



Integrating Technological Resources into English and Communication Curricula to Address Socioeconomic Disparities

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ABSTRACT

Effective communication skills are a prerequisite for employment, especially for African students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds who face linguistic challenges. This paper examines the impact of integrating technological tools into English and communication courses, and how they can improve students' interview skills, increasing their chances of employment and self-esteem. An integrative literature review and pedagogical recommendations are used to emphasize the beneficial effects of artificial intelligence, blended learning, and social media-based speaking activities in low-resource environments. Moreover, the paper covers issues such as the digital divide and recommends affordable, inclusive strategies for skill enhancement. Educators and policymakers should recognize the significance of accessible digital tools in facilitating multilingualism and English proficiency.

Keywords: Blended learning, Communication skills, Employability, Interview skills, Technology in education, Socioeconomic gaps

Introduction

Proficient communication skills are crucial across all walks of life, especially in professional positions. Technical skills alone are no longer considered adequate in today's business world without soft skills, such as the ability to communicate with people at different levels (Tankovic, Kapeš & Benazić, 2023). While communicating with people is a very broad area, there is a need to focus on specific interpersonal communication skills, particularly verbal and the non-verbal component of it because they are the most frequently used (Iksan et al., 2012; Schroth, 2019). Communication skills are essential for students when seeking employment because they must undergo interviews. It is during these opportunities that they must confidently and fluently present themselves to be considered for the opportunities they desire. Sadly, the competition for fewer jobs is tough among the South African youth (62.2%) in an environment where black Africans (37.1%) and black graduates (11.7%) are the worst affected (Statistics South Africa, 2025). Reports indicate that the country exceeds global standards (World Bank, 2019; Yende & Mugovhani, 2021). This crisis has witnessed some of the unemployed social workers and medical doctors marching to their regional government buildings to demand jobs (Kunene, Ludolph & Malan, 2024; Myeza, 2024). This puts pressure on communication lecturers to come up with innovative ways to enhance students' communication skills if they are to secure jobs, if they are shortlisted for interviews, without implying that communication is the sole factor in unemployment.

However, communication skills conducted in a foreign language pose several challenges. Central among these is the ability to speak because of limited exposure to English outside the classroom. African citizens dominate in South Africa and there are measures directed at revitalising and intellectualising African languages whilst promoting multilingualism (Mabela & Ditsele, 2024; Posel, Hunter, & Rudwick, 2020). This concern has led Ntombela (2023) to call for the problematization of English as a dominant language of education and business in countries where it is a foreign language. This view has been echoed by scholars from Pakistan (Shah, 2025), China (Zhao & Xiao, 2025), Spain (Husillos et al., 2024) and Finland (Dervin, & Hahl, 2024). Despite the continued prevalence of colonial languages in the post-independence period, it is imperative to establish a stimulating learning environment that closely resembles the natural setting. This approach will facilitate the development of business English and multilingualism, thereby promoting African languages for

business communication skills (Agustina & Setiawan, 2020; Francis et al., 2018; Gonzales-Betancor et al., 2019). In the era where computer technologies, such as video games, digital music players, and cell phones, have become an indispensable part of today's students, the *digital natives*, the use of technology in education becomes essential to explore (Guo & Wang, 2025; He et al., 2025; Prensky, 2002). Research shows that the youth of today, including those from socio-economically deprived nations, depend now on artificial intelligence for their learning (Kujundziski & Bojadjiev, 2025; Ndaba & Ngcobo, 2024). Digital platforms should be utilized to transform language acquisition and promote multilingual communication (Laihonen et al., 2025; Truan, 2025; Yu et al., 2025). Technological innovation is essential to address global issues such as unemployment, socio-economic inequality, and the improvement of political empowerment (Beek & Straub, 2024).

Against this backdrop, it emerges that English, a language rooted in colonialism, maintains a dominant and challenging position in African students' academic and professional settings (Ntombela, 2023; Posel et al., 2020). Hence, this paper seeks to investigate how technology can bridge these socioeconomic and linguistic gaps by improving African students' English communication skills and interview techniques.

Literature review

Language Acquisition in the Digital Age

Research indicates that establishing a positive communication environment enables second language learners to improve their communication skills (Kim & Su, 2024; Rashov, 2024). One of the effective strategies involves employing technology for the digitalization of foreign language teaching and development because of the many opportunities it provides (Юсупова, 2022; Xulu, 2024). Integrating technology in language education offers substantial opportunities to enhance motivation, foster active engagement, and promote self-directed and autonomous learning (Arsyad et al., 2024; Kujundziski & Bojadjiev, 2025; Ndaba & Ngcobo, 2024; Юсупова, 2022). Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) tools, such as AI chatbots, have proven to be supportive in aiding personalized language practice and enhancing willingness to communicate in second languages (Kim & Su, 2024; Yu et al., 2025).

Besides language development, technology has been hailed for developing problem-solving, critical thinking, and collaborative learning skills that are essential for students to acquire in the 21st century (Amaya-Díaz, & Bazaña- Zajia, 2020; Ondrashek, 2017). All these factors make digital tools to be critical in 21st-century education and language development. Despite this, the digitalization of education poses certain challenges, for example, unforeseen digital failures, exposure to a broad spectrum of educational materials and the swift obsolescence of technology (Popov & Popova, 2020; Premawardhena, 2025; Samoylenko & Zharko, 2025).

Blended learning in resource-constrained environments

Considering the advantages and disadvantages of digital tools, educators must find effective strategies for integrating technology into their instruction. A balanced approach is best achieved through blended learning (BL), which combines face-to-face and online interaction, as it has the potential to enhance accessibility and social engagement (Ali, 2018; Yajie & Jumaat, 2023). BL is favored because it utilizes videos and interactive materials to foster both synchronous speaking practice and asynchronous skill development (Baker & Spencely, 2023; Rofii & Herdiawan, 2024). A study by Ali (2018) found that most students and staff viewed blended learning as convenient because course materials and lessons could be made accessible online and has a transformative potential for higher education institutions. Moreover, BL addresses the perception that technology is intended to replace, rather than augment, established learning and teaching practices (Festus & Emmanuel, 2025; Prokopenko, 2021). Yet, digital inequities and infrastructural gaps present challenges that require the use of adaptive, low-tech approaches (Flores & Mean, 2025; Prokopenko, 2021).

Gamification and social media to enhance engagement

Contemporary youth, often labelled as digital natives or Generation Z, frequently utilize technology for social purposes, making digital instruments to be favored for bolstering their academic pursuits (Bhalla et al., 2021; Lissitsa, 2025; Soyupak & Ipek, 2025; Ngcobo & Msomi, 2025). Therefore, the integration of gamification strategies and social media platforms can improve student motivation to learn (Chee Hoo et al., 2024; Rincon-Flores & Santos-Guevara, 2021). Social media platforms, such as Facebook and WhatsApp groups, encourage interaction among students and between students and their lecturers (Islam, Sarker & Islam, 2022). Activities such as recording brief presentations on smartphones and sharing them on designated platforms promote active English and technology utilization, leading to improved confidence in public speaking and interviews (Slapac, 2021). It is therefore important to explore easily available and affordable technological tools to assist in the development of communication skills among students from poor socioeconomic backgrounds (Flores & Mean, 2025). Yet, caution should be exercised in not assuming that all students are familiar with and have access to these basic technological tools, such as mobile phones and internet connectivity (Zaklama, 2025). In developing nations, educational and socioeconomic disparities contribute to the existence of a digital divide (Han & Kumwenda, 2025; Ngcobo & Msomi, 2025).

Pedagogical Recommendations for communicative skills development

Studies emphasize the essential role of teacher creativity in crafting online speaking activities suitable for students of differing socioeconomic backgrounds and language proficiency levels (Slapac, 2021; Lütge, 2022; Pfenninger, 2022). When educators design simple class activities suitable for low-resource settings they promote interpersonal skills and build confidence among learners (de Graaff, 2015; Peng et al., 2020; Pfenninger, 2022). Teachers can require that their students upload their stories to the online learning platform used for the classes rather than posting them on their social media pages (Slapac, 2021). However, they should also provide clear guidelines to prevent plagiarism and encourage original content development (Pfenninger, 2020). To foster broader communication skills, Mabela & Ditsele (2024) encourage the incorporation of multilingual competencies alongside English in settings where English is a second or foreign language. Table 1 provides a concise overview of technological resources that promote language learning for students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.

Table 1: Language Learning Tools: Technological Applications and their advantages.

Technology Type	Educational Benefits	Context Suitability
Artificial Intelligence Chatbots	& Personalized language practice; adaptive feedback	Low-resource settings with mobile access
Blended Learning Platforms	Flexible access; synchronous and asynchronous practice	Institutions with internet connectivity
Gamification & Social Media	Increased motivation; authentic language use	Youth-friendly, mobile-accessible environments

Furthermore, the paper suggests a method to enhance students' interview and public speaking abilities in the English communication course. This involves students preparing and directing questions to their classmates, with a short period allocated for selecting a peer to answer. The advantages of this exercise are manifold: heightened student interest, promoted interaction, modelled interpersonal communication, and strengthened peer bonds leading to improved confidence (de Graaff, 2015; Peng et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The continued dominance of ex-colonial languages in African countries in the independence era is a challenge. Most of these countries would perceive a foreign language as a neutral solution to their multilingual nature. Languages such as English are held at high esteem because of their status as international languages. It therefore becomes crucial for teachers of foreign languages to seek innovative ways to assist their students. Poor students lack supportive facilities from their home backgrounds. Technology comes to the rescue of struggling language students. Teachers need to explore various language teaching electronic tools easily available on the internet. Most importantly, the focus should not be solely on developing a foreign language, but multilingualism as a national and global communication tool. Educators and policymakers should focus on integrating inclusive and affordable digital tools to support learners from impoverished socioeconomic backgrounds.

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