

## Teaching English Through Technology: A Reflective Self-Study on Integrating Digital Tools in Higher Education

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**Keywords:**

English language teaching, educational technology, digital tools, reflective self-study, higher education

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**Abstract:** In the digital era, integrating technology into language instruction has become essential to create learning experiences that are creative, interactive, and relevant to students' needs. This paper presents an autobiographical self-study reflecting on the author's experience in teaching English using four key digital tools: Canva, TikTok, Prezi and Spotify Podcast. Each tool was purposefully applied to enhance specific language skills, such as vocabulary retention, collaborative speaking, dynamic presentation skills, and audio-based speaking and listening. Drawing on the self-study guidelines, this reflective inquiry emphasizes honesty, contextual sensitivity, and a commitment to pedagogical improvement. The reflection demonstrates that the integration of digital tools, initially selected to foster creative and relevant English learning, was effectively enacted through diverse classroom practices and ultimately generated insights into the author's evolving role as an adaptive and transformative facilitator of learning. This study seeks to inspire fellow educators to implement technology-enhanced language learning in their own classrooms.

## INTRODUCTION

As digital technologies continue to reshape the landscape of education, educators are increasingly called upon to integrate technology into their teaching in meaningful, context-sensitive ways (Mahmadov, 2025; Yasin et al., 2024; Hassan, 2023; Hussain et al., 2024). The push toward technology-enhanced learning is now a pedagogical necessity, particularly in the post-pandemic era where digital fluency and flexibility have become central to educational access and engagement (Kharchenko et al., 2024; Stuart et al., 2021). Integrating digital tools in the classroom is not simply about keeping pace with technological trends; it is about rethinking pedagogical approaches to align with the realities of how students live, learn, and communicate (Ganeshwari & Geetha, 2025; Amiri, 2025; Wahab et al., 2024).

In the field of language education, especially English language teaching (ELT), the integration of technology holds considerable promise. Numerous studies have shown that digital tools can enhance language acquisition by creating opportunities for authentic communication, multimodal input, and student-centered engagement (Ram, 2025; Zhang & Zou, 2020; Alqurashi, 2025; Obidovna & Rustambekovich, 2024). Tools such as presentation software (Mahdi, 2022), social media platforms (John & Yunus, 2021), and podcasting apps (Yoestara & Putri, 2019) have been used to facilitate speaking, listening, and vocabulary development in ways that are interactive, creative, and aligned with real-world communication. These tools also cater to the diverse learning preferences of students and provide flexible pathways to access and produce language.

Furthermore, the use of technology in ELT has been linked to improved learner motivation, engagement, and autonomy (David & Weinstein, 2024; Baby, 2019; Panagiotidis et al., 2018). Digital platforms allow students to become content creators, not just passive recipients of information. This shift can significantly transform their learning experience and increase their investment in the language-learning process (Shahi, 2025; Degirmencioglu & Gilanlioglu, 2025). However, the effectiveness of such integration depends greatly on the pedagogical decisions of the teacher and their sensitivity to the specific teaching context, including students' needs, institutional culture, and available resources (Safdar et al., 2025; Kazu & Issaku, 2021).

In my own teaching context as a university lecturer responsible for English courses, I have actively explored the use of various digital tools to enhance classroom engagement and learning outcomes. Among the tools I have implemented are Canva (for visual vocabulary projects), Prezi (for student presentations), TikTok Duet (for speaking tasks), and Spotify Podcast (for listening and speaking activities). These tools were selected not only for their popularity among students, but also for their pedagogical affordances in promoting active, creative, and contextualized language use. My experience with these tools has revealed both opportunities and challenges, prompting a need to reflect more deeply

on their impact, not only on student learning, but also on my own professional growth as an educator.

Despite the growing body of literature on technology integration in language teaching, relatively few studies have employed self-study methodologies to explore the lived experiences of educators who navigate these digital shifts in their own classrooms. There remains a gap in understanding how teachers make sense of their pedagogical decisions, adapt to new tools, and evolve in response to the realities of digital learning environments. Reflective self-study offers a valuable framework for addressing this gap by positioning the educator's voice, experiences, and context at the center of inquiry (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001).

This paper aims to contribute to that space by offering a reflective self-study of my experience integrating digital tools into university-level English language instruction. Specifically, it seeks to (1) explore the rationale behind the selection and integration of digital tools in English language teaching, (2) describe the classroom practices and experiences of implementing these tools in a higher education context, and (3) reflect on the pedagogical insights and professional growth that emerged through the process of integrating technology.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a reflective self-study design, drawing upon the framework of autobiographical inquiry in teacher education (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Self-study was selected because it provides a systematic and rigorous way for educators to critically examine their own practices, not only to improve personal pedagogy but also to contribute insights that may be valuable to others. This approach was particularly relevant given the author's longstanding engagement with educational technology and his interest in exploring its pedagogical value in English language teaching.

The participant in this study was the author's himself, in his role as a lecturer of English in a private university. Rather than focusing on external measurement of student achievement, the emphasis was placed on his lived experiences and

reflections as he designed, implemented, and evaluated learning activities using digital tools such as Canva, Prezi, TikTok, and Spotify Podcast.

The primary instrument for data collection was a reflective teaching journal, maintained throughout the semester, which captured the author's intentions, classroom practices, challenges, and evolving insights. The central source of analysis is his own narrative as an educator.

In terms of data analysis, the author engaged in exploring themes related to (1) the rationale for selecting digital tools, (2) classroom practices and experiences, and (3) pedagogical insights and professional growth. These themes were deliberately aligned with the research objectives and guided the organization of the findings. To strengthen methodological rigor, the author referred to Bullough and Pinnegar's (2001) guidelines for quality self-study, ensuring that the account was authentic (narrated in the first person), contextually grounded, interpretive, and directed toward the improvement of learning not only for the author himself but also for others.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

My decision to integrate digital tools in teaching English was not merely driven by the availability of technology, but by the challenges I consistently observed in my classroom. Many of my students struggled with speaking confidence, tended to present ideas rigidly, and were often hesitant to engage in communicative tasks. These recurring issues compelled me to reflect on how I, as an educator, could provide learning experiences that were both relevant to their digital lives and supportive of their communicative development.

Canva was selected because I wanted vocabulary learning to move beyond memorization into creative design, allowing students to own their personal dictionaries in a way that might strengthen retention. TikTok Duet was chosen to extend speaking practice beyond the classroom, offering flexibility in time and space while helping students confront their shyness in a familiar social media environment. Prezi was introduced as a medium to rehearse public speaking in a visually dynamic format, giving students the opportunity to practice confidence,

body language, and effective delivery in front of the camera. Spotify Podcast, in turn, provided a practical way for students to refine their oral fluency and articulation, while simultaneously fostering listening comprehension.

These choices were not random; they were grounded in both my professional history in educational technology and my honest assessment of the pressing issues in my teaching context. At the same time, they reflect a fresh perspective on how widely used digital platforms, often associated with entertainment, can be reimagined as pedagogical resources that enrich language learning.

The implementation of the digital tools in my English classroom unfolded as a series of carefully designed activities, each intended to extend students' communicative competence while drawing on the affordances of different platforms. At the beginning of the semester, students were introduced to Canva to create a personal dictionary of at least ten vocabulary items related to their own study program. I modeled the task by presenting a sample design: a page containing the word, part of speech, example sentence, and synonym, enhanced with a relevant background image. While most students engaged enthusiastically, differentiating visuals across entries to strengthen retention, a few overlooked these details, revealing varying levels of attention to design. Yet even in these moments, the creative process itself made vocabulary learning more meaningful than rote memorization. Figure 1 depicts one of my students' personal dictionaries, created through Canva to visually organize and retain vocabulary.

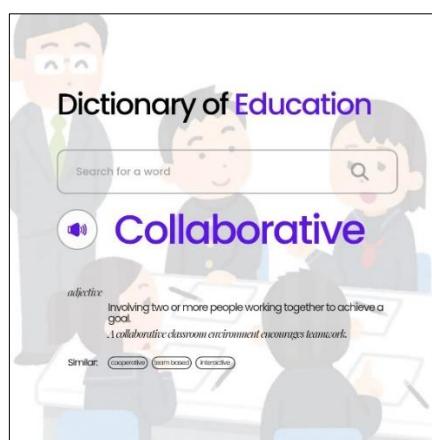


Figure 1. Personal dictionary designed by a student using Canva

The use of TikTok Duet introduced a different dynamic. My initial video contained a scripted dialogue on career topics, where students were to read their lines in response to mine. The first round was deliberately simple, focusing on fluency and pronunciation rather than delivery. Students generally managed the task, though the uneven quality of video positioning, sound clarity, and body language revealed their challenges in speaking on camera. This led me to design a second round, in which students produced a self-introduction using the framework of name, fame, same, aim, and game. Here, I asked them to introduce themselves in a professional manner, with attention to content, pronunciation, fluency, and body language. Students began re-recording their videos multiple times due to some mistakes. Some confessed their fear of being judged or their discomfort with the camera. However, through persistence, students gradually enhanced their confidence. Figure 2 depicts one of my students' TikTok Duet videos, which demonstrates her confidence in delivery while intentionally optimizing her gestures.



Figure 2. A student speaks confidently on TikTok

Building on this momentum, I tasked students with using Prezi to present their dream jobs. Each presentation was limited to three slides – each containing only one image and one sentence – requiring students to expand orally. Unlike TikTok, Prezi demanded a shift to laptops and greater technical adjustment, which initially posed challenges for some students. Yet this constraint became an opportunity: students learned to adapt to unfamiliar platforms and discovered the potential of Prezi's visual affordances. As they recorded their videos, I observed

significant improvement not only in content articulation but also in their delivery; body language, facial expressions, and overall stage presence became more convincing. Figure 3 shows a student who elaborates her ideas confidently, making use of a simple sentence and visual aid to strengthen her argument.



Figure 3. A student explains her ideas through Prezi

Finally, the podcast assignment on Spotify invited students to describe a chosen product using the 3-2-1 framework (three steps, two types, one thing). Alongside audio, they designed a visual poster to accompany their episode. After I gave a clear example and explanation, most students were able to produce clear and structured recordings. However, some still struggled with intonation or pronunciation. Rather than shortcomings, I viewed these as a process of achieving communicative competence. By situating their voices in a platform like Spotify, students successfully made their spoken English both audible and meaningful. Figure 3 shows a student's podcast, accompanied by an attractive poster.

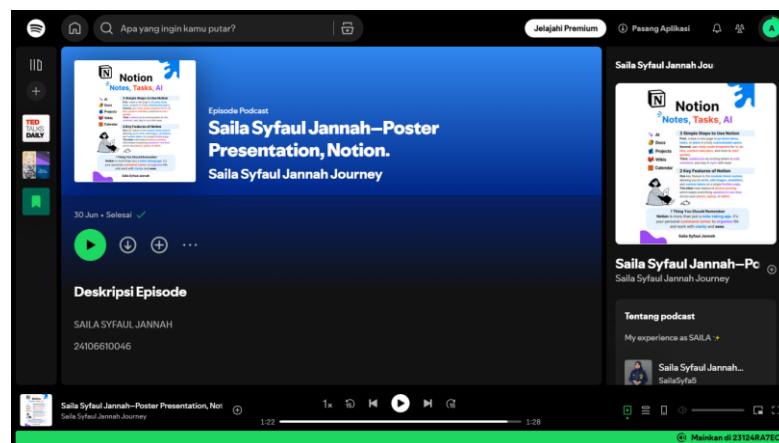


Figure 4. A student describes a certain product on Spotify

Taken together, these classroom practices illustrated the potential of everyday digital tools to transform language learning into a multimodal, authentic, and iterative process. Each activity carried its own moments; hesitation, technical barriers, or self-doubt. These moments, however, engaged students more deeply in the process of learning. They rehearsed more persistently until finally they improved their communication skills.

Reflecting on this journey, I realized that integrating digital tools reshaped not only the way students engaged with English but also the way I understood my role as a lecturer. Initially, my motivation was largely instrumental: to find practical solutions to problems such as limited speaking opportunities, low confidence in public presentations, and disengagement with traditional tasks. However, through repeated cycles of designing, implementing, and reflecting on these digital activities, I came to see my practice as part of a broader pedagogical transformation.

One of the most significant insights was the recognition that my role had shifted from being a transmitter of knowledge to becoming a facilitator of learning experiences that empowered students. By experimenting with Canva, TikTok, Prezi, and Spotify, I was not merely introducing technology but creating new spaces for student voices to emerge. The changes in student behavior – whether in their willingness to participate, their creativity in designing tasks, or their confidence in speaking – also reflected back on me, highlighting the reciprocal nature of teaching and learning.

This journey was not without challenges. At times I questioned whether these tools truly enhanced learning or merely entertained students. I also confronted my own limitations, particularly when technical glitches or uneven digital literacy among students slowed progress. Those uncertain moments turned out to be where the real growth happened. They showed me that teaching today means being flexible, patient, and willing to learn side by side with my students.

In retrospect, something genuine was at stake in this experiment: the quality of my students' engagement and the credibility of my own teaching philosophy. By taking risks and opening myself to new practices, I experienced character development as an educator who is not only technologically competent but also

pedagogically responsive. Ultimately, the self-study reaffirmed my obligation to improve learning not only for myself but also for others, that is, students in my classroom, and potentially colleagues who may draw inspiration from this account.

The reflections presented in this self-study highlight how the integration of digital tools in English language teaching is not merely a technical adjustment but a pedagogical decision that reshapes both student engagement and teacher identity (Saraswati, 2025; Moorhouse & Yan, 2023; Ahmed et al., 2024; Saud, 2024; Octaberlina, 2023). While the findings emerged from my personal experiences, they resonate with broader discussions in the literature on technology integration, which emphasize the interplay between technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). In this sense, the use of technology demonstrates how tools commonly associated with everyday digital culture can be reimagined as meaningful and potential learning resources.

The classroom practices described in this study illustrate how digital tools can create spaces for active and multimodal engagement in language learning. For example, Canva supported creative vocabulary retention (Fitria et al., 2024; Febriyanti et al., 2024), TikTok facilitated flexible speaking practice (Hongsa et al., 2023; Ngo, 2024), Prezi encouraged dynamic public speaking (Korpaš, 2021; Lina, 2018) and Spotify provided authentic listening and speaking opportunities (Lubis, & Wahono, 2024). These activities align with prior research showing that digital platforms, when meaningfully integrated, can enhance student motivation and participation (Xiang et al., 2022; Hafidurrahman & Dwirayanti, 2024). At the same time, the findings emphasize the importance of contextual sensitivity: students' familiarity with these tools as part of their everyday digital culture lowered barriers to participation and allowed them to engage more confidently (Bergdahl, 2020; Yaseen et al., 2025). This suggests that leveraging tools embedded in students' lived experiences may yield stronger engagement than relying solely on formal learning management systems.

Beyond student engagement, the self-study also revealed significant improvement in my own professional identity as a lecturer. Initially, my intention was largely pragmatic, that is, finding tools to address specific classroom challenges

such as low speaking confidence and rigid presentations. However, through cycles of reflection and experimentation, I recognized that technology integration required me to become an adaptive and transformative facilitator of learning. This resonates with literature on teacher professional identity, which emphasizes that teaching is not static but continually reconstructed through practice and reflection (Mockler, 2005). Moreover, the experience aligns with the principles of transformative learning, in which moments of uncertainty and challenge become opportunities for growth (Kennedy & Stevenson, 2023). In this sense, my reflections underscore that innovative teaching is not only about using new tools but also about reshaping the educator's stance toward learners, pedagogy, and professional self.

In summary, the reflections presented in this self-study show that the thoughtful integration of digital tools can simultaneously enrich students' learning experiences and transform the pedagogical identity of the lecturer. By situating everyday digital platforms within the context of English language education, the study contributes fresh perspectives to ongoing discussions about innovative teaching and learning in higher education.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This self-study revealed that the rationale for selecting digital tools was rooted in the desire to make learning more creative, relevant, and supportive of students' communicative skills. Second, the use of Canva, TikTok, Prezi, and Spotify demonstrated how digital platforms can foster creative vocabulary learning, authentic listening and speaking practice, and effective public speaking, while also transforming challenges such as technical barriers or performance anxiety into opportunities for student growth. Third, the reflection underscored my professional shift from a transmitter of content to an adaptive and transformative facilitator of learning. The implications of these findings highlight the pedagogical potential of everyday digital tools when aligned with clear objectives. At the same time, the study acknowledges its limitations, particularly its reliance on personal reflection without systematic triangulation from student voices or longitudinal tracking of language outcomes. Future research could address these limitations by adopting

collaborative self-study designs, incorporating student perspectives more deeply, and exploring long-term impacts of digital tool integration on language skills. For practice, educators are encouraged to embrace digital platforms not only as teaching aids but also as spaces for authentic communication, creativity, and transformative engagement.

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