English and technology

What we do

At the British Council, English language teaching, learning and assessment are at the heart of what we do. For nearly 90 years, we've championed the power of English to break down barriers and helped millions of learners grow their skills, build international connections, and access life-changing opportunities.

Now we're collaborating with partners, thought leaders, teachers and learners around the world to open up new conversations and share global perspectives about the future of English.

With online lesson, language learning phone apps and other EdTech, can technology narrow the equity gap in English language education?

Technology is increasingly used both within and outside of classroom learning. Covid-19 saw a huge surge in the numbers of students and educators accessing teaching and learning online, kickstarting a wider acceleration of digitalisation in education.

The different forms of digital learning (e.g., synchronous/asynchronous online learning, blended learning) have the potential to support differentiated instruction in classrooms, reduce resource gaps between regions and provide practical value in this post-Covid-19 era.

Jessica RW Wu – Taiwan

Opportunities for English and technology

- Artificial intelligence represents a revolution in teaching practice supporting educators with functionality such as auto-generation of tests and real time speaking practice with chatbots.

- Online lessons can be more affordable than in-person and may make learning more accessible. For example, widespread smartphone ownership gives large numbers of students access to learning in their hands.

Challenges for English and technology

- Access to digital learning is not universal or equitable. Poor connectivity can exclude teachers and learners in some areas, and the cost of hardware and software can also create a digital divide.

- While AI provides opportunities to reduce costs in areas such as assessments, it also presents issues with security and concerns over areas such as plagiarism.

- The success of technology in English language education depends on connectivity, teacher skill and motivation, political and parental support, and access to hardware and software.

The British Council's position

Technology has the potential to revolutionise language learning and assessment. However, teachers will remain at the heart of the teaching and learning process. Technology is not a solution in itself; a solid infrastructure of support, resources and expertise are all required to achieve educational objectives.

The big questions

How will teachers remain relevant in future English language learning?	Teachers will remain vital for learning, even in the face of new technology.
How can AI address the likely shortage of English teachers going forward?	Technology can revolutionise teaching but will not replace teachers.
Can technology narrow the equity gap in English language education?	Technology can support language learning, but the digital divide must be addressed.

Further resources

- Future of English: Global Perspectives | Explore the full eight key trends shaping the future of the English language and its role in our world. Read the research summary or access the new landmark book for free.

- English language teaching during Covid-19 | Access our research into the experiences of professionals throughout the world and their perceived impact of remote teaching during Covid-19.

- How to support English teachers online | Download our guide on how teacher educators can best support teachers online.

- English education and empowerment of girls | Learn more about our 11 scoping studies conducted in 2021 to inform English and digital skills' programmes for adolescent girls in remote or socio-economically marginalised communities.

- North-South telecollaborations among universities | Read our latest research in this ongoing project on telecollaborative links between universities in the Global North and the Global South and the search for evidence of transformative outcomes for students.