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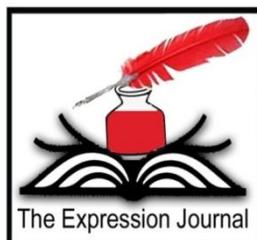
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## MERGING TECHNOLOGY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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### Abstract

The technological advancements witnessed in the last few decades have presented unique opportunities for instructors of language. There is little doubt that the modern classroom is unique in that the teacher and the students have opportunities that their predecessors never had. In essence, technology is now used in the teaching of language and enhancing the learning process. This paper will explore ways in which technology can be used in the teaching of language; the paper will discuss how technology has the potential to change the location and time that learning takes place and ensure that learning goes on beyond the normal classroom hours. Furthermore, it will discuss how technology currently provides students with greater access to the target language. Furthermore, it will explore how teachers and students can use technology to change their view of the nature of instruction and language acquisition. Notably, technology enables enhanced individualization, better reflection, and social interaction, all of which combine to make learning easier and faster. Incidentally, the paper will argue that digital technologies are ideally placed to assist teachers who work with learners, or help students who prefer working independently. On the same note, the paper will explore the benefits of technology in the teaching of language that is incorporated in project work. For instance, the paper will examine how some technology tools could allow teachers to differentiate instruction to meet the needs and abilities of every student. Equally, the paper will scrutinize how distance learning could be enhanced by the use of technology. Ultimately, this study will explore some of the challenges that teachers might face when using technology in the teaching of language and give recommendations on how to overcome them.

### Key-Words

Technology, Teaching, Distance learning, Language

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### 1.0 Introduction

Language instructors today are highly likely to become conversant with computers as part of the higher learning experience, with the expectation of integrating different technologies to support education research, projects, and writing as well as research. Students are increasingly being exposed to Computer Assisted Learning (CALL) using various tools and technologies to enhance teaching through technology (Godwin-Jones, 2011). There are numerous ways to which technology can be applied in the teaching of language, and with the multifunctional role technology plays in the integrated online environment, technology has had the capacity to transform the location as well as the time that learning takes place to ensure that learning occurs beyond the typical classroom setting. Teachers, as well as students, have integrated technology in language learning to change their views regarding nature of instructions and language acquisition and the platform offers learners with better access to the target language. Technology inclusion in language learning also promotes enhanced individualization, improved reflection, as well as social interaction, making learning faster and easier. In practice, digital technologies are ideally placed to assist language instructors in teaching as well as learners who want to learn remotely. The paper delves into how the benefits of technology in the teaching of language that is incorporated into project work by demonstrating how technology tools allow teachers to differentiate instruction to address the needs and abilities of each learner and how distance learning could be enhanced through technology use. Eventually, the paper will respond to some of the hurdles that instructors might face when using technology in the teaching of language and put forward recommendations on how to address them.

### 1.1 Background

The society has become knowledge based, where information gathering and acquisition will be based on technology. As such, the ultimate aim of learning and teaching will be to assist learners in their goal to enhance their strategies of information processing. Consequently, the

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traditional model of learning and information transmission will be substituted with models that place emphasis on knowledge construction and learning activities that are most suited for the knowledge society. Education and instruction methods in the knowledge based society can no longer be confined to the act and process of imparting knowledge and skill, but learning ought to be recognized in which the learner serves the role of an active constructor of knowledge (Jones, 2017).

Technology is an integral part of language learning throughout the world. The advent of networked multimedia computing and internet availability, language teachers across the globe, has been warming up towards the use of computers in the education classroom. The use is particularly high in higher education learning where educators and students have increased access to computers and enhanced skill to interact with technology compared to their K-12 counterparts. In the recent years, there has been increased enthusiasm for technology use in language teaching. Before assessing the impact of technology on language learning, it is important to briefly examine the historical background surrounding the integration of technology into the education sector.

Virtually today, every language instruction has its distinct technology that has been designed to support it. Historically, language instructors who adopted the grammar-translation approach, whereby the teacher would explain grammatical rules to the learners as they executed transactions, applied the most pervasive technologies, the blackboard, as a way of transmitting information to the learners (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Subsequently, the use of the blackboard was substituted with the utilization of the overhead projector, which relied on simple computer software programs that provided drill-and-practice exercises in grammar. The audiotape, which was adopted after the overhead projector, was considered a perfect medium for the audio teaching of language and facilitated language learning through oral repetition.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, university language classes employed obligatory sessions in audio labs where students performed grammar repetition drills. However, by the late 1970s, the audio-lingual approach had fallen into disrepute, because of the poor outcomes that emerged from these language labs. The repetitive drills, whether used in the classroom or audio labs, realized poor results because of their sole focus on language and disregard for communicated meanings. Indeed, the 1990s have witnessed a significant shift towards the integration of communicative language teaching, which places emphasis on the learners' engagement in realistic and meaningful interaction (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). Based on the above information communicative trend, the unique application of technology in language learning is viewed regarding cognitive and socio-cognitive approaches.

Before computers being readily available and affordable, technology use in education encompassed the use of television, audio and video resources across many schools and teaching centers for lesson preparation and delivery. However, through the 1990s and 2000s, the revolution in technology has implied that many educators across the world are more likely to be found using internet tools to create podcasts for their students. The integration of technology in language teaching came of age with the innovation of powerful hardware and software, and the

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emergence of the internet that facilitated both information sharing and communication. The fact that the internet facilitated information sharing and communication implied that it would be an indispensable tool in promoting language learning. The platform opened up the possibility of expanding the horizons beyond the teaching context of language classes with geographical limitations. The internet has provided a borderless platform for teachers around the world to collaborate and engage with each other.

The earlier use of internet in language learning incorporated emails exchanges between learners and their teachers as well as regular chat sessions among learners as well as their instructors. The use of the early technologies was instrumental in facilitating the real world into the classroom. For example, the internet was used as a source of information and students, and their instructors predominantly used the information contained on the platform. With increased technological innovations characterized with mobile advances such as smartphones and increased interconnectedness, students and their teachers are highly interconnected, and there are multiple channels through which educators and learners can collaborate. In effect, computer aided language learning has grown to become part of mainstream learning across learning institutions.

## 2.0 Technology Use in Teaching Language

There are varieties of language learning technologies available for use in education programs. In many regions across the globe, education institutions have made concerted efforts to enhance the utilization of the web in all forms such as text messaging, podcasting, electronic books, blogs, and wikis to facilitate education learning. The various channels available have been aimed at conforming to the increased education demands in of the competitive markets, as well as offer a variety of learning choices to the students (Brown, 2003).

In a society whereby the use of technology has taken center stage in the education sector, it is rare to find a language class that does not employ some form of technology in assisting and enhancing the learning process. Teachers in different levels of language teaching have incorporated a number of technologies to support their teaching, promote students' engagement in the learning process, as well as in the provision of authentic examples in language instruction that integrate culture and integrate diversity in the classroom setting (Jones, 2011). In one study conducted by Yang and Chen (2007) to explore the integration of internet tools in facilitating language learning activities, the findings of the study were that learners who are passively oriented towards technology-based language learning demonstrate better language competence, compared to the manual based learning system.

The numerous technology tools available enable language instructors to differentiate instruction and conform to classroom activities, tasks, and assignments, thus enriching the learning experience. Technology continues to grow as an integral classroom, to assist learners and teachers of a foreign language to mediate and facilitate language acquisition. Whereas the integration of technology in language learning has played a significant role in supporting and enhancing language learning, the effectiveness of the language tools in use is largely dependent on the expertise and qualification of the educator, who oversees and manages the learning environment. In some instances, however, education administrators permit the application of technology as the driving force for the curriculum and substantively use it in education learning in

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place for the classroom teacher. There are a number of language learning modules

## **2.1 Technology Enhanced Materials and Tools for Language Learning**

There are a number of areas and language learning settings within which new technologies have been successfully integrated. These incorporate exercise materials for self-motivated study, authoring tools, electronic publication and resources, tools for processing and familiarizing materials for classroom use, and telecommunication tools (D'Angelo & Woosley, 2007). The vast majority of technology based materials for language learning seem to conform to the traditional textbook style exercises to facilitate self-study. In fact, materials for study and access of information are the most popular among teachers in the integration of technology in language learning. Study materials package existing course book content into interactive multimedia platform for enhanced learning. The context incorporates innovative methodology with matching reconstructed text and flexible learning exercises that offer a rich learning platform.

The interface in the automated platform has been designed to promote increased interactivity in the learning process, for instance the drag and drop functions that promote more exploratory learning approach. For example, the listen and act feature is composed of a picture and a number of elements presented pictures and text on the screen, alongside audio functions that enable learners to listen to text. The platform incorporates visual and oral information that enable the learner to complete a set of tasks. A number of self-study materials also make use of adventure-game mode with enhanced interaction to offer a fun and thrilling environment that motivates the learner.

Technology based self-study materials use multimedia elements to facilitate a situational frame for different learning tasks. Further, animation, video, sound, and images are used to visually enhance text content in automated tutorials. Particularly, audio files are used in teaching specific language skills such as pronunciation and listening comprehension, as well as help learners develop an understanding of some foreign languages and their representation in written formats. Voice-recognition technologies are also used in language learning, whereas the integration of email and internet in learning tasks enable learners to search the web for course content and background information on assigned tasks (Spada, 2014). A virtual learner group allows students to collaborate with their tutor and course mates in learning different tasks. More recently, there have been a number of learning materials to facilitate self-study available on the web; the materials provide a platform for synchronous learning with enhanced interactivity and feedback.

Authoring tools are technologies that offer teachers with customized templates for learning exercises and interaction in self-study packages. The authoring tools facilitate automatic creation of interactive exercises that promote the learning of different learning concepts. Whereas the authoring tools use complex programming tools in their creation, to the user, basic computing skills are adequate to enable the user, interact with the content to learn. To the instructor, authoring tools provide them with a platform to create exercises for the learners, giving them tasks that are more elaborate in language learning in the form of electronic homework. The learners can also use the tools to create exercises and work on them with their peers, enhancing

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the learning process. Authoring tools have been attributed to positive experience among learner groups, where learners work on task based exercises that they have been assigned.

Electronic publication and resources contribute to a rich learning environment for languages. The resources offer up-to-date and topical materials such as encyclopedias, newspapers, electronic books and other content for both teachers and students. The resources offer a wealth of authentic materials, which are valuable in the integration of different intercultural information, especially in the learning of foreign languages. Electronic publication and resources make use of search engines and portals that facilitate easy ways of adapting to texts and resources for use in the classroom.

The use of these learning resources can be transferred in the learning environment to provide more flexible learning arrangements such as within the setting of project-based learning. The internet has diverse information on different websites that offer support for learning through different exploiting materials for use in the classroom. The tools for processing and adapting materials for classroom use combine the flexibility of word processors with customized routines for text analysis and adaptation for use with target groups

## **2.3 Benefits of Technology in Language Learning**

Several studies report that the advent of new technology has had a positive impact on both teachers' and learners (e.g. D'Angelo & Woosley, 2007). Some pieces of research, for instance, Godwin-Jones (2011) and Jones (2017) have demonstrated that the integration of technology in learning promotes the development of teaching methods as well as enhances the learners' knowledge. Schmid and Hegelheimer (2014) argues that technology helps learners in regulating their learning process and helps them in accessing information that the teacher may not be able to provide. For instance, the students can access information on the internet and use it in conducting research in language concepts, whereas such information would not be available via other platforms. Indeed, the potentially positive impact of integrating technology in language learning is that foreign language instructors make use of the platform to enhance their pedagogical practices.

One key benefit of integrating technology in language learning is enhanced engagement among learners. The use of the automated platform has been reported to motivate learners to study more, even seek to understand complex language concepts (Blake, 2013). Technology based learning offers learners with a fun and interactive platform for them to learn. Such is because the platform makes use of multimedia tools such as animated content and graphics that draw the attention of the learners to the learning process and engage them in a fun and exciting learning process that is very interactive, brought into the classroom. Online language learning types of software have numerous exciting ways to learn that help the individual learn on vocabulary, references through the provision of practical learning package to the learners. The fun factor is a key benefit in the language classroom, particularly in drawing the attention of the learners. Additionally, the novelty of the integration of these technologies as well as the learners' interaction with the online platform is that they can enhance their engagement and motivation by engaging in the provided tasks.

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Additionally, merging technology with language learning increases the learners' academic ability in the primary language areas. Bestty (2013) asserts that Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) tends to promote an improvement in the students' academic performance. Such improvement is particularly realized by transforming the student's attitude to learning as well as boosting the student's self-confidence level. In such context, Dahlstrom, Walker and Dziuban (2013), argue that test scores of learners tend to improve with the integration of technology in the learning process since the online platform offers an additional source of information to the learners through access to websites, online tutorials, and research databases. With the availability of these technology tools, education does not stop outside the classroom since they can access online help and tutor all the time, whether from their instructor via email or through collaboration with their peers. The use of technology in learning enhances the student's language proficiency as well as their overall academic achievement.

Technology integration in the learning process has led to a paradigm shift in language teaching and learning (Riasati, Allahyar, & Tan, 2012). The advent of technology, particularly in the field of education has led to a paradigm shift from the perspective of teacher-centered to learner-centered learning models in language teaching and learning. Within the automated platform, learners act as facilitators of digitally grown up learners. To address the needs of the digital learner, teachers adopt the responsibility of a moderator rather than an instructor. In the traditional learning model, teachers are considered as bench-bound instructors, who relay information to students within the confines of the classroom. However, in the technology-enabled classroom, the teacher supports and guides the student. The use of these technologies, thus support the significant shift in the learning approach to be learner-centered, thus students have the autonomy to engage in the learning process. One challenge that teachers have is to support the language proficiency of every learner, especially to great classrooms. Teachers are forced to make student-centric decisions through the provision of remediation, grade-level work as assessment.

The use of technology enables teachers to digitalize some language instructional elements such as video, lectures, textbook content, and lesson plans and this facilitates greater access to learning materials by the learners. The increased access of educational materials by learners has been considered key in closing learners' achievement gaps. From the pedagogical perspective, the use of technology facilitates transmission of information in two ways, whereby students not act as receivers but also senders of information. Therefore, student-centered language learning setting fosters increased engagement: independent thought and enhanced interaction through the collaboration offered by technology tools. For effective delivery of a student-centric learning context, every classroom teacher requires lessons as well as resources on how to engage the learner in fostering meaningful learning when the students are active learners rather than passive receivers.

Another advantage of integrating technology in language learning is enhanced assessment. Technology promotes assessment shift by enabling learners to make an evaluation of their achievements in a more meaningful way. Through technology self-assessment tools, students become better aware of the quality of their work and evaluate their performance outcome more

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willingly. Technology gives learners a platform to undertake enhanced self-monitoring, and this enhances their ability to conduct and fulfill tasks successfully. Additionally, technology provides teachers with improved platforms through which they can assess the student's knowledge and ability more accurately and objectively. The assessment shift from a teacher-centered to self and peer evaluation primarily contributes to learners' development independence, which has been largely emphasized on in the context of the modern classroom.

Technology enhances collaborative learning in language instruction. The technology tools used in language learning have been designed in a manner that encourages communication and collaboration in the course of learning. As argued by Schmid and Hegelheimer (2014), emerging technologies enables learners to collect information and engage with multimedia content such as images and videos to foster interactive learning. Largely, the internet not only serves as a platform for information access but also communication. The internet facilitates seamless connection among individuals through networks regardless of their graphical separation. By using technology in the classroom, the user is connected to the world outside the classroom, and this enables them to share ideas with their peers or even seek to understand from their teachers for concepts they do not understand. For instance, in an online classroom, students have the capacity to reach their teachers and peers, exchange ideas via the chat room, and even undertake assessment online. While interconnected to the world outside their classroom, learners tend to generate high quality work, knowing that a large audience will access their work. Moreover, learners also get to interact with peers from different schools, language experts as well as other interest groups.

Evidence from research has linked a decreased student anxiety with the application of technology in the classroom. In an examination of EFL instructor's perception of computer-aided language learning, Ozerol (2009) carried out a survey among 60 language instructors from a number of schools spread across Turkey. From the findings of the study, the researchers established that the teachers agreed that the integration of technology in language learning was reported to lower the learners' anxiety level, at the same time enhancing their ability to communicate and relate to each other. Similar to the above findings is the results of Yang and Chen (2014), who concluded that foreign language learning could be enhanced through intercultural projects since such programs foster integration and lower anxiety among learners. Using computers in the classroom contributes to diversity, develops the students' specific language skills, and increases their independence in learning.

Distance learning programs can equip language educators with the ability to expand learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their location, the resources available to them or their language background and level of competence. Distance learning programs in foreign languages are widely offered online, whereby students can access available tutorials and learn independently or with the help of an online tutor. Distance learning programs have proven to be rich platforms through which learners study without having to be physically present in the classroom. Indeed, the telecommunication tools facilitated by technology such as videoconferencing enable learners to undertake online classes by interacting with their tutors as well as course mates.

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## Examples of Technologies That Can Be Used to Facilitate Language Learning

Evidence from empirical studies has shown that there is great value in incorporating technology, not just as an enhancement but an integral aspect of the learning process. When

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deployed correctly, technology helps in fostering the four C's of learning: communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking (Binnur, 2015). It enables learners to easily draw on authentic resources, which promote a deeper understanding of concepts and interact in non-fabricated, real contexts. It can be noted that modern learners are exposed to technology right from an early age. As such, they have a great enthusiasm for technological tools. The goal of incorporating technology in language learning is to channel this enthusiasm for technology by embedding it purposefully in classroom learning.

There are many different types of technologies that can be used in language learning. One of these technologies is the video. According to Young (2013), videos are a powerful tool for learning language both inside and outside the classroom. Videos draw upon multiple bits of intelligence, foster creativity and promote collaboration, all of which are crucial for effective language learning. Due to the visual aspect, videos simulate real life situations, which increases engagement and give students ownership of their work. With videos, teachers can make short films to complement each language learning lesson. There are tens of computer applications, which can be used to create video animations in the target language.

Although teachers can make their videos to match their lesson plans, the internet has a large collection of videos, which can be accessed even by students at their own time. One of the key advantages of using videos is that they can be stored in the cloud and be accessed at any time. Learners can use videos to flip the classroom. This means that instead of learners having to be physically in class to learn, they can access lesson content from home. This ensures uninterrupted learning especially during weekends and holidays when students do not go to school.

Another technological tool that can be used in language learning is the blog. By definition, a blog is a type of a website, which is frequently updated and resembles an online journal. Blogs are easy to create and update as they only require access to the internet and basic computer skills. About language learning, the use of blogs is a very powerful tool (Binnur, 2015). It has the power to facilitate learning, communication, and reflection. Even more, blogging can help teachers to reach to a large number of students and thus widen the learning opportunities. Through blogs, students can interact with one another. The platform provides opportunities for learners to practice communication and writing skills, both of which are critical to language learning. Unlike other technologies, blogging builds a passionate learning support community and empowers students' voice. Blogs also provide a platform for peer feedback, which in turn motivates students to engage in high-level communicative learning.

Applications for vocabulary learning are also an important technological tool for language learning. According to Young (2013), vocabulary is an essential aspect of language learning. Vocabulary learning apps are an effective way to embed and memorize words, expressions, phrases, and spellings. With these apps, learners and instructors can search for specific vocabularies in any topic and create their own. The ability to record, rehearse and edit spoken words helps students to improve pronunciation. This, in turn, boosts students' confidence and extends speaking skills.

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Technologies that support teleconferencing are a valuable resource for language learning. For instance, Skype can be used to link students who are trying to learn a new language with other students who are fluent in that language. This way, the fluent students help the other students to learn the language without necessarily relying on class lessons quickly. In the past, this could only be possible through correspondences or exchange programs, which were not only too costly but also very inconveniencing for students and their tutors. The proliferation of cost effective and high-quality video conferencing programs allow students from other countries to connect instantly with students from other countries to practice their language skills.

Podcasts and digital art have also proven to be effective tools for language learning. Podcasts are digitized audio files shared over the internet, which can be downloaded to a mobile device or computer. Podcasts are ideal for language learning because they come in series are highly cost effective. With podcasts, students can learn a language and its vocabularies while doing other things such as commuting to work or household chores (Binnur, 2015). The good thing about podcasts is that learners can combine learning with their favorite activities. Digital art tools entail the use of drawing and photo-editing tools. With these tools, learners can draw, paint and manipulate images and then describe what these mean to them. The use of digital arts is a good way for students to learn a language while being creative.

### **3.0 Barriers to Effective Use of Technology in Language Learning**

Nevertheless, the integration of technology in language learning in the classroom cannot be devoid of challenges. While the benefits of technology use are often reported, it would unrealistic expecting that technology use would transform language teaching and language without encountering barriers. In this regard, there are wide ranging barriers to the effective integration technology in language instruction. One challenge is the lack of technology resources such as stable internet connection, which becomes a challenge particularly for schools or learners who want to engage in collaborative learning. Besides, the initial startup expenses for acquisition of computer hardware and software are a big challenge for low-cost institutions and individuals with inadequate financial resources. Selwyn (2016) affirms that the unequal access of technology and the internet is a big problem for both language educators and students. The low frequencies of technology use may also an outcome of inadequate expertise to manage technology on the part of the teachers, whereas in some cases, school budgets do not support teacher training.

Researchers support the notion that lack of teacher training, experience, and knowledge are aspects that hinder the successful use of the internet as a learning tool. Teachers must increase their competency in the use of technology for effective learning. As cited by Spada (2014), teachers lack sufficient training and the access to technology does not automatically imply that the learning process improves unless teachers are equipped with adequate training on the integration of technology as an education tool. Blackwell et al. (2013) also argue that technology would remain unexploited if educators do not develop appropriate skill, attitude, and knowledge for integrating it into the curriculum.

Research into the barriers of effective integration of technology in education has established that teacher's attitude is a significant hurdle in the academic setting. Some teachers

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perceive technology use in learning as a disruptive tool, thus their tendency to resist change. Some scholars agree that the context of poor attitude among teachers could be a significant deterrent for traditional teachers in adopting technology use (Howard & Mozejko, 2016). Some teachers' lack of confidence with technology is rooted in their lack of adequate knowledge, which could lead to anxiety.

Student's poor attitude regarding the integration of technology in the classroom could also hinder the effectiveness of implement. Some students perceive technology as a disruption of the traditional learning model. As such, when technology is inappropriately implemented, students may view it negatively and resist such changes, which could adversely affect their academic performance. Additionally, lack of time and technical support is another reason for instructors' inclination towards the use of technology in language learning.

## 4.0 Overcoming Barriers

The initial step in equipping the classroom with technology and promoting language learning in an automated environment is adequate training for staff. Teacher training programs are considered effective in preparing instructors for their new roles to apply technology in collaboration and learner engagement. There is need to set up teacher training centered which work towards equipping teachers with adequate computing equipment and technical support to undertake to learn on the digital platform (Simonson et al., 2014). Moreover, a legitimate concern for teachers is how to plan the effectively delivery of technology based lessons. Such entails equipping them with information on how to search information on the web and how to access relevant information within the allocated time.

Teachers also need to undertake professional development courses on a regular basis to exploit different aspects of technology that will boost their confidence in technology use and thereby embrace technology (Benson & Voller, 2014). Furthermore, teachers who are now to the technology-based learning environment need to understand and embrace their new roles and responsibilities in the new model of teaching and learning. Teachers need to know that it is pedagogy not technology use that will determine the effectiveness of the learning process. Consequently, for teachers to make a successful transition from traditional learning to technology-based instruction, they need to adjust their teaching approach to facilitate effective language learning.

New technologies have become an integral feature that influences our living, learning, and working. The resulting impact of technology on education has been discussed by Kurzwei (2000), who argue that if learners are keeping pace with the rapid revolution of technology, then instructors cannot continue to reorganize the curriculum in discrete compartments, but rather using human inquiry that makes use of information tools and their relationship with language learning. As such, teachers should strive to integrate technology into language learning. There is need for radical change in instructors' approach to teaching language learning to prepare future generation for living and working in a world driven by technology.

## 5.0 Conclusion

Indeed, there are both advantages and challenges of merging technology with language

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learning. However, the benefits from the merge seem significant in enhancing learning and language skill achievement among students. As such, increasing technology use in the classroom will certainly improve a number of aspects of the classroom experience. The access to distant learning programs on the internet has been instrumental in ensuring that students access language courses remotely regardless of their geographical location. The impending challenges of technology in language learning are how these barriers can be overcome to merge technology with language learning effectively. The integration of new media into language learning is an important step in ensuring that learners acquire the kind of competencies and skills they need to survive in knowledge based society. The innovative use of these technologies foster flexibility in organization of learning content and enhances learning outcomes.

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