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INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY IN YOUNG LEARNERS' ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS: FREQUENCY, TYPES, AND ATTITUDES

Abstract: Integrating technology into teaching is not only modern but has also become indispensable part of daily school life. The aim of this paper is to reflect on the current situation in terms of types of digital resources used in YL classroom by English teachers, on the one side, and on the other side to find out young learners' attitudes and frequency of using educational technology for English language learning. For the purpose of this research two questionnaires were used: a questionnaire for young learners focusing on the frequency and attitudes towards technology use, and another for teachers examining their preferences of digital resources in three categories – websites, applications and digital tools. A quantitative method was used to analyze the data. The results showed a positive trend towards technology integration in classes for both groups. However, although teachers reported usage of various digital resources, they indicated lacking sufficient didactical and technological knowledge to efficiently adapt and implement web material in order to improve the teaching practice. The study also indicated that young learners reported positive attitudes toward technology-mediated tasks and their frequent usage.

Keywords: young learners, English as a foreign language, digital tools, ICT.

1. INTRODUCTION

Integrating technology into education has become an important aspect of making foreign language learning both successful and engaging. Technology is on the rise and plays a significant role in modern life and education. Therefore, its effectiveness in primary school teaching should be carefully evaluated.

Nowadays, most educational institutions in developing countries are trying to keep up with the modern world developments by evolving and transforming their approaches to learning and teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) throughout the use of various technologies (Pradana et al., 2022). However, in many schools in Serbia “traditional approaches remain the basic method of foreign

language teaching” (Cekic-Jovanovic et al. 2014: 261). The main cause is instability and lack of resources. The integration and usage of technology in classes has become a significant part of successful EFL teaching and learning (Ibid.). As computers have become more widely available in schools, the debate over how to use them effectively has intensified (Cirkovic-Miladinovic & Golubovic-Ilic, 2015). It is necessary to observe the attitudes of young learners (YLS), as well as teachers’, towards digital tools. This can provide a broader understanding of the current situation in schools and help identify ways to support students in overcoming challenges they may face in the language learning process. It is not surprising that technology has become a major part of the educational curriculum due to COVID-19 and its aftermath. Although teachers’ knowledge of using educational technology remains a challenge in Serbia, some studies show that most EFL students and teachers hold positive attitudes towards using and integrating technology in English language learning and teaching (Costley, 2014).

There is a significant amount of research suggesting that Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) can effectively support both students and teachers through the process of learning and teaching English as a second or foreign language (Davies et al., 2011; Leakey, 2011; Murray, 2013). These studies concluded that almost all students see CALL as an important and successful method of learning a second language (Ibid.). Given the widespread use of digital tools and CALL in teaching English to young learners (YL), this research aims to analyze the types of digital resources used by EFL teachers in primary schools in Serbia and to explore the frequency of use and attitudes of young English language learners toward these tools.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES

Teachers should model the use of technology to support the curriculum enabling their students to increase the use of technology to enhance their language skills (Costley et al. 2014). Through the past decades, the use of technology in English language learning and teaching has developed and expanded rapidly. Using technology has significantly changed the education systems, improving the quality of teaching and learning, not only for English language courses but also for other school subjects. Technology is an effective tool for learners, significantly boosting their motivation and comfort (Ibid.). It can enhance learners’ cooperation and be a crucial element for effective learning. Integrating technology into the learning process helps students gain knowledge, build self-esteem, explore new ideas, and express themselves more confidently. Students should be able to learn from one another, develop healthy competitive motivation and actively support their peers

(Ibid.). Using computers and digital tools could help teachers meet their learners' educational needs by offering a variety of language exercises (Cirkovic-Miladinovic, 2024). However, the positive effect of computer technology does not occur automatically; it depends on how teachers integrate it into their language lessons. According to Cirkovic-Miladinovic (2022), new methods, such as CALL, create a more productive and efficient classroom atmosphere for teaching and learning compared to traditional approaches. In today's modern age, children begin using technological devices even before starting school. Teachers can use this early exposure to guide young learners to use technology properly for school purposes and for more efficient learning. In the classroom, tools like interactive boards, computers, projectors, and tablet PCs enhance learning. According to the study conducted by Blair and Serafini (2014), language laboratories positively influence students' communication skills and speaking skills. On the other hand, with the help of software such as Internet voice chat and speech synthesis programs, ESL students can work on speaking. Internet voice chat (Jonassen et al., 2008) programs are highly effective for improving speaking skills because they provide students with the opportunity to converse with native speakers anytime and anywhere.

According to Blachowicz et al. (2009), the use of ICT tools in teaching writing skills allows students to explore Internet and find the appropriate content, improve their understanding, and foster independence. On the other hand, writing using computer programs can be easier and more enjoyable, as the software allows for easy correction of errors. Through Wiki, for example, ESL students can use italics, underline, change colors, change font size, and even control spelling and grammar with the help of the program (Nomass, 2013). In this context, the use of technology to develop writing skills can be both motivating and enjoyable for young ESL/EFL learners.

In traditional classrooms, teachers stand in front of students, delivering lectures and instructions using a blackboard (still common in some rural schools in Serbia) or a whiteboard. While this method can be effective with a highly skilled and creative teacher, it should be reconsidered due to the expansion of technology (Dynarski, 2017).

The use of multimedia texts in a classroom helps learners become familiar with vocabulary and language structures. Additionally, multimedia incorporates print texts, films, and the Internet to enhance learners' linguistic knowledge. The use of print media, film, and Internet gives learners the chance to collect information and offers them different materials for the analysis and interpretation of both language and contexts. According to Drayton et al. (2010), using computer technology provides a meaningful learning experience that enhances learners' responsibility while navigating the Internet. It also encourages learners to study independently and develop responsible behaviors and self-directed learning style. The use of the Internet increases students' motivation to explore content, while the use of films in teaching engages learners' visual and auditory senses, helping them

connect with the topic enthusiastically and deepen their knowledge (Ibid.). To sum up, the proper and adequate combination of multimedia and teaching methodology is very important to attract learners' attention towards English language learning.

Currently, digital tools support EFL students and teachers by simplifying the process of learning and teaching English (United Nations Conference, 2020). Moreover, in many educational institutions in the world, technology has become a crucial component of the educational curriculums and second language learning and teaching process (Ibid.). In some schools, especially in developing countries like Serbia, traditional approaches are still being used in foreign language classrooms. However, incorporating a wide variety of technologies can enhance and develop the learning and teaching styles of both students and teachers. Chen (2013) conducted a study to investigate how integrating technology and social experiences into courses can enhance language learners' motivation to learn English, and found it to be beneficial. Similarly, technology has had a significant and positive impact on the process of foreign language teaching allowing a variety of teaching approaches used in the classroom (Ibid.).

Hansen, Nowlan, and Winter (2012), found that CALL can provide students with highly motivated learning environments and opportunities to engage in meaningful and authentic learning. Results point out that the Internet is a useful educational tool for motivating students, providing a large amount of information, teaching resources and materials and a place for experiencing different cultures and communicating with other people in the target language. Blair and Serafini (2014) reported that the Internet has transformed research methods, communication, and access to education.

Young learners are motivated to work with computers because they are visually engaging, interesting, and different from their usual classroom activities. Additionally, the speed and color of computers help stimulate children's imagination and thinking skills. Research conducted in England indicates that ICT is increasingly valuable in supporting learning across various subjects, particularly in developing spoken language skills (Hefright, 2009). The study concludes that using developmentally appropriate software on computers can aid bilingual children's speaking and listening abilities during early childhood. Watching cartoons and playing games in a non-native language can also contribute positively to children's language development.

From the aforementioned, it can be concluded that digital tools and educational technology present new opportunities to enhance various aspects of young learners' language development. There is a widespread support and interest among educators in integrating ICT into education (Pradana et al., 2022). When used effectively, digital tools can significantly enrich young learners' foreign language learning and overall development. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the types of digital tool usage by English language teachers, as well as to explore the frequency and attitudes of young learners towards educational technologies.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to understand EFL young learners' attitudes toward the benefits and barriers of using technology in learning English. Additionally, the study examines the frequency of digital tools used by EFL students in their English language learning. The study addressed the following research questions: 1) What is the frequency of technology use in young learners' English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms? 2) What are young learners' attitudes toward using digital tools in English language classes? 3) What are the most frequently used types of digital resources by teachers in young learners' English language classrooms?

3.2. PARTICIPANTS, INSTRUMENTS AND PROCEDURE

This research was conducted with young learners at two primary schools in central Serbia. A total of 108 students, aged 7.5 to 11.5 years, participated in the survey (N = 108). The sample consisted of 27 students from each grade, ranging from first to fourth grade. Among these students, 36 attended private English lessons, and 85 had access to at least one type of technological device. The research also included 82 English language teachers of young learners from Serbia (N = 82), comprising 70 female and 12 male teachers, aged 26 to 58. Their teaching experience ranged from 1 to 18 years. Teachers were selected through volunteer sampling and were invited to complete a Google Forms questionnaire, provided they taught English to young learners. The instruments that were used for this research were two questionnaires, one designed in English for teachers and the other in Serbian for students. The student questionnaire used a three-point Likert scale, asking respondents to choose from three answers represented by three different smiley faces (this design aligns with the students' age). Some items were taken from the existing questionnaire by Uçar and Yazici (2021) but were adapted to suit the context of this study. The questionnaire designed for students was consisted of two parts: a) the first part included questions to investigate how often students use electronic devices for learning English at home or in school, and b) the second part examined participants' attitudes towards integrating technology into English language lessons. The questionnaire designed for teachers aimed to investigate the types of digital resources they use in young learners' classrooms. It consisted of open-ended questions, inviting teachers to list the websites, applications, and tools they most frequently used and preferred in EFL classrooms.

To conduct the study, the researcher obtained necessary permissions from school principals, administrative staff, students' parents, the students themselves,

and their teachers. The student questionnaire was administered in May 2024 with the researcher present to ensure comprehension of the questions and provide clarifications when needed. The teachers' questionnaires were administered online in April 2024 and collected in June 2024.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study employed a descriptive research design to illustrate both examined students' attitudes and frequency of usage of digital tools and young learner teachers' preferred types of educational technology into English language classes. Namely, descriptive statistics were used to explain teachers' usage of websites, applications, and digital tools in young learners' classes.

4.1. FINDINGS FROM STUDENTS

To explore the frequency of digital tool usage in English language learning and young learners' attitudes toward educational technology, a questionnaire was administered to the students. All questions were presented in Serbian and explained by the researcher to ensure understanding.

Table 1. The frequency of technology usage reported by students.

Statement	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)
I use a computer at home to learn English.	10.21	14.28	75.51
I use the Internet to learn English.	10.00	24.49	75.51
We use computers in the English language lesson.	8.15	22.45	69.40
I use a computer to do my English language homework.	18.36	36.75	44.89
My teacher teaches English with the help of technology (Power Point, Videos etc.) at my school.	0	26.45	73.55
Mean (M)	9.34	24.88	67.77
Standard Deviation (SD)	6.54	8.09	13.03

According to these results, most students reported using a computer often for learning English both at school and at home. The highest percentages were recorded for the first and second question about using computers and the Internet for English learning, with 75.51% of participants using these tools through various websites. For the third question, it is noteworthy that not all students can use a computer simultaneously during English lessons due to a lack of sufficient computers in schools. As shown in Table 1, 18.36% of students rarely use technology or the Internet for English homework, while 44.89% often do. This indicates

that many students frequently use computers to complete their English homework tasks. The fifth question revealed that 73.55% of students felt their teacher often tried to integrate technology into lessons and encouraged its use for learning English. This aligns with the 69.40% of students who confirmed that computers are used during English lessons. The “Rarely” category has the lowest mean at 9.34. The standard deviation values suggest that there is more variability in the “Often” category compared to the “Rarely” and “Sometimes” categories. Therefore, it may be concluded from the descriptive statistics that, on average, examined students often use educational technology in their English language learning, with a mean of 67.77. Parvin and Salam (2015) conducted a study and concluded that incorporating technology allows learners to enhance their exposure to language in meaningful contexts and to construct their knowledge. It is crucial for learners to have opportunities for social interactions in order to practice real life-skills. This can be accomplished through learners’ collaboration in positive surroundings and authentic activities without fear of making a mistake (Cirkovic-Miladinovic, 2019).

Table 2. Students’ attitudes towards the use of educational technology in the English language classroom.

Statement	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
	%	%	%
1. I like using computers in the English lesson.	2.04	12.24	85.71
2. Using technology helps me to be prepared for my English lessons.	2.04	40.82	57.14
3. Using technology helps me complete my English homework more easily.	4.07	38.77	57.14
4. I think that using technology in English lessons makes them more interesting.	4.07	18.36	77.54
5. Technology can help me improve my English and my self-esteem in English lessons.	6.12	32.65	61.22
6. I like searching the Internet for English language learning materials.	2.04	24.48	73.46
	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Mean (M)	3.40	27.89	68.70
Standard Deviation (SD)	1.66	11.45	11.94

In Table 2, the category “Rarely” shows very small rates because nearly all students enjoy using computers for various purposes in learning English. Most students (85.71%) like to use a computer in English lessons. They reported in additional comments that computers helps them “feel better and be sure that they do not make mistakes in English.” However, 40.82% of the students were unsure whether technology helps them prepare better for English lessons, which is understandable given that they are young learners from 7 to 11 and may find it difficult to evaluate and reflect on this on their own. Still, 57.14% of students agreed that technology helps them be better prepared for lessons. Similarly, 57.14% of students reported that technology helps them complete their homework tasks, while 38.77% were uncertain and only 4.07% disagreed. A significant majority (77.54%) believe that

using technology makes learning English more interesting. This can be explained by the specific principles of teaching English to young learners, which involve a variety of activities, including songs, rhymes, and videos. Technology can provide this variety in the classroom keeping students highly motivated. Regarding English language improvement, 32.65% of the students stated that technology could sometimes help, while 61.22% found it quite effective for this purpose. Given that 85.71% of students enjoy using computers, it is not surprising that 73.46% like to use them to search the Internet for English language learning materials. Similarly, Ahmadi (2017: 121) found that learners improved their vocabulary, spelling, and sentence structure by reading their classmates' work. His study examined students' motivation and engagement in the classroom and revealed that students were more likely to engage when technology was used as an educational tool (Ibid.). Technology tools were shown to enhance both accessibility and motivation (Ibid.). Correspondingly, surveyed students in Serbia reported positive feelings about technology. However, Ahmadi's research focused on older learners who were proficient in reading and writing in English. In contrast, Serbian students primarily enjoyed playing didactic games and having fun with their teacher as a means of engagement.

Overall, the surveyed students reported frequent usage and had a positive attitude towards the use of technology in the foreign language classroom, finding it useful for completing homework tasks, learning, and improving their English language skills and overall self-esteem.

To conclude this part, the descriptive statistics indicates a strong inclination towards frequent use and positive attitudes toward digital tools in English language learning among examined young students. While there is some variability in usage, the overall trend indicates that digital tools are a well-integrated and beneficial component of students' educational experience, as evidenced by 85.71% of learners who stated that they enjoy using computers in EFL.

4.2 FINDINGS FROM TEACHERS

English teachers were surveyed based on the research framework proposed by Taghizadeh and Yourdshahi (2019: 12). To identify the websites, applications, and tools most frequently used in Serbian classrooms for young learners, teachers were asked open-ended questions and invited to list the digital resources they used most frequently and preferred in EFL classroom. This approach ensured that teachers identified only the digital resources they found useful for their teaching. The surveyed teachers reported using technology in education across three main categories: websites, applications, and digital tools (Table 3).

Table 3. Teachers’ preferences towards digital resources in the YLs’ EFL lessons.

Teachers’ preferences toward digital resources in the YLs’ English lessons	M	SD
Websites usage		
www.education.com	2.09	.92
www.preply.com	2.07	.93
www.learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org	2.65	.64
www.eslkidstuff.com	2.82	.66
www.cambridgeenglish.org	2.73	.58
www.macmillan.com	1.65	.77
Applications usage		
Lingokids	2.76	.57
LearnEnglish Podcasts	1.54	.91
LearnEnglish Grammar	2.77	.59
LearnEnglish Kids	2.86	.63
HotPotatoes	2.80	.61
Picture dictionaries	2.08	.93
Memory	1.60	.75
Tools usage		
Quizlet	2.82	.58
Kahoot	3.00	.55
WordSalad	2.98	.53
StoryBird	1.77	.62
Education.com	2.43	.66
Learn English Kids	2.99	.54

The descriptive statistics of the three given categories were calculated. As presented in Table 3, the highest mean score was calculated for 'Tools Usage' (Kahoot $M=3.00$, LearnEnglish Kids $M=2.99$ and WordSalad $M=2.98$), lower scores were given to 'Application Usage' (LearnEnglish Kids $M=2.86$, HotPotatoes $M=2.80$ and LearnEnglish Grammar $M=2.77$), while the lowest mean scores were reported in the category 'Websites Usage' (the most used out of them all was www.eslkidstuff.com $M=2.82$). Table 3 also shows that teachers used more tools than applications and websites. The most homogeneous attitudes were those reported for the tools category (Kahoot, WordSalad and LearnEnglish Kids) with $SD=.55$, $SD=.53$ and $SD=.54$, in this order) while the attitudes to the websites usage were the most heterogeneous ($SD=.92$ and $SD=.93$). This indicates that teachers in Serbia mostly use tools such as Kahoot, WordSalad, and LearnEnglish Kids, followed by applications for vocabulary, grammar, and fun activities. It is unsurprising that English language teachers of young learners identified the most frequently used tools as those suitable for students aged 7 to 11. This finding aligns with the principles of teaching English to young learners, which emphasize the need for a variety of activities to boost motivation, increase attention spans, and enhance retention (Ćirković-Miladinović, 2024).

In this study, teachers of young learners were found to use technological tools such as Kahoot, LearnEnglish Kids, and WordSalad more frequently, while using other applications and websites less often. Although teachers named several applications and websites they use for teaching, this may suggest that they are aware of other technologies but primarily rely on those most suitable for young learners and compatible with smartphones that students possess. In the research conducted by Taghizadeh and Yourdshahi (2019: 20), teachers also reported greater knowledge and usage of tools compared to websites and applications. This is also the case with examined Serbian teachers and may be due to the fact that grammar and vocabulary applications, as well as podcasts, are more commonly used by teachers during lesson preparation rather than in the lessons themselves. It is suggested in the mentioned research (Ibid.) that most of the tools were frequently used by teachers outside the classroom, providing them with higher confidence and familiarity in using these technologies. The limited use of websites and applications by teachers may be due to the lack of technology integration and training in professional development programs within the Iranian context (Ibid.). Teachers in Serbia also added this as a problem in their free comments given in the questionnaire, such as: “We don’t have enough training in the area of educational technology”, “I learned by myself about different tools during COVID-19 and I didn’t have the chance to learn from the experts”, “Our school does not want to pay the professional development of teachers or to give us a day off”.

Some Serbian teachers, particularly those with more teaching experience and older in age, reported in the comments that young learners often help them use technology in class although they are 7 or 8 years old. Stockwell (2010) supports this by noting that young learners can assist teachers in technology integration, as they have had more time to master technology at home while teachers focus on lesson plans, materials and directing instruction. Allowing learners to assist in the teaching process can boost their confidence, giving them the opportunity to reinforce skills and knowledge they have already acquired (Levy and Stockwell, 2006).

5. CONCLUSIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The study’s findings indicate a general positive trend, both by students and teachers, toward integrating technology into young learners’ English as FL classes. Technology appears to increase students’ interest and engagement in lessons, potentially making learning easier and enhancing language skills. The use of technological tools in young learners’ English language classes is likely to facilitate these improvements.

From the students’ responses, it is clear that the majority have a positive attitude toward technology and the use of digital tools in general. A positive atmosphere and enjoyment during English lessons contribute to increased student

confidence and a significant anxiety reduction (Cirkovic-Miladinovic, 2024). Most students own a personal technology device, such as a smartphone, tablet, laptop, or computer. Children today are “digital natives” (McGrail, 2005), meaning they understand and use technology more proficiently than their teachers. The questionnaire designed to assess students’ technology usage frequency and attitudes reveals that most students use technology almost every day and enjoy it. Their overall attitude toward technology is mostly positive, with only a few students lacking access to technological devices. However, some barriers to technology integration have been identified, primarily due to a lack of financial resources in schools. The examined schools lack sufficient electronic devices, such as computers, interactive boards, and projectors, for every classroom. Instead, lessons are usually conducted in the language classrooms equipped with a projector and a computer.

The students’ responses align with the observation that teachers use technology during English lessons. Specifically, teachers tend to use more tools within the classroom than applications and websites for lesson preparation. The study indicates that teachers believe technology should be integrated into training and professional development programs. In Serbia, it is increasingly common for professional development seminars to incorporate some form of technology during presentations. However, these seminars often lack a focus on the variety and specific usage of technology in young learners’ classrooms, with a greater emphasis placed on older students or teachers’ professional development in teaching skills.

Based on the results of this study and the challenges associated with integrating technology into young learners’ English classes, it can be concluded that instructional technology offers several benefits. It can help teachers integrate various aspects of the curriculum, make lessons more learner-centered, moderate student learning, design engaging activities, and connect the curriculum to real-world language use. Additionally, instructional technology can make tasks more enjoyable and dynamic. According to Zhao and Frank (2003), it supports students in developing new ways of thinking, gathering and organizing information, thinking critically, exploring topics, and enhancing creativity and productivity.

The findings of this research may inspire further in-depth experimental studies on the implementation of technological tools by language teachers for young learners and the use of technology by students in English language learning. For example, future research could focus on raising awareness among teacher educators and school principals about the benefits, challenges, and necessary infrastructure for integrating technology into English language classes for young learners. Additionally, studies could encompass a broader range of schools and classes and consider both rural and urban schools. It is important to note that the results obtained cannot be generalized to the entire population of young learners; rather, the data and conclusions are specific to the group of teachers and students examined in this study.

To conclude on a positive note, it is important to acknowledge the numerous significant roles that technology can play in teaching and learning. Ultimately, the effectiveness of technology in the young learners' English language classroom depends on the teachers' creativity and how they choose to integrate it into their teaching practices.

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ИНТЕГРАЦИЈА ТЕХНОЛОГИЈЕ У НАСТАВУ ЕНГЛЕСКОГ ЈЕЗИКА ЗА УЧЕНИКЕ НА МЛАЂЕМ УЗРАСТУ: УЧЕСТАЛОСТ, ВРСТЕ И СТАВОВИ

Резиме: Интегрисање технологије у наставу и употреба онлајн-алата није само савремени тренд, већ је у новије време и неопходан део свакодневног школског живота. Циљ овог рада је да се осврне на тренутну ситуацију у погледу врста дигиталних ресурса које користе наставници енглеског језика у настави на млађем узрасту и да се утврде ставови млађих ученика према изабраним алатима и учесталост коришћења образовне технологије за учење енглеског језика. За потребе овог истраживања коришћена су два упитника: један за ученике млађег узраста који се фокусирао на учесталост и ставове према коришћењу технологије, и други за наставнике који је испитивао које дигиталне ресурсе користе из испитане три категорије – веб-сајтови, апликације и дигитални алати. Квантитативна метода је коришћена за анализу података. Резултати су показали позитиван тренд ка интеграцији технологије у наставу код обе групе. Међутим, иако су наставници навели коришћење различитих дигиталних ресурса, указали су на недостатак адекватног дидактичког и технолошког знања за ефикасну адаптацију и примену веб-материјала у циљу унапређења наставне праксе. Истраживање је такође показало да ученици млађег школског узраста имају позитивне ставове према задацима које су решавали уз помоћ образовне технологије. Они сматрају да је настава обogaћена дигиталним алатима занимљивија и боље их мотивише.

Кључне речи: ученици млађег школског узраста, енглески као страни језик, дигитални алати, ИКТ.