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İÇİNDEKİLER

AI as Language Learning Partner: A Phenomenological
Inquiry of Turkish University EFL Students1
Duygu İŞPINAR AKÇAYOĞLU, Gökçe DİŞLEN DAĞGÖL
The Role of Digital Literacy in English Learning21
Ecem EKİNCİ, Mithat EKİNCİ

"Bu kitapta yer alan bölümlerde kullanılan kaynakların, görüşlerin, bulguların, sonuçların, tablo, şekil, resim ve her türlü içeriğin sorumluluğu yazar veya yazarlarına ait olup ulusal ve uluslararası telif haklarına konu olabilecek mali ve hukuki sorumluluk da yazarlara aittir."

AI AS LANGUAGE LEARNING PARTNER: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY OF TURKISH UNIVERSITY EFL STUDENTS

Duygu İŞPINAR AKÇAYOĞLU¹ Gökçe DİŞLEN DAĞGÖL²

1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) technology is based on creating machines with human intelligence and processing, analyzing and using data to improve their performance over time (Stewart et al., 2020). AI has revolutionized learning and accessing information in the field of education with its key features such as offering personalized learning experiences tailored to individual learner characteristics (Grasse et al., 2023), organizing content, and recommending learning paths (Nadimpalli et al., 2023). Since AI systems can analyze learning patterns and offer customized content, they enable equal opportunities to progress for all students (Roshanaei et al., 2023). Other important benefits provided by AI include access to quality resources across geographical and linguistic boundaries (Singh, 2025), helping to overcome linguistic challenges by giving effective feedback (Pang et al., 2024).

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Like in many fields, artificial intelligence technologies have also changed English language learning as they provide interactive and personalized learning experiences meeting individual needs. The role of artificial intelligence can be associated with a number of theories in the field of foreign language education. For instance, Krashen posits that learners acquire language when they are exposed to input that is slightly above their current level of language, which is referred to as i+1 (Krashen, 1982). Krashen also highlights the importance of comprehensible input, indicating that teachers should make sure that the students understand what is being said and what they are reading. Hence, when there is enough input and when this input is understood, i+1 is considered to be covered automatically. Students may benefit from AI technologies by simplifying the input they are exposed to, making the language they need to learn align with their current level. Another theory that can be considered to be associated with AI use is Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, which posits that social conversation and scaffolding enable learners to perform tasks with a degree of assistance from a more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978). Personalized learning support provided by AI aligns with Vygotsky's ZPD and helps learners achieve tasks that they can achieve with guidance (Cai,et al., 2024).

With various forms available on mobile devices, AI tools today have great capabilities for ELT. However, as stated by Crompton et al. (2023), these affordances can only be gained when understanding what tools are available and specifics on how pedagogies/andragogies match those tools to advance ELT. AI technologies help learners to be exposed to comprehensible input through various simplification versions of a topic enriched with examples. They can also provide learners with social conversation and scaffolding that enable them to perform tasks with a degree of assistance from a more knowledgeable other. In

addition, the personalized plans that they offer could help students organize and monitor their learning, help them save time by finding relevant sources on the internet, and provide exposure to English. In recent years, various studies have explored the use of AI tools (Daukšaitė-Kolpakovienė,2024; Gusman et al., 2024; Tynnyi et al., 2024; Abdelmohsen, 2025) from the perspectives of tutors and students. However, the widespread ease and use of new AI tools and their specific uses in different contexts is a topic worth discovering. Hence, the purpose of this study is to explore the use of AI tools by students enrolled in an intensive English program for the purpose of learning English as a foreign language.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design and Participants

The qualitative inquiry employed a phenomenological approach to elicit and analyze the personal perceptions and experiences of EFL students' use of artificial intelligence in their own language learning process. Phenomenological qualitative investigations focus on the participants' lived experiences and their respective reflections to gain greater insight into the explored experiences (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Ten EFL students participated in the study. All participants were English preparatory class students, studying in the school of foreign languages and enrolled in various departments in a state EMI university in Türkiye. The participants were selected through the convenience sampling method.

Table 1. Participants

Gender	Age	Major	Starting level	Current level	Using AI in language learning
Female	21	Psychology	A1	B1+	Yes
Female	18	Business	A1	B1+	Yes
Male	20	Mechanical Engineering	A1	B1+	Yes
Male	20	Mechanical Engineering	A1	B1+	Yes
Female	19	Management Information Systems	A1	B1+	Yes
Female	19	Mechanical Engineering	A1	B1+	Yes
Female	20	Political Science and Public Administration	A1	B1+	Yes
Male	19	Artificial Intelligence Engineering	A1	B1+	Yes
Male	20	Aviation and Space	A2	B1+	Yes
Female	37	Software	A1	B1+	Yes

Out of 10 students, six were female and four were male. Their ages ranged from 18 to 37. They were enrolled in different departments whose medium of instruction was English. All participants stated that they used artificial intelligence tools in their language learning process.

2.2. Data Collection Tool

As qualitative in nature, this study utilized semi-structured interviews with students. The interviews were conducted with each student and tape-recorded except for one since one of the students was not volunteered to be tape-recorded; thus, the researcher took notes while interviewing. Students were asked six questions on their perceptions and experiences of AI use in learning English. The questions mainly focused on the following issues:

- whether they use AI in English or not
- cases when they need AI in learning English

- potential benefits of AI in their own English learning process
- potential changes that AI caused in their attitudes to learning English
- potential changes that AI caused in their study skills while learning English
- possible negative effects of AI in their English learning process

2.3.Data Analysis

The responses of the students were subjected to content analysis. The information gathered through the interviews was transcribed into a Word document to identify recurring themes. The transcripts were read multiple times to build familiarity with the content. According to Gerson and Damaske (2020), researchers are encouraged to deeply engage with the data, formulate concepts, structure the material conceptually, and pay attention to inconsistencies and lack of connections. The categories were constructed by considering the main questions of the interviews.

3. FINDINGS

The findings of the study were summarized using the themes determined as follows:

1	Purpose of using AI
2	Effects of using AI on learning English
3	Effects of using AI on attitudes toward learning English
4	Effects of using AI on study habits
5	Possible disadvantages /problems associated with AI use

Purpose of using AI

All the participants were found to have explored and occasionally use artificial intelligence in their lives. Despite various kinds of artificial intelligence available for different purposes, all the participating students stated that they used ChatGPT. They reportedly used AI for different purposes in daily life, which included asking for information about the use of medicine, general knowledge, practical solutions to daily problems, psychological issues, etc. Excerpts from the participants' original utterances are as follows:

Excerpts:

"I use it for everything in my life. I like the answers If you know what you want, it is beneficial. But you need to explain well. Otherwise, you may get irrelevant and unsatisfactory responses" P1-Female, 21

"I use it in daily life. I discuss psychology and sociology with it. People are not always convenient, so I use it to ask and discuss many things". P8-Male, 19

Effects of using AI on learning English

The participants were also found to use AI while they are learning English in an intensive program where they are enrolled. Even those who do not actively use it in daily life reportedly discovered some advantages of AI in their learning. AI seems to help participants with several aspects of their English-learning process. The findings show that students find AI beneficial for studying for grammar topics (f=7). They ask AI to explain the grammar topics in a simplified way and provide examples for them. Secondly, they benefit from AI while they are getting prepared for the exams by asking it to prepare quizzes and tests for them (f=5). They list the topics they need to study and practice on the questions prepared. AI was thus found to be a good assistant for them while preparing for the exams. Thirdly, some students used AI to improve their speaking and pronunciation (f=4). One student used it for two foreign languages and stated that she trained AI to make it her personal language assistant. Another common use of AI was related to writing. Participating students were found to benefit from AI as a writing assistant to receive feedback for their writing (f=6) in line with the exam and assignment requirements. Other less frequently cited items included using AI for accessing level-appropriate links to materials (f=3), asking for a personal plan for improving language skills (f=3). These findings indicate that AI has become a good language partner to the students, yet some excerpts also indicated a number of problems. Excerpts indicating both advantages and problems are as follows:

Excerpts:

"I ask for links to understand topics better. I ask "from which teacher or channel I can understand this topic better?". It gives me links. I click it and find myself in YouTube". P1- Female, 21

"When I do not understand some topics, I ask it to explain it in a short and simple way. It helps a lot... Instead of needing to watch long lesson videos, I can easily understand the core of a topic, which saves time." P2-Female, 18

"I tried not to use it much for lessons. For example, some of our friends relied too much on it for their writing tasks. I realized that some students who did so received low scores because they did not put any effort on it. I never use it that way. Those who asked AI each time they wrote failed in the exam. Those who used it as an assistant to teach did better." P5-Female, 19

"For listening for example, I say send me some links B1 level links. It gives me relevant sources. I practice speaking with it. I received 100 points In the exam. Because I practiced speaking with it in a way to improve my skills". P6-Female, 19

All the participants mentioned the positive effect of using AI as a language partner and believed that their language skills improved with AI. When they were asked to indicate the specific reasons for this view, the excerpts they provided were as follows:

Excerpts:

"I have the opportunity to find various resources and listen to topics from different people. Learning only from books or teachers are not sufficient." P1 –Female, 21

"It explains like a teacher. It is like a 7/24 available teacher. You can interact with it using simple language as well. You receive feedback for your writing, for example." P5-Female, 19

"It is timesaving and I do not need to travel. All the information I need is in my pocket". P6-Female, 19

Effects of using AI on attitudes toward learning English

Except for two students who reported to already have positive attitudes about AI, all the students mentioned the positive effect of AI use on their attitudes. However, one student stated that this effect may turn to a disaster when AI is used too much, especially when you do not have access to any AI tools.

Cases to put students in a difficult position may also affect attitudes negatively. However, generally speaking, students reported positive effects on their attitudes toward learning English. Excerpts are as follows:

Excerpts:

"I feel more self-confident. I know that even if I do not understand the topic during lesson, I will understand it at home. It affects my attitudes positively." P1-Female, 21

"I started at A1 level and previously hated English. I never used it before my education here. AI helped me to realize that learning is easy and manageable. This attracted my attention. I do not struggle. I learn and enjoy it. AI helped me to realize that I can achieve". P2- Female, 18

"It depends on use. To me, as I do not rely too much on it, it is positive. To someone else, who uses it a lot and fails in case of real sceneries, it may cause problems. They use it, they do not learn it, and find themselves failing." P5-Female, 19

Effects of using AI on study habits

Participating students also mentioned the effects of AI on their study habits. The majority of the students stated that AI helped them to save time and prevented them from getting lost in the huge amount of sources available online. On the other hand, as they do not strive for or spend effort on the content they are learning, they think people's study habits are negatively affected. Excerpts are as follows:

Excepts:

"Previously, my studies were unplanned and complicated. I was lost in resources, which caused me to lose time. AI is a super time-saver in this regard. It gives recommendations specific to my own needs, which saves time.

"P1-Female, 21

İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Değerlendirmeleri

"I used to spend long hours studying. Now, it gives the point information. The internet has a lot of sources, but AI organizes them and saves time." P2-Female, 18

"Previously, I had difficulty in focusing. We are here to learn and try to motivate ourselves. It suggests songs, makes plans, and increases my motivation." P6 –Female, 19

"It makes people impatient and lazy. We used to search for information, now it is ready. I do not think it is useful in the long term" P8-Male, 19

"Not me, but my friends' use causes laziness. No one struggles... You should try yourself and ask for help if needed. Some of my friends use it in the simplest way, and that's why they become lazy. They find the answer they need in seconds and then do not learn it.. this is something horrible for their future". P7-Female, 20

"It makes things a lot easier, but relying too much on it causes laziness" P10- Female, 19

Possible disadvantages /problems associated with AI use

Despite the benefit of accessing a 7/24 available language assistant, AI use is not problem free. First, one of the problems is occasionally receiving incorrect answers. The second problem is getting stuck or losing time when the answer one is looking for is not provided or is provided differently depending on the prompt. Excerpts are as follows:

Excerpts:

"Sometimes it provides different answers from the ones we covered during lessons. Sometimes it gives wrong answers. Once, all the class we asked the same question and it gave different answers, wrongly in different ways". P1-Female, 21

"You need to explain in a detailed and comprehensible way. Otherwise, you get irrelevant answers and it causes loss of time". P2-Female, 18

"We experienced it in a bad way. We had a reading comprehension activity. We put it in Chat GPT and realized that each one of the answers was incorrect. We were shocked and learned it in a sad way". P5-Female, 19

"Sometimes the answers may be wrong. When I say I do not agree, it apologizes and revises its answer". P7-Female, 20

4. DISCUSSION

The present inquiry dwelt upon EFL students' use of artificial intelligence in their language learning process, and explored their experiences of using AI as a language partner from different angles such as the cases when students needed AI, its potential effects on their study habits and on their attitudes towards English learning, and the possible pros/cons of AI usage in their own language learning journey.

One of the purposes of EFL students' using AI in learning English was to improve their grammar knowledge. Another study (Yener & Selçuk, 2024) in the Turkish context also found students' positive perspectives towards the impact of AI technologies on grammar. This finding can also hint at students' confidence in AI for studying grammar and the possibility of using hard-copy grammar books less. This can stem from AI technologies' increased pace in answering students' questions. Likewise, students noted that they consulted AI not only for improving grammar but also speaking skills. As Gilea et al. (2025) report, artificial intelligence tools play a substantial role in enhancing pronunciation accuracy, speaking fluency, and listening comprehension. Moreover, by getting feedback from AI

as cited by students, they can focus on the process of learning more. This way, they can track their progress. AI is capable of giving feedback on how students are performing (Mudhsh et al., 2025) and tailor the content to meet their individual needs (Chen et al., 2020). Overall, the participating students referred to the effect of AI on improving their language skills. Given that AI has substantially improved the efficiency of language learning (Evenddy, 2024; Smith & Johnson, 2020), this finding is not surprising for our study context.

The improvement did not occur in merely language skills; students reported a more positive stance towards learning English. The study by Yuan and Liu (2025) also indicated an increased motivation, engagement and enjoyment among EFL students due to the artificial intelligence tools. Similarly, another study underscored the positive impact of AI-integrated EFL instruction on the students' cognitive, affective and social engagement (Guo & Wang, 2025). This finding could be interpreted as the influence of AI on students' sense of efficacy. Students who can find answers to their questions in a short period of time, receive immediate feedback and produce sentences in foreign language through AI tools are likely to develop positive beliefs in their own ability and thus find learning easier.

When it comes to the potential effect of AI on students' study habits, AI seems to facilitate their learning process by saving time and helping them with managing a lot of information. Another study in the Turkish tertiary context found the time-saving nature of ChatGPT among EFL learners, as well (Karataş et al., 2024). In the same vein, studies in the existing literature presented the positive influence of AI-mediated learning on EFL students' self-regulated learning. (Jin et al., 2023; Pan et al., 2024; Wei, 2023). However, as Derakhshan and Ghiasvand (2024) asserted, ChatGPT represents a double-edged sword in the context of second language (L2) education, offering potential

benefits while also posing certain challenges or drawbacks. Particularly overreliance on AI-powered tools potentially hinder the development of critical thinking skills (Dai & Lui, 2024; Spector & Ma, 2019). This finding raises awareness of the importance of the way students benefit from AI in their learning. If students try to benefit from AI without totally depending on it and to analyze and evaluate the information gathered through AI technology, they are likely to avoid the drawbacks of AI.

Last but not least, getting wrong information from AI presented itself as the perceived disadvantage of using AI in learning English. As Montheith et al. (2024) pointed out, generative AI models can be unreliable, frequently producing errors and disseminating misinformation on a broad scale. More specifically, Zengin-Erbaş (2023) also found misinformation as the perceived challenge of AI by EFL instructors. This finding underscores the significance of being cautious while using AI-powered technologies. After verifying the credibility of such information, students can be guided to critically analyze and synthesize it using their own words (Dakakni & Safa, 2023). At this point, checking the credibility and the validity of the information offered by AI holds great importance in following a correct and systematic path to success in learning language.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present phenomenological inquiry was an attempt to uncover the experiences of EFL students at university level in terms of including AI in their own language learning process. It was clear that students were willing to benefit from AI in learning English. However, they were also aware of some drawbacks and challenges of using AI in learning. Therefore, instructors should guide them in how to tackle those challenges. It could also be better for instructors to integrate AI technologies into their

İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Değerlendirmeleri

instruction to show students how to use these technologies in an efficient way. They could practice together how to analyse and check the credibility of the information AI provides. Similarly, instructors could role-model in preparing appropriate prompts for AI to get the possibly most relevant answers. Students who get accustomed to using AI properly could study grammar points, practice speaking and even take tests before real time exams, which may alleviate their text anxiety. This way, EFL students may regulate their study habits and feel more self-efficious in learning English. What seems important is not to merely depend on AI while learning English, instead to use AI as a language learning partner since learning thrives with personal effort and human engagement.

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İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Değerlendirmeleri

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THE ROLE OF DIGITAL LITERACY IN ENGLISH LEARNING

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1. INTRODUCTION

The fast-paced digitalization of the twenty-first century has brought about significant changes in the education field. Due to the widespread adoption of digital technologies, methods for accessing information and tools for learning have evolved from traditional to more interactive and student-centered approaches (Kadhim, 2024). The concept of digital literacy has gained prominence as a result of this development. According to Ng (2012), digital literacy is the ability to find, evaluate, and utilize information in a digital setting in a manner that is morally sound. Wei (2022) defined digital literacy as an ability to surge, evaluate, organize, and perform tasks by using digital sources different disciplines such as learning, work, and social life. It is clear that digital literacy is a sort of proficiency expected from the citizens of online community.

Education is one of the areas highly influenced by digital sources and online Technologies. For today's learners to succeed in this cybernated world, they must possess digital literacy skills. As identified by Ekinci (2024), digital literacy is very vital for students' language learning, cultural awareness, and communication skill. This proficiecny enhances students'

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learning experiences and study pattern paving the way for better cognition and comprehension. Considering the importance of digital literacy for the learners, this study offers an examination of the significance of digital literacy in enhancing EFL learners' language acquisition and its crucial role in language education, particularly in meeting the educational demands of the digital era.

2. SCOPE OF DIGITAL LITERACY

Digital literacy is defined as the ability to access, evaluate, produce, and share information efficiently using digital tools (Martin, 2008). This competency also includes navigating digital environments safely and effectively, interpreting digital information correctly and using it in accordance with ethical rules. In other words, digital literacy is a many-sided expertise that empowers learners to engage with digital content critically, responsibly, and effectively in today's information-rich environment.

Digital literacy is also a handy instrument in the field of education. As digital platforms become increasingly integrated into educational settings, students and educators alike are expected to engage with digital content not only passively but also as active and responsible contributors. As Ekinci and Ekinci (2020) state, students' ability to evaluate and use online materials for educational purposes is an integral part of digital literacy. Developing digital literacy skills not only enhances students' academic performance but also prepares them to participate effectively in an increasingly technology-driven society. In English language teaching, digital literacy involves students' practical and conscious use of digital resources to improve their language skills. Students who develop digital competencies can have the opportunity to communicate using the target language on digital platforms, increase intercultural understanding and

make language learning processes more efficient (Hafner & Miller, 2011). In short, integrating digital literacy skills into language education can make significant contributions to both the academic and social development of students.

3. CONTRIBUTIONS OF DIGITAL LITERACY TO ELT

The development of digital literacy proficiencies of learners is an essential prerequisite for effective foreign language learning process. Using digital tools while learning helps students learn the fundamentals of language, including how to listen, speak, read, and write. For instance, being able to communicate with each other in real-time over the internet can help students improve their speaking and listening skills (Kern, 2006). These kinds of interactions make it possible for language learning to occur outside the classroom and provide students with a more flexible and rich learning environment. Additionally, using blogs or wiki sites to read and write online can help learners understand what they read and write more effectively (Ware & Warschauer, 2005). Additional studies have shown that tools such as digital storytelling and podcasts have a positive impact on language acquisition (Lee & Chan, 2021). As stated by Rosell-Aguilar (2013), digital stories let students show off their unique personalities and give them a personalized and unique way to learn a language, and podcasts give students timely content that helps them improve their listening and comprehension abilities. In this way, students can make what they learn more permanent by engaging with content that is closer to real life. Additionally, mobile learning applications offer the opportunity to support language skills at any time and from any location (Sung, Chang & Liu, 2016). In this way, a flexible and personalized learning environment can be created, allowing students to learn

independently at their own pace. By utilizing these technologies, students can learn in interactive settings that are grounded in real-life situations and experiences. These technologies enhance students' language learning motivation, improve their language skills, and also enhance teachers' digital teaching skills (Ekinci & Ekinci, 2020). This technology enhances students' digital literacy, coinciding with the technology-centric learning environments of the 21st century.

Artificial intelligence is one of the most recent technology-based developments. In today's world, where digital transformation is accelerating, artificial intelligence technologies are affecting how information is accessed and how students learn. In recent years, the use of artificial intelligence technologies in English language teaching has gained significant momentum. These technologies provide a more interactive, dynamic, and student-centered learning environment by overcoming the limitations of traditional teaching methodologies. As stated by Kristiawan, Bashar and Pradana (2024), artificial intelligencebased applications respond to students' individual learning needs by making language learning more personalized and adaptable. These applications, which are tailored to students' learning styles, speeds, and areas of deficiency, increase motivation and make the learning process more efficient. Additionally, intelligence-based automatic assessment tools quickly and objectively evaluate students' tests providing them with instant and personalized feedback (Escalante, Pack & Barrett, 2023) Such feedback mechanisms make it easier for students to realize their mistakes and learn the correct language use. Artificial intelligence-supported systems make English teaching more efficient and adapt teaching programs to the needs of the digital age.

4. DIGITAL LITERACY-RELATED CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Several challenges arise during the integration of digital literacy into English language teaching. The most significant of these challenges is the teachers' lack of knowledge about using digital tools and their resistance to adopting new habits (Aljemely, 2024). Some teachers are hesitant about these technologypowered applications because they lack sufficient knowledge about integrating digital technologies into course content. To overcome this problem, educational institutions should organize continuous and systematic in-service training programs to enhance teachers' digital competencies. In addition, good practice examples should be shared to increase teachers' motivation, and the benefits of successful digital applications should be demonstrated with concrete examples (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). In this way, it will be easier for teachers to adapt to the digital transformation, paving the way for the effective use of digital literacy in English language teaching.

Another critical problem is the ethical issues and online security risks that students may encounter in digital environments. Especially with the widespread use of social media and online platforms, cyberbullying, personal data protection and digital ethics issues have come to the fore. Educational institutions should integrate digital ethics training into their curricula and conduct continuous information activities so that students can use digital environments responsibly and safely (Ribble & Park, 2019). Such awareness-raising activities will enhance students' digital skills and prepare them better for the risks they may encounter in the digital world.

In addition, the low level of interest and participation among students in digitally powered learning communities presents another challenge. As identified by Leka and Roseni (2022), students who have not been exposed to digital technologies sufficiently for educational purposes may lack motivation to use these tools. The reasons of this issue is that digital tools are not associated with the course, students lack digital skills, or the platforms used are not attractive enough. To overcome this problem, teachers must select interactive, accessible, and user-friendly digital tools that capture students' attention. In addition, gamification, collaborative online projects, and digital tasks connected to real life can support students' digital literacy development by increasing their participation. In this way, students can be encouraged to develop as more active and conscious individuals in digital environments (Beetham & Sharpe, 2013).

Finally, the lack of technical infrastructure is also an important factor limiting the effectiveness of digital literacy practices. As expounded by Mustafa, Nguyen and Gao (2024), inadequate technical infrastructure in regions with limited economic resources, hinders the integration of digital applications into the classroom environment. To address this issue, educational institutions should enhance their infrastructure investments with government support or through private-sector collaborations, and provide equal digital access to all students (Ng, 2012). Otherwise, the digital division will deepen, and inequalities of opportunity among students will continue to increase.

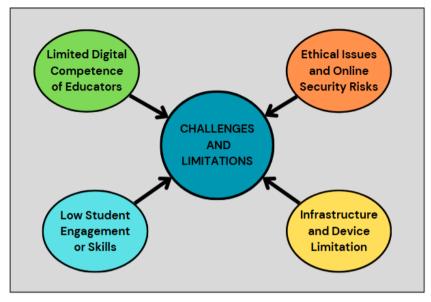


Figure 1. Barriers to Effective Digital Literacy Integration

As illustrated in Figure 1 above, teachers' lack of digital competence, ethical and security issues faced by students, and technical infrastructure deficiencies stand out as significant challenges in the process of integrating digital literacy into English language teaching. To overcome these obstacles, it is crucial to provide continuous professional development opportunities for teachers, disseminate digital ethics training, and increase infrastructure investments in disadvantaged regions.

5. CONCLUSION

The integration of digital literacy into English language teaching is of great importance in developing students' language skills and increasing their motivation. In this way, students can take a more active role in digital environments and use digital tools effectively in their foreign language learning processes. The active role of educational institutions and teachers in digital literacy may potentially increase the quality of education by

İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Değerlendirmeleri

making teaching processes more innovative and student-centered. Especially with the correct use of digital tools, students' interest and desire for learning will increase, and it will be possible for them to reach higher levels of success in the learning process. As a result, students can grow up as conscious and responsible digital citizens who can adapt to the requirements of the digital world.

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