avenues for practice and interaction.

Recent research highlights several key aspects of technology integration in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. Studies indicate that digital tools, particularly gamified learning applications, can enhance student engagement and motivation, potentially increasing perseverance in language study (Godwin-Jones, 2018). Nonetheless, significant challenges persist. Barriers to effective integration include a lack of digital literacy among students and educators, limited access to necessary resources, and sometimes, resistance to adopting new pedagogical approaches incorporating technology (Lai, 2013).

Further research explores technology's effectiveness in skill development. Evidence suggests technology can enhance oral and written skills by providing opportunities for automated feedback and exposure to authentic materials, although the optimal integration of these tools into formal educational settings requires further development (Hockly, 2018). Emotional responses, such as language anxiety, remain a crucial factor influencing student success. Some research suggests that technology-mediated communication might alter these dynamics, potentially reducing anxiety for some learners compared to direct interaction (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). Finally, the impact and adoption of educational technology are not uniform; specific findings underscore the influence of socioeconomic factors and differing political or educational environments, with variations often observed between developed and developing contexts (Chen & Tsai, 2012).

Research Questions General

Research Question

1. What is the effect of technology on EFL learners' proficiency in speaking and writing?

Specific Research Questions

1. How do EFL learners perceive the use of technology for language learning?
2. What challenges do learners face when integrating digital tools into their language studies?
3. How does the use of technology influence learners' motivation, confidence, and anxiety in language learning?

Methodology

Study Design

This investigation employed a mixed-methods research design. This approach strategically combines quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis within a single study framework. The rationale for adopting a mixed-methods design is to achieve a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation—specifically, the impact of

technology on English language learning—than could be afforded by utilizing either quantitative or qualitative methodologies independently (Janeth, 2023). By integrating diverse data types, this study aims to leverage the strengths of both approaches, potentially corroborating findings and providing deeper insights.

Participants

The study sample consisted of $N = 25$ university students enrolled at the Language Center of the Catholic University of Guayaquil. Participant ages ranged between 20 and 25 years. These individuals were recruited to participate in research examining the perceived impact of technology on their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) studies.

A convenience sampling method was utilized for participant recruitment. This non-probability sampling technique was selected based on the accessibility of the student population at the Language Center. Key considerations during selection included participants' ready availability, presumed access to relevant technology used in language learning, and their level of English proficiency.

Inclusion criteria:

Eligibility for participation in this study was contingent upon meeting specific inclusion criteria. Primarily, participants were required to be currently enrolled as students at the Catholic University's Language Center. In addition to enrollment status, individuals needed to possess at least a basic level of English language proficiency to ensure they could meaningfully engage with the study's focus. Furthermore, a fundamental prerequisite for inclusion was the provision of voluntary consent, confirming their willingness to participate freely in the research process.

Exclusion criteria:

Conversely, individuals were excluded from the study if they did not meet the established inclusion requirements. Specifically, university students who were not currently enrolled at the Catholic University's Language Center were deemed ineligible. Exclusion also applied to any potential participant who did not demonstrate a basic level of English proficiency, as this was considered essential for contributing relevant data to the investigation.

Data Collection

Data for this study were gathered using a mixed-methods approach, involving distinct quantitative and qualitative phases designed to be complementary.

Quantitative Phase: The primary instrument for quantitative data collection was a survey administered to the participating university students. This survey incorporated Likert-scale items, a measurement approach chosen for its effectiveness in gauging levels of agreement or disagreement with specific statements. This allowed for the systematic assessment of participants' attitudes and perceptions regarding various aspects of technology's impact on their English language learning.

Qualitative Phase: Qualitative data were gathered to enrich and provide context to the quantitative findings. This phase centered on exploring the nuanced opinions and experiences of the university students concerning the role of technology in their acquisition of English as a foreign language. The specific method for gathering qualitative data appears linked to the survey responses aiming to capture in-depth perspectives that complement the scaled responses. The integration of these qualitative insights sought to provide a more holistic understanding than quantitative data alone could offer.

Data Analysis

Distinct analytical procedures were employed for the quantitative and qualitative data collected in this study.

The quantitative data, gathered via the survey instruments, were analyzed primarily to describe the participants' collective responses regarding the influence of technology on their English language learning. Microsoft Excel was utilized as the computational tool for this phase of the analysis. The process involved organizing the numerical data (likely from Likert scales or similar response formats) and calculating relevant descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, to summarize the central tendencies and distribution of responses. Furthermore, these statistical results were translated into graphical representations, including charts and graphs created within Excel, to facilitate a clear visual presentation and interpretation of the key quantitative findings related to the perceived impact of technology.

The qualitative data analysis focused on interpreting the perspectives and opinions expressed by the university students, likely through open-ended responses within the survey or related qualitative inquiries (Self-correction: Adjusted based on previous text suggesting qualitative data stemmed from survey results). The objective was to delve deeper into the nuances of student experiences with technology in language learning that quantitative scales might not fully capture. This analysis involved examining the textual responses to identify recurring themes, significant opinions, and illustrative examples regarding technology's role. (Self-correction: Replaced the problematic mention of comparing to authors here. The analysis described now focuses on the collected qualitative data itself. Comparing to external authors/studies is typically part of the Discussion section, not the primary data analysis description). The insights gained from this qualitative analysis were intended to complement and enrich the understanding derived from the quantitative results, contributing to a more holistic interpretation of technology's impact on English language learning within this specific student cohort.

Study Implications

This mixed-methods study, combining both quantitative and qualitative data, offers valuable insights into the influence of technology on English language learning among university students. By integrating these two approaches, this research advances the understanding of how technology affects learning in ways that would be difficult to achieve through mono- method studies alone, whether quantitative or qualitative.

The findings present crucial pedagogical and curricular implications for EFL programs at the university level, particularly in Ecuadorian contexts. The results obtained demonstrate that technology plays a fundamental role in students' learning of the English language. Consequently, EFL instructors could benefit from revising their teaching strategies to incorporate more technology-assisted learning tools. This could help students navigate challenges related to language acquisition, especially those rooted in the integration of technology into educational settings.

Furthermore, identifying the specific challenges faced by students—especially in relation to language proficiency, access to technology, and cultural differences—can inform the development of targeted interventions. Such interventions could address the diverse needs of learners, ensuring that technology is leveraged effectively to enhance language acquisition.

The mixed-methods design also opens up avenues for further research, particularly in exploring the long-term impacts of technology integration in language learning. Future studies could examine the sustainability of these findings over time, assessing the evolving role of technology in English language instruction across different proficiency levels and educational contexts. This research not only deepens the theoretical understanding of the intersection between technology and language learning but also provides practical applications for improving EFL programs.

Results

During the research process, a pre-survey was administered to exactly 25 students. Those chosen were students of English as a foreign language who actively use digital tools in their studies. The results of the responses obtained will be announced below.

Figure 1. How do you feel about the use of technology in your EFL learning process?

Options	Quantity.
5 = Excellent	25
4 = Very Good	0
3 = Good	0
2 = Fair	0
1 = Bad	0
Total	25

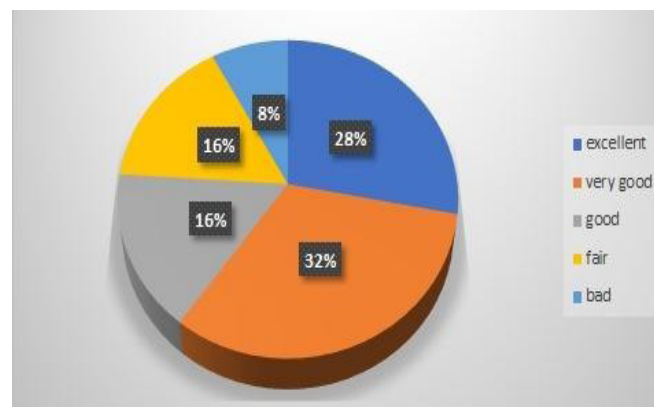


Source: own elaboration

100% of the students surveyed commented that they feel very good/excellent about the use of technology during their learning, given that it is possible to use various apps and platforms with content in English, allowing them to study independently, reinforcing what they have learned in class.

Figure 2. To what extent do you feel that digital tools enhance your skills in EFL learning? (Likert scale: 1-5)

Options	Quantity.
5 = Excellent	7
4 = Very Good	8
3 = Good	4
2 = Fair	4
1 = Bad	2
Total	25

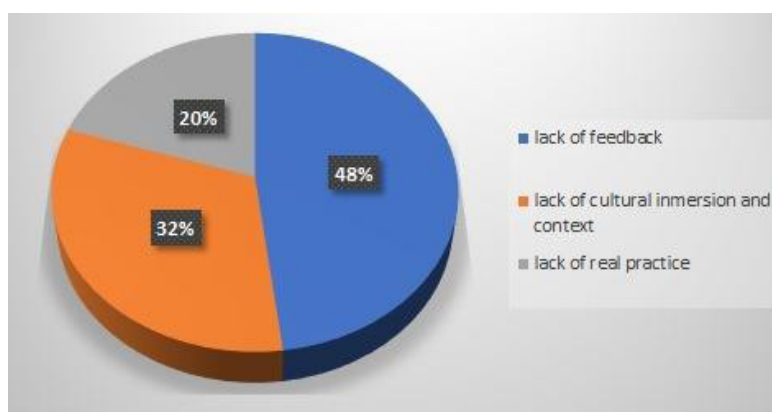


Source: own elaboration

28% of the students surveyed consider that the measure of their learning through the use of digital tools is 5 = Excellent, being of great help to them, 32% rate themselves with a 4 = Very Good, since they consider the progress, they have made since they began to use the tools, 16% of the students consider themselves 3 = Good, another 16% somewhat 2 = Average while 8% feel that it has not been of much help to them 1 = bad.

Figure 3. What specific challenges have you faced when using technology for language learning?

Options	Quantity.
Lack of Feedback	12
Lack of Cultural Immersion and Context	8
Lack of real practice	5
Total	25

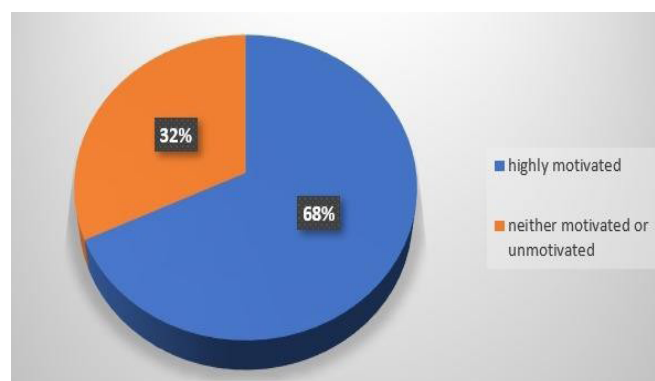


Source: own elaboration

The challenges that students have faced are the pronunciation and understanding of words and phrases that can have different meanings depending on the context used. 48% mention the lack of feedback in the app they use to improve their English, since, by not being able to ask, they do not get an answer to any doubt they have at that moment. Another 32% mentioned the lack of context and cultural immersion that occur in the applications. This is considered to be the case because there are many words that have one meaning in some countries while in others, they have a different one. And 20% comment that the lack of real practice does not allow them to properly practice the pronunciation of words by not being able to interact.

Figure 4. How motivated do you feel when using online platforms for EFL practice? (Likert scale: 1-5)

Options	Quantity.
5 = Highly Motivated	17
4 = Motivated	0
3 = Neither motivated nor unmotivated	8
2 = Unmotivated	0
1 = Very unmotivated	0
Total	25

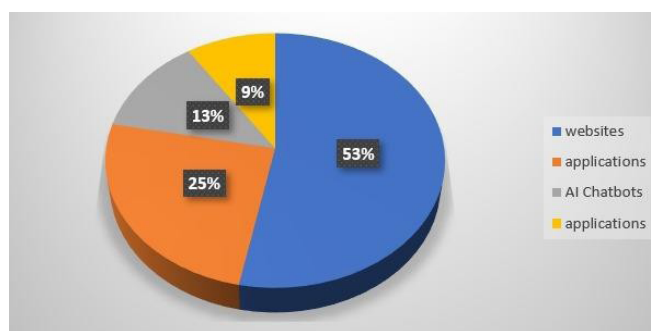


Source: own elaboration

68% of students are motivated by the interaction and use of the platforms while 32% remain neutral, that is, they are neither motivated nor discouraged by their use.

Figure 5. Which digital tools do you find most helpful for improving EFL skills?

Options	Quantity.
Websites	8
Applications	10
AI Chatbots	4
Google Translate	3
Total	25

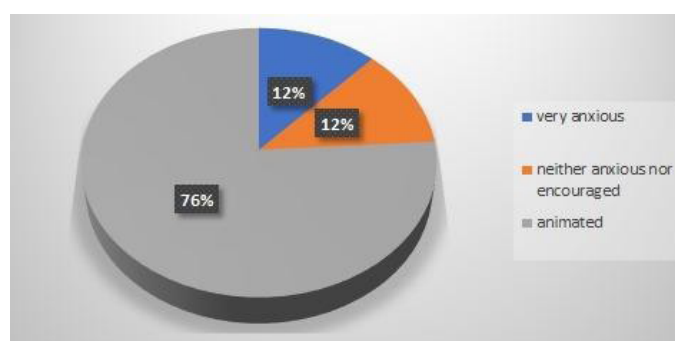


Source: own elaboration

40% of students consider that the use of applications encompasses greater learning for the improvement of their study, 32% select websites, 16% consider AI chatbots to be the most suitable for greater interaction while a minority of 12% continues to use Google Translate, one of the first tools that has helped in the translation of various languages.

Figure 6. How anxious do you feel about speaking during online classes? (Likert scale: 1-5)

Options	Quantity.
5 = Very anxious	3
4 = Anxious	0
3 = Neither anxious nor encouraged	3
2= Animated	19
1 = Very lively	0
Total	25

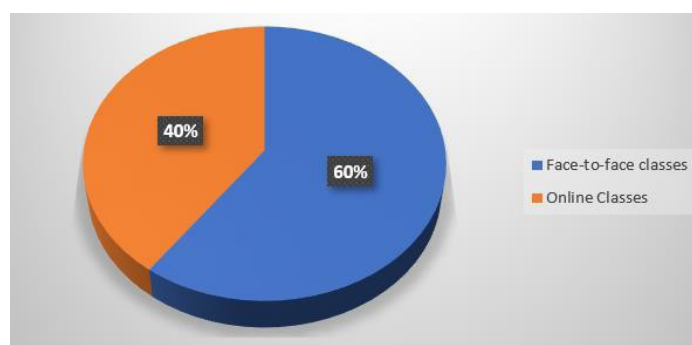


Source: own elaboration

Only 12% feel anxious when speaking during classes, while 16% remain neutral and the remaining 72% said they feel encouraged when interacting during online classes with the teacher.

Figure 7. Do you prefer speaking in online class discussions or in-person classes? Please explain why.

Options	Quantity.
Face-to-face classes	15
Online Classes	10
Total	25



Source: own elaboration

60% of students have expressed that they prefer to receive face-to-face classes because there is much more interaction, they can ask their teacher questions, debate with their classmates, as well as practice their pronunciation and fluency, and they also consider that they can learn body language and cultural immersion through direct interaction, while 40% prefer to debate during online classes because they consider that it would be faster and more accessible, they can communicate from anywhere, in addition to saving time and money, and these types of classes can even be recorded and watched again.

The results obtained from the previous survey show that the impact of AI on learning English as a foreign language is a fundamental part of their learning, although it is worth mentioning that the majority of students surveyed consider that this learning is complemented by debates in face-to-face classes due to the direct interaction that everyone has, allowing a greater exchange of ideals, facilitating attention and obtaining new knowledge through practice.

Discussion

According to the results obtained in the survey carried out on university students and based on the information obtained from bibliographic sources of studies that have been carried out in advance by various authors, it has been possible to carry out the interpretation and analysis, being able to answer the general question of this topic: What is the effect of technology on the oral and written competence of students of English as a foreign language?

During the survey carried out, 100% of the students surveyed stated that they feel comfortable using technology as a necessary resource to improve their learning in the English language, since with it they can improve their writing and listening, in addition to correcting their pronunciation when repeating. The authors Baltazar et al. (2024), comment that technology is a tool that has become necessary in people's daily lives, given that, currently, most of them carry out their work activities through its use, complementing this statement. Ortiz (2024), points out that the use of personalized tools improves their oral skills, however, their use poses challenges such as accessibility and the availability of adequate.

How do EFL learners perceive the use of technology for language learning?

The research carried out shows that students prefer to use applications, websites and even AI chatbots in addition to the traditional Google Translate since having several learning options brings them greater benefit in their career. There are different types of digital methods and tools that are born from technology such as intelligent tutoring systems, whose purpose is to improve teaching through personalized experiences (Garcia, 2021).

What challenges do students face when integrating digital tools into their language studies?

It is true that technology has allowed improvement in the learning of a foreign language, however, there are limitations that could occur, in addition, the results obtained have shown the

deficiencies that students have in its use, such as the lack of Feedback, cultural immersion and real context and practice. Although studies argue that technology could reduce and impede the growth of creativity in people, in addition to influencing students' thinking and even creating problems between the teacher-student relationship (Guaña & Arteaga, 2023).

During the investigation, it was learned that they opt for both options, that is, a mix of the use of technology, as well as traditional learning by choosing to be in face-to-face classes in which they can have greater interaction by practicing their pronunciation and at the same time being able to be in virtual classes. The authors Jiménez and Franco (2023), in the results of their study state that 59% of the students surveyed mentioned that their preferred educational modality is face-to-face, while 22.2% prefer the hybrid modality, and 18.5% opt for the virtual modality.

In agreement with the authors Guaña and Arteaga (2023); Wendorff (2019), establishes the lack of adequate personalization in learning, resulting in excessive dependence on AI tools instead of direct instruction and human interaction.

How does the use of technology influence students' motivation, confidence and anxiety in language learning?

The research revealed that a minority of students feel anxious about using technology, while the majority say they feel encouraged when using digital media to learn new things. This type of anxiety arises because they think that traditional learning with human interaction is the most viable way to improve their foreign language by maintaining face-to-face conversations in which they can study not only speaking and listening, but also body language and interpreting the context of certain phrases or sentences. Olaya and Ahumada (2023), point out that for many students, speaking in a foreign language without interactive support to give them confidence is a situation that produces anxiety; However, anxiety levels are not the same in all students, some feel little anxiety while others generate high levels of anxiety.

Implications of Findings

The findings of this study underscore the significant role technology plays in enhancing the oral and written competence of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, while also highlighting the challenges students face in integrating digital tools into their language studies. The results suggest that students generally perceive technology as a valuable resource for improving their language skills, particularly in writing, listening, and pronunciation. This aligns with existing literature, which emphasizes the growing necessity of technology in education (Baltazar et al., 2024). Moreover, the findings support the idea that personalized learning tools, such as AI-powered applications and intelligent tutoring systems, can facilitate language acquisition by providing students with tailored learning experiences (Garcia, 2021).

However, the study also reveals that the use of technology in EFL education is not without its limitations. While technology improves access to various learning resources, students face

challenges related to the lack of personalized feedback, cultural immersion, and real-world context. These challenges are crucial to address, as they could hinder the effectiveness of digital tools in supporting language learning. Additionally, the over-reliance on technology could reduce students' creativity and create potential issues in the teacher-student relationship (Guaña & Arteaga, 2023).

The preference for a hybrid model of learning, combining both traditional face-to-face instruction and virtual classes, reflects students' desire for a balanced approach that maximizes the benefits of both methods. This indicates the need for EFL programs to adapt and integrate technology in a way that complements in-person learning experiences, allowing for greater interaction, particularly in developing pronunciation and communication skills. The findings also suggest that EFL educators should be mindful of the challenges posed by excessive dependence on AI tools and strive to maintain a balance between technological and human interaction in the classroom (Wendorff, 2019).

In terms of motivation and anxiety, the study reveals that technology can have a positive impact on student confidence, with many students feeling encouraged by the digital media they use to learn. However, anxiety remains a concern, especially for students who are more comfortable with traditional, human-centered learning methods. This highlights the importance of providing supportive, interactive environments—both digital and face-to-face—that reduce anxiety and foster greater student engagement. As Olaya and Ahumada (2023), note, students' levels of anxiety vary, and understanding these differences is crucial for designing effective language learning environments.

In summary, the implications of these findings suggest that while technology can significantly enhance EFL learning, its integration must be carefully managed to address the challenges students face and to strike a balance between digital and traditional methods of instruction. Educators should be mindful of the potential for over-reliance on technology, and ensure that the human element remains central to language acquisition, particularly in fostering student confidence and reducing anxiety.

Conclusion

In short, taking into account the investigation and interpretation of the results obtained, it is possible to reach the following conclusions:

The impact of technology on students' learning in the foreign language has been important, since it has allowed it to be faster and more accessible, allowing them to advance in their oral and written skills, not only within the classrooms but from anywhere and at any time, accessing virtual platforms, giving them greater flexibility in the distribution of their time.

Through the research that was carried out for the development of this document, relevant data was provided in which it was possible to indirectly know the advantages – benefits and

disadvantages – shortcomings that students may have when constantly using technology for their language studies, such as rapid access to a large amount of information, as well as the generation of a dependency on technology.

The shortcomings that technological tools present for students are limitations in learning the foreign language, the lack of cultural immersion and context in them makes understanding difficult, it is general knowledge that a word or phrase has a different meaning depending on the place, therefore, body language and facial expressions become a great help, but when using an app, this is not possible.

The university students who participated in the survey, through their responses, stated that they opt for traditional learning, which is manifested in face-to-face classes through direct interaction with the teacher and classmates, complementing it with the use of technology such as applications, websites and other digital tools, using them in their leisure time. It is worth mentioning that a minority feels anxiety about the use of technology, because they do not feel that it is real, which is why they prefer to reduce their interaction to a minimum.

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Declaration

Conflict of interest

We have no conflict of interest to declare.

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