



Technology is Our Friend: Using Technology to Teach English Learning Strategies

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Abstract

This paper examines the implementation of technology enhanced learning which is based on digital resources and its benefits specifically in a reading course at an English prep school. The paper describes the findings that contribute to the impact of technology tailored teaching on students' learning. Positive impacts are evident if the lesson is carefully planned, structured and integrated. In particular, it provides that there is a direct relationship between the way lessons are presented with the use of digital resources, and the progress students showed during a limited period of time. By no means, technology guarantees significant change in the students' progress in learning English. This study employed a structured questionnaire, classroom observations, and student interviews to examine the impact of technology tailored teaching. The results indicated that as the level and length of time digital teaching increases, students' attitudes towards the lessons show more positive results. The data collected in this study support the idea that technology combined with effective instruction can show positive results for students and teachers. However, although the data are promising, they are preliminary.

Keywords: Digital teaching and learning, digital resources, technology, technology enhanced learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Since English is used as a second language in most countries like Turkey, the number of English learners is increasing. This leads to the implementation of different teaching methods to assess the teaching and learning processes. There have been a lot of discussions and arguments about recent technological innovations and their potential benefits for language teaching and learning. The rapid change in networks and computing offers a boom for education. Using authentic materials such as podcasts, videos, blog or other web based materials have replaced the traditional teaching successfully. Therefore, technology is often considered to be a valuable tool for increasing educational benefits and instructional quality (Dexter, Anderson & Becker, 1999). According to Graddol; “Technology lies at the heart of the globalization process; affecting education, work and culture.” (Graddol, 1997, p16). However, it is good to point out the difference between educational technology and technology in education because these two terms are often confused in language teaching and learning. “Educational Technology is the study and ethical practice of facilitating learning and improving performance by creating, using and managing appropriate technological processes and resources” Januszewski & Molenda (2008, p1). “Educational technology is a complex, integrated process involving people, procedures, ideas, devices, and organization, for analyzing problems and devising, implementing, evaluating, and managing solutions to those problems, , involved in all aspects of human learning.” (AECT, 1977, p1,2) In short, educational technology is a theory and field in applying an integrated process to analyze and solve problems in human learning. On the other hand, “Technology in education is the application of technology to any of those involved in operating the institutions” (Januszewski & Molenda, 2008, p.2). That includes the function of computers, televisions, telephones and other communication devices.

It has been stated by many researchers that a digital teaching environment potentially creates something new and has significant impact on education (Roblyer, 2003; Roschelle, 2003). Digital resources provide many possibilities for the development and application of technology in education. English is such a language that there are thousands of materials available for teaching and learning. It is widely seen that “the relationship between teachers and students have undergone a phenomenal change” (Barad, 2009, p10). The impact of technology on learners has been the major interest for researches so far, and has played a major role in enhancing English as a second language. It should not be ignored that there are many factors influencing the application of technology in classrooms when benefits are considered. It is clear that the key to successful use of technology in education is provided by the institution and teachers. Teachers are promoting technology in education and enhance learning that is why their impact provides us the necessary information about how technology is implemented and adopted in education, how it can be supported technically and personally. Digital teaching can play a prominent role in fostering skills in language learning in the hands of teachers. Therefore, the pedagogical approach of teachers should be considered as core of this process. Teacher attitudes to the application of technology and classroom management skills should be guided by a particular theoretical model. Selber (2004, p36) has called this

attitude toward technology a “tool metaphor”. He claims that “from a functionalist design perspective, good tools become invisible once users understand their basic operation.” ‘It is the teacher’s role to encourage students to explore new things, compare different viewpoints of the problem, analyze and synthesize diverse sources of information, and construct their own understanding of the topic or issue at hand’ (Owsten, 1997). By doing this teachers will have students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This is what teachers mainly aim for during the teaching and learning process. Understanding the effects on roles and practices vary according to that adaptation of technology appropriately in language classes. It should also be kept in mind that technology rapidly changes, so constant updating is required for such institutions and teachers.

Technology in education offers more plentiful and colorful materials than textbooks. As an institution our curriculum is based on integrated skills. Since traditional grammar based and teacher-centered teaching left the path to a communicative student based approach, it is not a good idea to teach separated skills. In this paper, a reading course is taken as basis of this preliminary study. The reading book is designed thematically that focuses mainly on an event or a problem situation. Therefore, technology provides vivid cultural background, rich context, natural life and true life materials for students. These materials not only improve their abilities or skills, but also they learn cultural, social and natural information. This information can equip the learners with diverse knowledge and make them share and actively participate with others in class. “Language learning is assisted through social interaction of learners and their interlocutors, particularly when they negotiate toward mutual comprehension of each other’s message meaning” (Long 1991, Chapelle 2001, Pica, Kanagy and Fulodun 1993, 11). Digital teaching has enlightened students’ critical and communicative skills positively in learning English.

I have tried to prepare and apply strong technologically modernized lessons though they may not be considered perfect. I offer a reading course supplemented by web materials which include videos or podcasts. The lesson is presented through a power point that includes usually more than one You Tube video based on a theme. The video or videos are used to provide background information about the topic to facilitate learning as mentioned above. Technology in the classroom via the web offers a variety of authentic resources. I design a theme based lesson providing lots of visual and printed materials. I have created my own materials by adapting the original resources that respond to specific needs of my students and I have used the original videos. Through these materials they can go to a trip to Rain Forests or they can get in the world of Second Life. It is clear that there is a wide range of topics that increases student interest in participation. Students work through these tasks and activities that lead them to move in a new direction and develop knowledge besides gaining a visual depth. The teacher takes the leading role in discussions through these videos which provided a context for effective discussions that helped students to develop the target skills. The lesson is structured, task based and the role of the teacher turns into a facilitator rather than being a traditional teacher. By traditional, it is meant teaching only from the book and using traditional approaches in learning, namely lecturing and mentoring with traditional teaching equipment such as

traditional printed materials, audio CDs or DVDs on screen. However, with digital teaching, there is a chance of visualizing the event or the problem stated in the book. As Jonassen (2000) mentioned visualization tools can encourage learners to picture scientific ideas or develop conceptual understanding. Digital teaching can be used to enhance aspects of teaching through presenting information using different ways.

Robert J.Black claims “Technology provides a series of electronic platforms and tools that support many language learning activities from the most mechanical drill-and-kill exercises to fully communicative real time conversations” (Blake 2008, p.15). Technology provides many educational possibilities that are not easily achieved by in a traditional learning environment. Language learning does not only occur in the classroom, it should be continuous outside the classroom. So, technology offers teachers and students the ability to work without time and location constraints. It frees teaching and learning “From the physical boundaries of classrooms and the time restraints of class schedules” (Owsten, 1997, p.27). Nowadays university students do not know a world without computers, technology is integrated in every part of their lives. So I took advantage of this, and carried learning outside the classroom. As a result, I decided to create a closed group, of course after a class discussion. It was created by one of the students in the class and named as “Diamonds” which was inspired by the idea that the students would shine like diamonds when they would finish the program and pass the Proficiency exam. Facebook offered asynchronous and synchronous communication and chat opportunities. They were highly enthusiastic about the idea that they would share ideas, discuss in English with all classmates and the teacher outside their class. They were also able access course resources; I sent most of my informative power point lessons via Facebook so that they could benefit at home as well. They were quite interactive by posting their views about their assignments or other things related to the lesson. According to the theorists the amount and quality of students’ L2 input is crucial to SLA (Second Language Acquisition) success. The use of technology opened a door to their language use. “Second language is best learned through social interaction” (Long 1981, 1991) (Pica 1994, Gass 1997, Douhgtly 1998). The control group started as a repeat A2 level, they did not have motivation to learn nor to do anything in class. They also had no intention of doing extra work at home alone. The situation looked very challenging for the teachers. However, with the promotion of the closed group, they were not left alone with their books or assignments at home. The social group enabled them to work with their friends, and they knew that their teacher is a mouse click away. In particular, the group motivated and encouraged them to do a little bit more work at home. If they were not able to finish their tasks in class, they had the opportunity to complete them at home and share in the group. In other words, technology gives them flexibility and freedom. In short, one of the primary advantages of digital learning is that it is a preferred method of learning, and is attractive to students due input to their pre-existing relationship with digital technologies. In most schools even in my country, students do not know a world without the computer. In the previous generations students were more audial, but now they are visual learners due to being surrounded by visual stimuli. So digital learning that becomes the center of their education, keeps education free, flexible and active at home too.

I also tried to encourage them to explore the digital world with tasks outside class. I designed assignments that would give them the opportunity to develop their communicative and written skills. One of the tasks was to find relevant videos for the following theme in the book. They had to do some careful research because the videos would be at their level of understanding, interesting and to the point. This assignment made them unbelievably enthusiastic and motivated. The assigned group brings the videos, and the teacher chooses the suitable videos, and adds them on her power point. During the lesson when they see that their videos were turned into a teaching material, they felt the joy of achieving something good.

The current study examines the positive impacts of technology use in a Reading course implemented by the classroom teachers. The following research questions were examined:

- 1) Does digital teaching and learning enable students learn better compared to traditional teaching and learning?
- 2) Does the length of the applied digital teaching affect the learning process by means of gaining awareness and the students' attitude towards digital learning?

A Brief History of Technology and Language Education

Technology is a broad term that and was first defined by the Greeks as a particular activity or kind of knowledge (Saettler, 1990). It comes from the word "techné" that could be a physical device such as a computer or video camera, but it could also be a type of knowledge, such as Gardner's multiple intelligences (Smith, 2005). When people hear the word technology, the first thing comes into their minds is a device. In education, technology is considered to be the sole device; computer. However, it includes cameras, digital cameras, mobile phones, videos, MP3 players, DVD players, projectors, software technologies and the Internet to promote learning.

Education met technology when the first computer was invented in the early 1950s. With the advancement of computers, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) emerged. Later in the 1960s, local area networks were created on campuses that enabled computers to communicate with each other, and exchange information. This was the starting point of the interest in educators and researchers. They started to experiment the opportunities provided by these networks. PLATO was one of the first networks. It helped many educators to store their exercises or tests for language learning. In 1975, Fraley and Vargas mentioned that, as the individuals of the modern and complicated world, the learners face many technological improvements, and challenges in responding these developments. They stated that, "To meet these challenges, today's instruction must be equally technological and sophisticated" (p.2). In 1980, Collet constructed a bank of activities mainly grammar based drills to teach students grammar. This was a small step into technology revolution in education. However, with the advancement of technology in the 1990s, computer networking was seen a better way of communication with softwares and interactive CD roms. Many reserachers stressed the importance of the World Wide Web as a unique way to develop learner's language competence (Chun & Plass, 2000; Kern & Warschauer, 2000).

PROCEDURE

This study examined two classes of 21 students each in a reading course at an English prep school of a private university. Data was collected mainly from two sources. First, a questionnaire was designed to explore students’ perspectives on digital teaching and learning. The items were based on the relevant literature and internet research based on technology and learning. The questionnaire consisted of 18 questions (see Appendix). The participants were asked to indicate the rate of their lessons tailored by technological resources. A Likert Scale with four points was used for responses (strongly agree, agree, neutral and disagree). Students completed this questionnaire voluntarily and anonymously in the classroom. Upon completing the questionnaire there was a class discussion. The second part is based on teachers’ observations. The data gathered from the questionnaire was shown in relevant charts.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study is limited to the time when the data were collected; the situation investigated may change as time goes on. The data collected from the students is shown in charts.

Table 1. Students’ view about technology use in classrooms

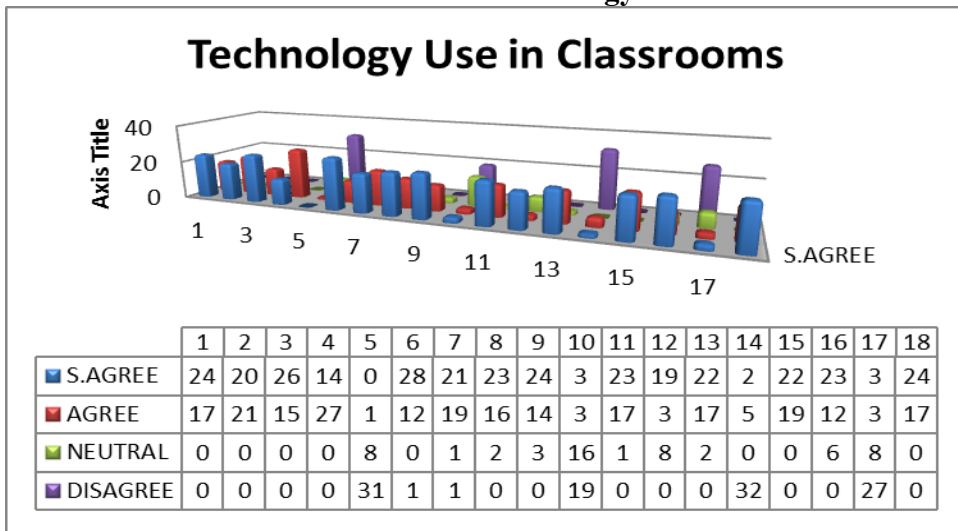


Table 1 shows the total responses to the questionnaire given by 41 participants in two classes. Both classes have 21 students, but on the day the questionnaire was conducted one of the students was absent. The data obtained from the students show mostly positive views about the technology use in the classroom. Both classes expressed their views positively, and this study reveals parallelism with the length of the course they had taken. B1 had the course for 16 weeks and B2 had it only for 8 weeks. Therefore, B1 students responded more “Strongly Agree” answers than B2 due to the length of time. This can be considered as awareness gaining. The more time they are exposed to digital teaching, the more they gain awareness towards learning.

Table 2. Students’ positive views about technology use in classrooms

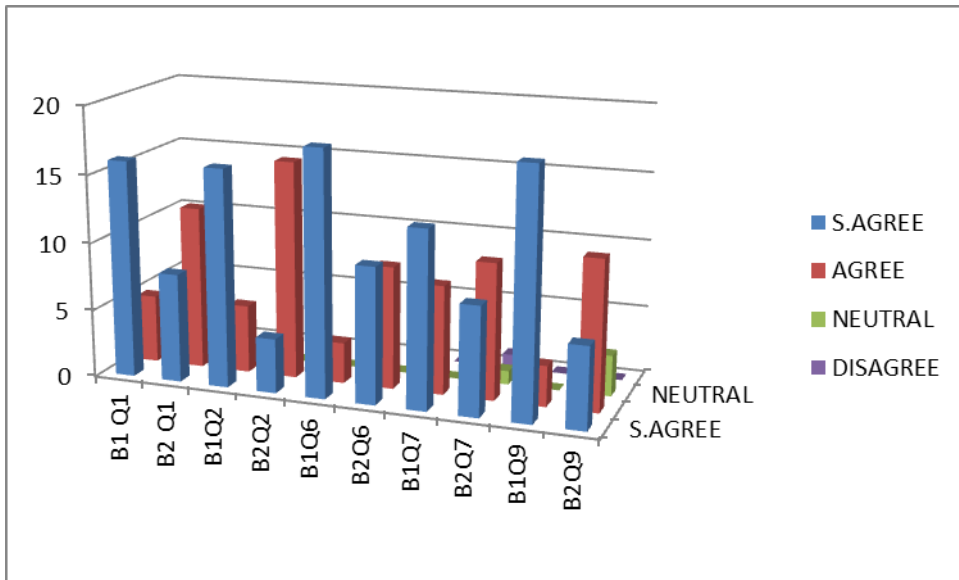


Table 2 also shows that the students’ views on the specified questions in the chart are again parallel with the length of the course they had taken. Both classes show consistency in their responses to the questions (see Appendix). The questions were chosen on purpose to show that the students think digital teaching enhances their learning and promotes motivation. They also prefer having different technological devices used during the lessons. The results still express that there is not much difference between the two classes in terms of the use of technology. Although both classes have positive views on digital learning, responses vary according to the time factor once again. “Strongly Agree” was favorable in B1 whereas B2 preferred “Agree” mostly. As can be seen, this was not an affective variable in the results revealed.

Table 3. Students’ views about skill improvement via technology in classrooms

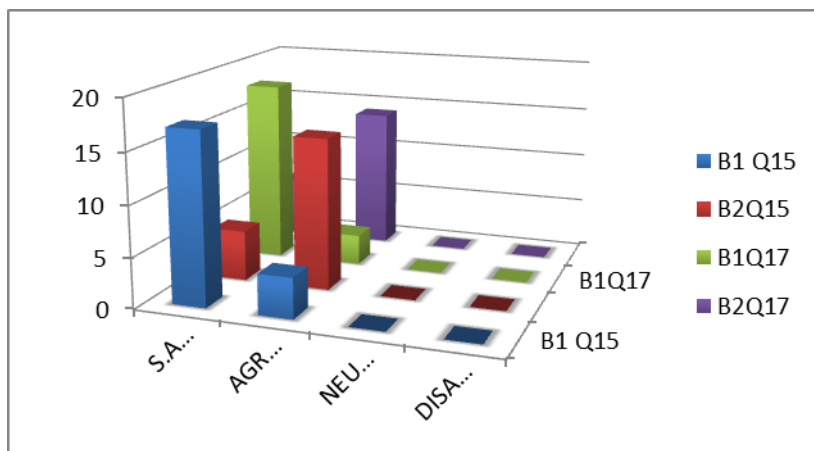
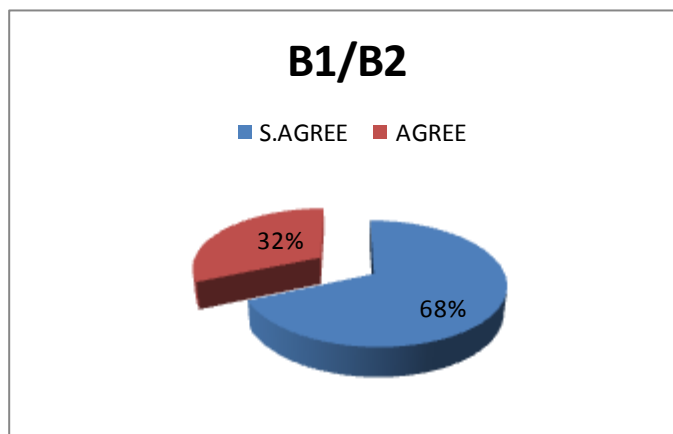


Table 3 shows the results obtained from questions 15 and 17 (see Appendix). The chart indicates that students agree that technology use promotes their learning. They can practice all skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) during digital teaching. Also, technology promotes their interpersonal skills such as working collaboratively with others. The responses to these questions show parallelism with two classes. However, they reveal a small difference due to the length of time. B1 had a 16 week course on reading when the questionnaire was handed in. Time plays a significant role on the progress of students' learning. Students gain awareness almost after 6 or more weeks because they were not used to digital teaching. It took some time to get used to this method and various approaches used. By the end of 8 weeks they almost became aware of the things done in and out of the classroom. Their performance was highly affected by the use of technology as stated in the introduction. Therefore, their responses are mostly "Strongly Agree". On the other hand, B2 was exposed to the same method only for only 8 weeks, and the results showed that they had just gained the awareness and started benefitting from digital teaching. So their responses are mostly "Agree" in the study. In conclusion, it is clear that time is a factor on students' learning in regard to the use of technology in class. The benefits they gained in 16 weeks reveal slight differences with the ones they gained in 8 weeks. However, the most important result is that both classes respond positively to the benefits of technology use in their courses.

Table 4. Students' overall positive views about the technology use in classrooms



This chart shows the overall responses to the questions except questions 5, 14 and 17 (see Appendix) in the questionnaire. Those questions were answered as "Neutral" or "Disagree" as expected. It can be seen in the chart that students' responses are mainly positive to technology use in the classroom. 68% of the students "Strongly Agree" and 32% responded as "Agree". In conclusion, both classes agreed that they could benefit from the use of technology both inside and outside the classroom. This also expresses that their learning performance showed positive changes during and at the end of the course.

This study also provides results based on class observations and a short feedback session with the students. Generally in Turkey, there is one year of preparation to achieve a proficiency level of English before students start freshmen year at university. As they have to deal with this language for almost 10 months, being

exposed to digital teaching with digital resources might also create a lifelong effect on them because they will continue their education in English when they move to their departments. They will have the chance of applying the gained skills and strategies they have learned in prep school in their departments.

According to the observations done, the quality and the number of student-teacher interactions increased significantly. The teacher could ask more high-level questions and students provided more-high level responses after the first 4-5 weeks. Moreover, students showed low academic achievement and inappropriate behavior. However, the teacher spent less time dealing with classroom management and behavior problems because they were all actively engaged with the lesson. Although at first, the tasks were challenging, gradually they were able to achieve and succeed at them. This was quite a surprising success because students paid more attention to the tasks, and participated more often, there were fewer behavior problems. Amazingly, students both became collaborative and competitive. Among the objectives of the reading program, critical thinking, problem solving, oral and written communication, and the ability to work collaboratively are a few outcomes of the digital learning. One last benefit was that students were observed to be more actively involved in classroom instructional activities, as a result they had fewer absences and attended class more regularly.

Challenges of Digital Teaching and Technology Use

The choice of how and when to use technology in class is still a complex issue according to current researches. However, the evidence above shows that technology tailored lessons make a difference in student's learning. Another issue to be considered is the knowledge and experience of the teacher with technology. A teacher's beliefs, skills and abilities should also be taken into consideration while designing such a teaching environment. Lastly, technology tailored teaching might not be effectively integrated into the existing curriculum. It is at best that the curriculum offers innovations for the benefit of teaching and learning.

Technology changes rapidly every day and it is not possible to fully catch up, but at least we can benefit from each change when teaching and learning are considered. Every change can open up new possibilities for teachers and learners. Teachers can be encouraged to improve their technology literacy, skills and abilities in order to have more technology tailored classes where it can become standardized.

It is significant that there are not clear answers on whether digital teaching is better than other approaches according to research done on this topic. Yet we can say that it impacts positively teachers and learners in a variety of ways. Hanson Smith stated that "One of the most significant problems facing computer-using teaching is that no education curriculum can prepare them for continuing changes that take place in the world of technology" (2006,p.301). Information and communication technology should be integrated in the curriculum to promote and increase the effectiveness of teaching and enhance students' learning. If more teachers well become engaged with technology, they will be able to eliminate the idea that technology causes more work and is a greater burden on their course load.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed a direct relationship between digital teaching-learning and the progress of the participants. There are significant changes in the learning which I argue that students moved from passive learning to active learning. This was the primary result of digital learning. To sum up, there is clear evidence about the limitations of the current study. This study was a preliminary descriptive study in which the results are limited to draw precise conclusions, but they were promising. Additional research and work are suggested to identify the outcomes of technology tailored teaching on teachers and students. It is also significant to analyze both positive and negative impacts of such a staged digital lesson. It would be interesting to explore the differential effects of technological teaching on students who are not succeeding in school and who are at high risk for dropping out English prep schools in universities. Further studies on technology use, digital teaching and learning are needed.

APPENDIX

Age: 18-22 Level: A2-B1 / B1-B2

Technology Use in Classrooms

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1. Use of Technology in our language classrooms increases my motivation				
2. Authentic materials downloaded from the internet make me active in the learning process				
3. We should use technology in our classroom for every lesson.				
4. Computer-based teaching activities make the lessons more enjoyable.				
5. Technology can be boring and unnecessary.				
6. I can understand language better when my teacher uses technology in the class.				
7. We always need technological devices in language classrooms.				
8. Different technological devices should be used in the class to increase my motivation for learning English.				
9. If my teacher uses power point presentations, lessons can be more useful.				
10. When we use technology every time, it makes the lessons boring.				
11. Videos can be helpful to develop my language skills.				
12. I should use technology during my project works in class.				
13. Computer-based lessons are more enjoyable and effective than traditional lessons.				
14. Computer-based technological teaching activities and technology can be boring and unnecessary.				
15. I can practise all skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) when my teacher uses technology.				
16. Technology use in class enhances my learning.				
17. When my teacher uses technology, I cannot improve my skills.				
18. Use of technology promotes my development of my interpersonal skills (e.g., ability to relate or work with others).				

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Teknoloji Bizim Arkadaşımız: Teknoloji Kullanarak İngilizce Öğrenme Stratejilerini Öğretmek

Özet

Bu makale, İngilizce hazırlık okulunda uygulanan okuma dersinde öğrenmeyi etkin kılmak ve arttırmak için dijital kaynakların kullanımının uygulanmasını ve faydalarını incelemektedir. Burada teknoloji kullanılarak yapılan derslerin, öğrencilerin öğrenmelerine katkısı ve etkileri gösterilmektedir. Eğer dersler dikkatlice planlanır, yapılandırılır ve uygulanırsa olumlu sonuçların gözlenmektedir. Derslerin dijital kaynaklar kullanılarak işlenmesi ile öğrencilerin kısıtlı bir zaman içerisinde ilerlemesinin doğrudan ilişkili olduğu gösterilmiştir. Şüphesiz ki; teknolojinin öğrencilerin İngilizce öğrenmesini kolaylaştırdığı ve çabuklaştırdığı açıktır. Bu çalışmada, teknoloji destekli öğrenimin etkilerini araştırmak için önceden hazırlanan bir anket, sınıf içi gözlemler ve öğrencilerle yapılan küçük söyleşiler kullanılmıştır. Elde edilen sonuçlar, dijital öğrenme süresi ile öğrencilerin olumlu davranış değişikliği arasında doğru orantı olduğunu göstermiştir. Bu çalışmada elde edilen bulgular teknoloji ile harmanlanmış bir dersin etkin bir şekilde işlenmesinin öğrenciler ve öğretmenler için olumlu sonuçlar gösterdiğini de desteklemiştir. Bu çalışmada elde edilen bulgular gelecek vaatmesine rağmen, yapılan araştırma sadece bir ön çalışmadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Dijital öğretim ve öğrenme, dijital kaynaklar, teknoloji, teknoloji destekli öğrenme.