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BEYOND DIGITAL ADOPTION: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF EFL TEACHERS' CHALLENGES IN TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

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Abstract: The incorporation of digital technology into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education has been increasingly emphasised, but few studies have critically examined how teachers confront problems in sustaining technology-enhanced classroom practices in everyday teaching realities. This study explores the challenges faced by EFL teachers in integrating digital technology into English courses at secondary schools in Indonesia. The research was conducted qualitatively and exploratively with three English teachers from three distinct senior high schools in Bandar Lampung, Indonesia. Data was acquired through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and document analysis. Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis. The findings reveal four interrelated themes: persistent infrastructural instability hinders technology-integrated teaching; teachers face pedagogical and emotional challenges in digital teaching; technology integration demands ongoing adaptation and improvisation; and institutional support is uneven and insufficient. The findings indicate that technology integration is not a smooth and linear process but a negotiated pedagogical practice affected by infrastructural restrictions, student involvement concerns, institutional constraints and teachers' adaptive methods. The study foregrounds the significance of moving beyond the narratives of technology adoption to a more critical understanding of the lived realities of digital education in EFL environments. The report suggests improved infrastructural support, context-sensitive professional development and durable institutional policies to facilitate meaningful technology integration in ELT.

Keywords: EFL teachers, technology integration, digital pedagogy, teacher challenges

INTRODUCTION

The use of digital technology in education is increasing and it has greatly transformed the way English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is taught and learnt in a variety of educational environments. Over the last ten years schools have increasingly been incorporating digital platforms, online learning apps, multimedia materials and internet based communication tools into classroom teaching. This quick shift was further expedited by the COVID-19 epidemic when teachers worldwide had to switch from traditional face-to-face training to technology-mediated learning settings virtually overnight. Since then, technological integration has been not simply a temporary solution for emergency remote instruction, but a significant feature of post-pandemic educational practice.

In EFL classrooms, digital technology is typically considered as a method to enhance interactivity, collaboration, and student-centredness in learning. Today, teachers have several digital resources at their disposal to help them teach language better, including Learning Management Systems (LMS), online quiz tools, educational films, virtual discussion boards, presentation software, and artificial intelligence (AI) based applications. For many of these tools, the expectation is that they will increase classroom interaction, make communication easier and provide students with more realistic and flexible opportunities to practise English.

Previous research have described a number of potential benefits from integration of digital technology into language acquisition. Digital platforms can boost students' enthusiasm, participation and engagement through multimodal learning activities and interactive classroom experiences (Hockly, 2015; Lai & Bower, 2019). Online collaboration solutions also enable students to communicate, share ideas and collaborate on projects beyond the actual classroom. Moreover, technology-based learning settings can enable more flexible kinds of evaluation and feedback, allowing teachers to track students' progress more efficiently.

With the rise in popularity of educational technology, institutions are coming to require teachers to be increasingly digitally competent. In many schools, teachers are now expected to teach not only language skills but also to successfully integrate technology into classroom learning. The integration of technology is therefore often linked to broader educational aims, such as developing twenty-first century abilities such as creativity, teamwork, critical thinking, communication and digital literacy.

In Indonesia, the incorporation of digital technology in education has been progressively emphasised in recent years, especially following the epidemic that has changed the teaching practices throughout the country. Schools have been promoting teachers' use of online platforms, digital assessment tools and blended learning approaches as part of broader attempts to change education. In particular, it has been recommended that English teachers should introduce digital media and technology-enhanced activities into their classroom education in order to make studying more interesting.

However, even with the increased enthusiasm for educational technology, the realities of technology integration in classroom practice are significantly more complex than policy aspirations would generally suggest. While digital tools are increasingly available, significant technology integration is not necessarily easy to sustain in everyday classroom environments. The implementation of technology

into classroom activities often poses multiple challenges for teachers, especially in institutions with uneven technological infrastructure and institutional support.

The incorporation of technology in EFL environments has been studied from a range of angles in numerous earlier research. There are so many studies that analyse teachers' attitudes towards digital technologies, students' attitudes towards online learning, or the effectiveness of some apps to help improve language abilities. Research has demonstrated, for example, that applications such as Google Classroom, Quizizz, Padlet and Kahoot can boost classroom interaction and encourage student engagement in language learning activities. Similarly, studies on mixed and online learning environments generally emphasise the flexibility and accessibility given by digital platforms.

These studies are useful in understanding the benefits of educational technology, although much of the available literature tends to focus on successful implementation and favourable outcomes. It is comparatively fewer research that have critically investigated the everyday problems teachers face while trying to maintain technology-integrated teaching approaches in real classroom environments. Therefore, the difficulties, tensions, and adaptations of digital teaching are generally under-represented in conversations about technological integration.

This is especially relevant as technology integration does not take place in perfect or fully regulated conditions. Instead, teachers often operate in environments characterised by poor internet connectivity, limited access to technology devices, power outages, differences in students' digital competence, and institutional constraints. Such constraints sometimes necessitate teachers to adjust their teaching techniques and instructional decisions to classroom realities instead of technology aspirations.

Ertmer and Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2010) state that hurdles to technology integration are of two types: external and internal. External hurdles include lack of infrastructure, lack of institutional support and lack of technical resources whereas internal barriers include teachers' confidence, pedagogical preparedness and beliefs about technology use. Even though many schools have upgraded their technology infrastructure after the pandemic, teachers in different contexts are still facing chronic issues in maintaining digital learning activities.

Besides technological problems, teachers face pedagogical and emotional issues in the use of technology in the teaching of EFL. Teachers may experience an increased instructional effort from managing student engagement in digital activities, sustaining motivation for technology-based tasks, addressing varied levels of digital literacy, and combining online with offline learning approaches. In many cases, teachers are asked to manage classroom learning and provide emotional encouragement and support to children who are frustrated with or disengaged from technology.

Recent talks on digital pedagogy have therefore focused on the necessity of teacher agency, adaptation and resilience in technology enhanced learning contexts. Trust and Whalen (2021) point out that digital teaching demands instructors to continuously adapt to new challenges and participate in emotional labour, especially in post-pandemic education environments where technology expectations are high.

Likewise, the adaptive digital pedagogy focuses on the necessity for the teachers' improvisation, modification of lesson plans and preparation of alternative instructional methodologies in order to sustain the continuity of learning in the face of technological disruptions.

These conversations imply that technology integration is not just the use of digital tools. Instead, it is a negotiated, context-dependent process, mediated through infrastructural conditions, institutional supports, the reality of the classroom, and the adaptive practices of instructors. It is therefore important to understand the lived experiences of teachers to develop more practical and durable solutions to digital learning in EFL teaching.

Studies on the difficulties instructors have in keeping up with technology-integrated teaching are still very few in Indonesian secondary school settings. Much of the research to date has focused on views of technology use, digital preparation or effectiveness of online learning platforms. These studies provide valuable knowledge on educational technology but they tend to pay less attention to the practical issues teachers still face in classroom application.

In addition, a large part of the current discussion on technology integration still treats instructors as technology users or adopters. Such viewpoints might ignore that teachers often serve as adaptive negotiators who have to constantly balance instructional goals, institutional demands, students' needs and technical constraints simultaneously. In fact, sustaining technology-integrated learning frequently demands a great amount of flexibility, creativity, emotional labour, and instructional improvisation.

This study aims to contribute to the current literature by examining the obstacles faced by EFL teachers in integrating digital technology in classroom activities at senior high schools in Indonesia. Rather than focusing on the tools teachers utilise, this study examines the ways in which teachers experience and navigate the technical, pedagogical, emotional, and institutional challenges of technology-integrated teaching practices. The study attempts to emphasise teachers' lived experiences to create a more nuanced understanding of the realities of digital pedagogy in EFL classes.

The following research questions are specifically addressed by the study:

1. What are the obstacles of EFL teachers in integrating digital technology in classroom activities?
2. How can teachers navigate and respond to such challenges?
3. What do these issues tell us about the realities of technology integration in EFL contexts?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This present study employed a qualitative exploratory design to explore the obstacles faced by EFL teachers' challenges in integrating digital technology into classroom activities. Qualitative inquiry was chosen because it allows the researcher to study participants' experiences, perspectives and contextual reality (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The study has in particular focused on how instructors encounter and negotiate the challenges of technology integration in ordinary classroom activities.

Participants

The research was conducted with three English teachers from separate senior high schools in Bandar Lampung, Indonesia. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) participants had over three years of teaching experience; (2) participants had experience in integrating digital technology in English language teaching; and (3) participants were willing to be interviewed and observed in the classroom. All participants were identified by pseudonyms throughout the study to safeguard their confidentiality: G1, G2 and G3. While the participants came from diverse schools, they all had familiarity with digital platforms such as Google Classroom, Zoom, Canva, Quizizz, and other technology-based learning apps.

Data were acquired through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken to study teachers' experiences, attitudes, problems and tactics on technology integration. Interviews allowed participants to recount their experiences in detail and allowed researchers to ask follow-up questions.

Classroom observations were undertaken to examine how digital technology was integrated in classroom activities, and how teachers responded to technological and pedagogical issues during instruction. In addition, documents such as lesson plans, digital learning materials, classroom projects, and screen images of learning platforms were analysed to supplement the data.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis was used because of its methodical yet flexible process for detecting and understanding patterns in qualitative data.

Thematic analysis was conducted in six phases which included familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, looking for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and preparing the report. First, the investigators read the interview transcripts, observation notes, and supporting documents several times to familiarise themselves with the data. Second, we produced initial codes based on reoccurring concepts and experiences of teachers' problems and adaptive techniques. Third, the codes were organised into larger themes that represented the patterns throughout the participants' experiences. The themes were then examined and developed to make sure that they were coherent and relevant to the study objectives.

To increase credibility, the study used triangulation, which is the comparison of data from interviews, observations and documents. Preliminary interpretations were shared with participants for member checking to check on the validity of the findings.

RESULT

Theme 1: Continuous Infrastructural Instability Disrupts Technology-Integrated Teaching

The participants faced a key hurdle in the volatility of the infrastructures, mainly the internet connectivity issues and the electrical disruptions. All

participants indicated that classroom activities were sometimes disrupted by technology disturbances, impacting the continuity of digital learning.

G2 said that in classroom teaching, the internet networks would often be lost when there was an electrical outage:

> *"Suddenly the electricity goes out and the internet signal goes off. When that happens, we do not have a generator to back up the learning process."*

This finding shows that technological integration is still significantly dependent on infrastructure resilience. Schools promoted digital teaching approaches but often faced difficulties in classroom application due to the fragile technology infrastructure. Internet cut-offs affected online quizzes, video activities and accessing digital learning systems.

In addition to school infrastructure, instructional activities were further hindered by unequal access to equipment and internet connectivity for students. Some pupils had problems obtaining digital tasks due to restricted internet quota or poor devices. Therefore, teachers had to continuously alter learning activities based on students' technical conditions.

Theme 2: Experiences of Teachers in Pedagogical and Emotional Tensions in Digital Teaching

In addition to technical obstacles, participants reported a number of pedagogical and emotional issues in technology-integrated teaching. Teachers said that it was often difficult to keep students motivated, engaged and disciplined during digital learning activities.

G1 explained that the pupils reacted differently to the technology-based activities:

> *"Some students are excited about new technology, but others immediately say, 'Miss, this is difficult.'"*

Similarly, G3 described how students' motivation fluctuated during long-term digital projects:

> *"Sometimes it's their drive. They have deadlines every week but a lot of students are requesting extensions, because they haven't finished their projects."*

These results suggest that technology integration is more than technical knowledge. Teachers also need to address students' emotional reactions, learning fears and motivation problems in the course of classroom activities. In many cases teachers were asked to give emotional support as well as intellectual guidanc.

G1 mentioned how she tried to support pupils directly instead of lecturing them when technical difficulties occurred:

> *"Usually, I ask them why is it hard. "Sometimes people tell me their phone battery is low or they have technical problems so I attempt to help them find solutions."*

This is a consequence of the emotional labour that underpins digital teaching approaches. Teachers had to ensure not only the delivery of instructional content, but also the confidence and participation of students in technology-mediated learning environments.

Theme 3: Ongoing Adaptation and Improvisation in Technology Integration

Another noteworthy discovery relates to the adaptation techniques of teachers when confronted with technological challenges. Rather than abandoning digital teaching approaches, participants consistently innovated and adjusted classroom activities to ensure continuity of learning.

Preparing offline-ready materials was a popular approach to get ready for the classroom session. G1 explained:

> *"When the internet is stable, I usually download the videos first so that the students can still watch them offline later when there is no internet."*

Likewise, G2 mentioned planning backup lesson plans when technology outages occurred:

> *"I normally use whiteboard writing or speaking and writing activities when I can't use slide."*

These adaptive techniques suggest that teachers actively handled technological uncertainties in classroom teaching. Instead of depending only on digital resources, teachers used hybrid online and offline methods to facilitate learning activities.

Participants also changed patterns of classroom interaction to promote student participation. Teachers frequently confused pupils in different ways, simplified digital assignments, or changed the assignment dates according to classroom situations.

The findings imply that technology integration should not be seen as a straightforward process of adopting digital technologies. Rather, it is about ongoing improvisation, adaptability and pedagogical negotiation. Teachers were problem-solvers who always reacted to changing conditions in the classroom.

Theme 4: Institutional Support is not Consistent and Lacking

The participants agreed that schools and educational institutions had offered some technological support such as Wi-Fi connectivity, projectors, Smart TVs and learning management systems. But instructors also pointed out that institutional support was still inconsistent and insufficient to sustain technology-integrated learning.

G3 said that government-backed learning accounts and digital storage systems helped teachers to have better control over learning materials:

> *"The learning account and Google Drive storage are very useful to store worksheets and teaching materials."*

However, participants said that technology support was often very much down to the individual teacher's initiative rather than systematic preparation by the institution. Teachers commonly made use of self-directed learning, professional groups, webinars and peer cooperation to develop their digital teaching skills.

In some instances, teachers created their own unique digital resources to suit the demands of their classrooms. For example, G1 has developed simple learning programs such as Madam English, Pocket English and Speak It Up for activities of learning English.

Such efforts are a testament to teachers' inventiveness and dedication, but also underscore the limits of institutional support mechanisms. Technology integration often depends on teachers' personal motivation, curiosity about technology and willingness to spend extra time and effort.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that technology integration in EFL classrooms is more complicated than just adopting digital tools. The participants' experiences reveal that despite the increased promotion of digital teaching practices in schools, sustainability of technology-integrated education is a continuous process of negotiation with infrastructural restrictions, classroom realities and student-related issues.

One of the most obvious difficulties is the infrastructural instability. Internet problems, electrical outages and unequal access to devices often interrupted classroom activity and hampered the efficiency of digital learning. This finding is consistent with the discussion of first-order barriers by Ertmer and Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2010) that suggests the importance of infrastructure and institutional support in affecting technology integration practices. Likewise, van Deursen and van Dijk (2019) demonstrate that inequalities in digital access and skills still influence engagement in technology-mediated environments.

Results also show that digital instruction poses pedagogical and emotional challenges for teachers. The participants not only controlled instructional activities but also attempted to maintain students' motivation, confidence and involvement during technology-based learning. Digital assignments were easy for some pupils, but others were frustrated and disengaged. These findings correlate with Trust and Whalen's (2021) notion that technology-mediated pedagogy typically adds to teachers' emotional and pedagogical stress. In this situation, teachers were obligated to offer emotional support as well as academic instruction.

A noteworthy discovery is that teachers constantly changed their teaching approaches due to technological uncertainties. When there were technical problems, participants often prepared resources that were ready for offline use, changed lesson plans, and changed teaching styles. Teachers were not only users of technology, but adaptive problem-solvers negotiating between instructional ideals and classroom reality. This conclusion is consistent with recent discourse on adaptive digital pedagogy that emphasises flexibility, improvisation, and continuity of learning in uncertain educational contexts (Rapanta et al., 2021; Trust & Whalen, 2021).

The study also indicated that institutional support for technology integration remained unequal. Schools provided some amenities such as Wi-Fi access, projectors, and learning platforms, but participants depended primarily on personal initiative, self-directed learning, and professional collaboration to enhance their digital teaching methods. This means that the integration of sustainable technology is more than just technological equipment. Teachers also need continual professional development, technical support and institutional policies that are sensitive to the reality of the classroom.

Overall, the findings undercut excessively optimistic narratives that technology integration is a straightforward or uniformly effective process. Rather, the incorporation of technology in EFL classrooms should be viewed as a negotiated and context-dependent activity, which is influenced by infrastructural conditions, institutional support, student engagement, and teachers' adaptive agency.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the obstacles that EFL teachers face while integrating digital technology in secondary school English classrooms in Indonesia. The study, using reflective theme analysis, found that technology integration is not a smooth or linear process but a negotiated pedagogical practice mediated by infrastructural instability, emotional tensions, institutional constraints and teachers' adaptive reactions.

Results show that teachers still experience chronic issues of unreliable internet connectivity, power outages, unequal access to devices among students, mixed levels of student enthusiasm, and little institutional support. The study also points out teachers' adaptive agency in sustaining technology-enhanced learning using offline-ready resources, backup instructional methodologies, flexible classroom management and individual student support.

Importantly, the study questions the mainstream discourses that constitute the integration of technology as effective digital adoption. Instead, the results point to the complicated realities of sustaining digital pedagogy in resource-limited educational situations. The use of technology in EFL classrooms is a constant process of negotiation between the affordances of technology, pedagogical aims, classroom realities, and institutional conditions.

This study presents various practical consequences. Educational institutions should improve their infrastructure support by providing stable internet connectivity, consistent electrical access and sufficient technical facilities. Professional development programs should go beyond technical training and focus on supporting teachers' pedagogical agility, emotional resilience, and contextually appropriate digital teaching approaches. Policymakers also need to understand that significant technology integration is about long-term institutional commitment, not short-term technological deployment.

Finally, this study adds to the growing body of literature on digital pedagogy in EFL instruction by foregrounding teachers' lived experiences and problems in technology integration. Future research might also examine the viewpoints of students, or compare schools or the sustainability of adaptive digital teaching approaches in the long-term in diverse educational settings.

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