

The Evolving Screen: An Autoethnographic Journey of English Proficiency and Technological Shifts

Ardhi Eka Fadilah ^{1*}, Siusana Kweldju ¹, Suhono ², Raisha Nur Anggraini ¹, Yeasy Agustina Sari ³

¹ Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia

² Universitas Ma'arif Lampung, Indonesia

³ Universitas Islam Negeri Jurai Siwo Lampung, Indonesia



ardhieka.fadilah@gmail.com*

Abstract

This autoethnographic study explores the author's long-term journey in learning English through the lens of Deeper Learning, emphasizing the transformative role of evolving digital technologies. From early reliance on analog tools such as cassette tapes and printed dictionaries to the adoption of artificial intelligence, chatbots, and mobile applications, the narrative traces how each technological era has reshaped language learning practices. Through thematic analysis of personal experiences, three key insights emerge: the expansion of immersive learning via digital access, enhanced learner autonomy through personalized technologies, and the development of hybrid human-AI interactions in language acquisition. The study reveals that technology serves not merely as a supplementary aid but as an active mediator that cultivates critical thinking, collaboration, and communicative competence. The key contribution of this study lies in providing a reflective, experience-based perspective that bridges personal narrative with theoretical understanding, offering valuable insights for educators, curriculum designers, and language learners on how to meaningfully integrate technology into language education. These insights call for a reimagining of English language classrooms integrating formal instruction with learner-driven, technology-enabled ecosystems.

Keywords: Autoethnography, Technology Integration, English Language Learning, Deeper Learning, AI in Education, Digital Autonomy

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INTRODUCTION

This autoethnographic inquiry explores the intricate interplay between personal language development and the rapid evolution of educational technologies. By examining personal experiences over time, the study adopts a narrative approach to trace how technological innovations have shaped the author's proficiency in English as a second language. Drawing upon the legitimacy of autoethnography in educational research (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011), the narrative unveils the layered transitions from limited analog exposure to immersive digital fluency. English, within the Indonesian context, serves as a pivotal tool for accessing global knowledge and opportunities. For the author, acquiring this language has been a dynamic process of navigating shifting resources from school-based textbook instruction and radio broadcasts to contemporary digital platforms. Initial exposure through Western music and subtitled films sparked curiosity, but limited access to authentic content posed significant challenges. As technologies evolved, so too did opportunities for interaction, comprehension, and production in English.

This paper argues that the accelerating development of educational technologies has not only diversified learning methods but also reconfigured the role of the learner. Tools such as mobile language apps, online forums, and AI-driven writing assistants have increasingly placed learners at the center of their own developmental trajectory. The discussion follows a chronological path through various technological "eras" to highlight how specific tools influenced the acquisition of receptive and productive language skills. The study also aims to reflect critically on how digital innovations nurture learner agency, encourage reflective practice, and support a deeper engagement with language learning as both a cognitive and social process.

Early Era: Cassettes, Radio, and Conventional Dictionaries

My earliest experiences with English occurred during elementary and junior high school in the late 1990s and early 2000s, at a time when access to language learning resources was minimal and primarily analog. Classroom instruction relied heavily on rote methods, with teachers delivering lessons through blackboard explanations and printed textbooks, offering limited interaction or contextual relevance. Yet, beyond the classroom walls, a few rudimentary technologies began to ignite my connection with the language. Audio cassettes and radio broadcasts were among my first gateways to authentic English input. I remember endlessly rewinding tapes that featured language lessons, repeating phrases in an attempt to imitate native accents. Songs by Western artists also became informal teachers each lyric a small mystery that I eagerly tried to decode. "Every song was a language puzzle," I often felt, and decoding lyrics became a regular form of vocabulary practice. Radio stations such as the Voice of America and BBC World Service exposed me to live, unscripted English often challenging, but rewarding. Without the support of subtitles, I was forced to sharpen my listening skills and develop an ear for familiar patterns and intonations. These auditory struggles-built perseverance and gradually increased my tolerance for ambiguity in language. To support these listening practices, I relied on a bulky printed dictionary from Longman, which became a constant companion. Looking up unfamiliar words involved flipping through pages, a time-consuming but enriching habit. Unlike today's instant searches, each word discovery was hard-earned, making vocabulary acquisition a deliberate and memorable act. There were no predictive texts or auto-corrects just pen, paper, and persistence. Although opportunities for speaking and writing were rare, this phase taught me self-reliance and internal motivation. It was not a period of fluency, but of foundational growth a time that cultivated patience, discipline, and an enduring passion for learning English. These analog tools may have been limited in functionality, but they were powerful in shaping a strong base for future linguistic exploration.

Transitioning with Technology: CD-ROMs and Dial-Up Internet

The early 2000s marked a pivotal shift in my English learning journey, driven by the growing presence of personal computers in everyday life. Although internet access remained scarce and costly due to the limitations of dial-up connections, computers themselves began opening new frontiers for learning. CD-ROM-based language programs such as Rosetta Stone and Microsoft Encarta introduced a level of interactivity I had never encountered before. These digital tools featured structured pronunciation drills, vocabulary challenges, and situational dialogues that allowed for a form of simulated engagement. While still largely pre-programmed and rigid, they offered a richer and more stimulating learning experience than traditional materials. What distinguished this period was the emergence of technology not merely as content delivery, but as interaction. I began "learning with" the computer not just from it. These CD-ROMs could be used offline, an essential feature in a time when connecting to the internet required careful budgeting

of time and money. Despite these constraints, the tools allowed me to engage with English in a more self-paced, experimental manner. When I did go online, despite enduring slow speeds and frequent disconnections, the experience was transformative. Internet forums like Yahoo! Groups and Kaskus provided opportunities to read and contribute to discussions in English for the first time. I began participating in threads, composing responses, and engaging with peers all without the pressure of formal evaluation. This informal writing practice subtly enhanced my confidence and fluency in written expression. Another breakthrough came through email and pen-pal platforms. As part of a university assignment, I was required to exchange messages with international peers. Each email demanded meticulous sentence construction, thoughtful vocabulary choices, and cultural sensitivity. Composing and reading these messages became a form of authentic, real-world communication. These exchanges not only enhanced my writing skills but also introduced me to cross-cultural nuances and idiomatic expressions rarely found in textbooks. This technological transition marked the beginning of a more active and purposeful use of English. While the tools were basic compared to today's standards, they represented a move away from passive consumption toward more interactive and self-motivated learning. The shift from textbook-bound learning to online engagement also planted the seeds of learner autonomy, revealing that English was not just a school subject it was a skill I could use to explore the world.

The Broadband Internet and Web 2.0 Era: Blogs, YouTube, and Early Social Media

The introduction of broadband internet in the mid-2000s was a watershed moment that radically altered how I engaged with the English language. With faster and more reliable connections, the internet evolved from a scarce utility into a daily learning companion. This transition unlocked a previously unimaginable level of exposure to authentic, real-world English dynamic, immediate, and increasingly multimedia-based. Personal blogs were my first window into informal, everyday English. These digital diaries ranging from travel reflections to hobbyist commentary provided insights into how native speakers expressed themselves in unscripted, natural ways. Unlike the scripted dialogues found in textbooks, these writings introduced me to colloquial language, humor, idioms, and cultural references in their native contexts. Reading blogs became a routine practice that enriched both my vocabulary and my understanding of tone and audience. YouTube, still in its formative years, quickly became my primary platform for audiovisual immersion. For the first time, I could see and hear English being used in context: vlogs, tutorials, interviews, and live discussions brought the language to life. The ability to pause, rewind, and replay videos gave me control over my learning pace. Subtitles—when available—provided much-needed support, and watching with or without them became a valuable comprehension exercise. This platform also helped me develop listening strategies, particularly for understanding accents, intonation, and discourse patterns. Social media, in its early incarnations like Friendster and later Facebook, offered another unique dimension. Through status updates, comments, and private messages, I found myself informally writing in English on a near-daily basis. These micro-interactions demanded quick thinking, casual fluency, and cultural appropriateness. Over time, this helped me internalize everyday expressions and adjust my language use for different contexts whether joking with friends, replying to posts, or initiating small talk with international acquaintances. At the same time, tools such as Google Translate despite its early flaws became widely accessible. Although initially prone to errors and unnatural phrasing, it offered a fast way to get the gist of unfamiliar texts. Online dictionaries, too, revolutionized vocabulary acquisition. No longer did I need to carry a thick dictionary or flip through hundreds of pages; now, definitions, examples, and synonyms were only a few clicks away. These digital aids accelerated reading fluency and enabled more efficient comprehension of English content across a variety of topics. This era reshaped my

perception of English from a static subject to a living, evolving mode of expression embedded in everyday digital life. It was no longer confined to academic tasks or formal assignments it was in the music I listened to, the videos I watched, the blogs I read, and the status updates I posted. The internet had become both my classroom and playground, offering endless opportunities for exploration, experimentation, and engagement.

English in My Pocket: From Mobile Apps to Artificial Intelligence

The emergence of smartphones in the late 2000s signaled a profound transformation in how I approached English learning. With powerful mobile devices constantly within reach, language practice became seamlessly integrated into daily routines. The once-fragmented learning process turned into a continuous experience, accessible anytime, anywhere. Mobile language learning applications such as Duolingo, Babbel, and Memrise turned ordinary moments waiting for transport, standing in line, or resting between activities into productive study sessions. Their game-like interfaces, adaptive feedback, and spaced repetition techniques supported vocabulary retention and grammatical accuracy. More importantly, they fostered consistency and self-discipline, nurturing the kind of self-regulated learning habits essential for long-term growth. Streaming platforms and podcasts further enriched my learning environment. Watching English series or listening to thematic podcasts became both entertainment and education. Unlike formal lessons, this form of exposure allowed me to engage with natural speech, cultural nuances, and various accents in an informal, low-pressure setting. Over time, I developed sharper listening skills, improved pronunciation, and a better grasp of idiomatic expressions all while multitasking or relaxing. Social media also evolved, offering increasingly interactive environments for spontaneous English use. Platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp allowed me to share thoughts, engage in discussions, and respond to real-time feedback. These interactions, though brief, honed my communicative agility and taught me how to adjust tone and register depending on the audience and context. Perhaps the most groundbreaking development in this phase was the integration of artificial intelligence into language tools. Applications like Grammarly offered instant grammar checking, clarity suggestions, and tone adjustments. They became my go-to support system for emails, academic writing, and even casual posts providing real-time feedback that improved both correctness and style. Instead of waiting for a teacher's input, I could now receive actionable insights within seconds, turning every writing activity into a mini lesson. More recently, AI-powered conversational agents such as ChatGPT and Gemini have fundamentally redefined my speaking and writing practice. These tools offer dynamic, judgment-free interaction, simulating real conversations with human-like responsiveness. Whether asking for grammar explanations, brainstorming ideas, or proofreading drafts, I found these AI companions invaluable. I often practiced reading their responses aloud or mimicking their sentence structures activities that improved both fluency and confidence. While I have not yet experimented with immersive technologies like virtual or augmented reality, I am eager to explore their future potential in creating simulated English-speaking environments. The idea of stepping into a virtual world where language use is contextual, reactive, and embodied is both exciting and promising. Additionally, speech-to-text tools and AI-driven real-time translation services have advanced to the point where cross-linguistic communication is becoming nearly effortless. Despite the remarkable benefits, I remain cautious of overdependence on these technologies. Relying too heavily on AI risks diminishing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. It also cannot replicate the unpredictability and emotional richness of real human interaction. Therefore, I view these innovations not as replacements, but as enhancements tools to support, rather than substitute, human-centered learning. This mobile and AI-infused era represents the pinnacle of technological influence on my language journey. The boundaries between learning, living, and technology have blurred,

resulting in a highly personalized, adaptive, and immersive learning experience one where English has become not just a subject, but a lived practice.

METHOD

This inquiry is grounded in an autoethnographic approach, which weaves together personal narrative and cultural reflection to explore the intersections of individual experience, educational practice, and technological development. As a method, autoethnography legitimizes subjective voice and introspection as valid sources of knowledge, especially when contextualized within broader societal and pedagogical frameworks (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). By chronicling my evolving relationship with English language acquisition through changing technological landscapes, I aim to uncover how personal engagement with tools and platforms reflects larger shifts in language learning paradigms. The reflective narrative was systematically structured using the Deeper Learning Framework as an analytical lens. This framework emphasizes competencies such as self-direction, content mastery, problem-solving, communication, collaboration, and academic perseverance (William & Berger, 2011). Each technological phase in the narrative was examined to determine its influence on these learning dimensions. For instance, cassette-based repetition cultivated discipline and auditory comprehension, while AI-powered writing assistants enhanced metacognitive awareness and feedback interpretation. Data sources included personal artifacts collected over two decades: handwritten journals, saved emails, digital screenshots, photographs, forum threads, and academic assignments. These materials provided authentic reference points for narrative reconstruction and allowed for a chronological organization of my learning trajectory. The analysis was conducted using narrative inquiry techniques (Van Hulst, Sools, & van Bommel, 2024), focusing on how meaning was constructed through interaction with tools, platforms, and people across time. From this process, three core themes emerged:

1. **Shifting Access and Immersion:** tracing the evolution from resource scarcity to digital abundance;
2. **Learner Autonomy and Personalization:** highlighting how technologies facilitated individualized and self-directed learning paths;
3. **Human-AI Interaction in Language Practice:** exploring the blending of artificial feedback and authentic engagement.

Each of these themes is situated within the larger context of Deeper Learning competencies, demonstrating how technology has not only supported linguistic development but also shaped critical cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Theme 1: From Limited Exposure to Seamless Immersion

My trajectory in learning English mirrors the broader technological evolution from information scarcity to digital ubiquity. In the earliest phase, language input was minimal, often limited to cassette tapes, English songs, printed dictionaries, and shortwave radio broadcasts such as Voice of America or BBC World Service. Despite their unidirectional and static nature, these tools fostered foundational language habits in developing discipline, honing listening skills, and encouraging deliberate vocabulary study (Bahrani & Tam, 2012). Each interaction with these analog tools required effort and attention, which cultivated a deep sense of engagement with the language. The arrival of CD-ROMs and dial-up internet marked a shift toward multimodal engagement. Interactive programs like Rosetta Stone and Encarta introduced visual elements, sound, and basic interactivity, offering a richer learning experience than traditional classroom materials (Reinders & White, 2011). While the internet was initially limited by connection speed and cost, even

sporadic access provided exposure to real-time English content and global communication platforms, which were previously unimaginable. As broadband became more widespread, my immersion in English content intensified. YouTube videos, educational podcasts, digital newspapers, and personal blogs allowed for unrestricted access to real-world language in diverse registers and cultural contexts. These platforms enabled me to pause, rewind, replay, and annotate as needed offering autonomy and control over how and when I processed information (Godwin-Jones, 2018; Kukulska-Hulme, 2020). What distinguished this stage was the opportunity to repeatedly engage with English in authentic settings. Unlike static textbooks, digital content was dynamic, current, and context-rich, which not only improved my comprehension but also sharpened pragmatic awareness. I was no longer just learning the language I was observing how it was used in real time by real people. The impact of this transformation aligns closely with the Deeper Learning dimension of content mastery and communication. By navigating different accents, informal registers, and topic-specific vocabulary, I gained the ability to process meaning holistically rather than word-for-word. My encounters with unfamiliar words or misunderstood phrases became learning catalysts, encouraging self-repair strategies and independent inquiry through online dictionaries and forums (Stockwell & Hubbard, 2013). Furthermore, these experiences nurtured a mindset grounded in resilience and long-term motivation. Early struggles with comprehension eventually became stepping stones toward fluency. The ability to revisit digital material at will meant that failure was no longer a roadblock but an opportunity to recalibrate and try again mirroring the academic mindset promoted within the Deeper Learning model. In essence, this first theme illustrates how advances in technology transformed English from a distant, classroom-bound subject into a living language, present in every corner of my digital environment. The progression from scarcity to abundance redefined not just how I learned, but also why I kept learning.

Theme 2: Personalizing the Path, Fostering Autonomy through Digital Tools

The integration of digital technologies into my language learning experience catalyzed a shift from externally guided instruction to self-managed exploration. This transformation was characterized by increasing control over the pace, content, and mode of learning, aligning directly with the Deeper Learning emphasis on self-directed learning and personal initiative (William & Berger, 2011). Applications like Duolingo, Memrise, and Babbel introduced structured yet flexible platforms where I could customize vocabulary themes, set personal goals, and monitor my progress in real time. Their gamified nature encouraged habitual learning by rewarding consistency and reinforcing correct usage through immediate feedback. These platforms supported spaced repetition, which improved long-term retention and catered to my specific language needs and interests (Godwin-Jones, 2011). Outside of apps, podcasts, YouTube tutorials, and blog subscriptions allowed me to align language input with topics I found genuinely engaging from academic discussions to hobby-related content. This alignment between interest and input enhanced motivation and contextual understanding, transforming English from a formal subject into a meaningful communication tool embedded in my daily life (Benson, 2013). Equally significant was the role of feedback-generating technologies. Grammarly, for example, became an integral writing companion. Its real-time corrections and suggestions prompted me to consider grammar and style more critically, which nurtured my metacognitive skills. Rather than simply accepting corrections, I learned to analyze them questioning why a phrase was unclear or a sentence was too long. This process sharpened my editing skills and deepened my language awareness. Interacting with AI chatbots like ChatGPT and Gemini further personalized my learning. I could tailor conversations to specific purposes e.g. academic writing, casual dialogue, or even grammar tutorials while receiving immediate, context-sensitive responses. These AI-

driven exchanges offered non-judgmental practice environments, which encouraged experimentation without the fear of criticism. Over time, I began to independently evaluate which AI-generated suggestions were contextually accurate and which required refinement, demonstrating what Reinders and White (2016) term “informed autonomy.” This autonomous and highly personalized learning environment also demanded increased critical thinking. The vast amount of online content, while empowering, necessitated discernment. I had to evaluate the credibility of websites, compare translation tools, and sometimes reconcile conflicting feedback. This process supported the development of decision-making and reflective judgment, crucial elements of deeper learning (Little, 2007; Lee & Song, 2016). Overall, this theme illustrates how the shift from traditional instruction to learner-centered digital engagement empowered me to become the architect of my own language development. With agency came ownership and with ownership, a more meaningful and sustained commitment to learning.

Theme 3: Between Humans and Machines, Redefining Language Practice in a Hybrid Space

As digital technologies evolved, the boundaries between human interaction and artificial assistance in language learning began to fade. This theme explores how my engagement with both human interlocutors and intelligent systems shaped my communicative competence, collaborative learning, and problem-solving strategies all of which are fundamental to the Deeper Learning Framework (William & Berger, 2011). In the early digital phase, online forums, pen-pal exchanges, and email correspondences provided my first authentic opportunities for communication in English. These interactions largely asynchronous required careful language planning, cultural sensitivity, and pragmatics. Whether responding to a forum post or crafting an email to a foreign classmate, I had to think critically about tone, clarity, and intent. Over time, these experiences expanded my intercultural competence and fostered adaptability in unfamiliar communicative contexts (Thorne, 2003). Gradually, this peer-based communication evolved into engagement with AI-driven tools, particularly with the emergence of chatbots like ChatGPT and Gemini. These platforms simulate natural conversation with surprising accuracy, allowing me to practice English in real time, across varied registers and functions. Unlike peer interactions, these tools provided instant responses without judgment, creating a low-anxiety space for experimentation and repeated practice. I could rehearse academic writing, clarify grammar points, or conduct simulated conversations all at my own pace and comfort level (Wang & Vásquez, 2012). Crucially, this shift also introduced a new layer of strategic reflection. Unlike static resources, AI tools are dynamic and require active interpretation. When an AI suggested a phrasing correction or paraphrase, I had to evaluate its appropriateness based on audience, tone, and purpose. This act of mediating between options demanded both linguistic knowledge and critical judgment traits indicative of deeper cognitive engagement (Ranalli, 2018). Furthermore, these tools helped me develop error-monitoring and revision strategies. Instead of waiting for feedback from teachers or peers, I could test hypotheses about grammar or word choice immediately. This process of self-correction promoted greater awareness of language patterns, typical errors, and stylistic preferences, deepening my grammatical and rhetorical control (Chun, 2016). While no artificial system can replicate the emotional complexity and spontaneity of human conversation, AI-enabled interaction offers valuable scaffolding. In many ways, it complements rather than replaces human practice. For instance, I often used AI as a rehearsal space before real conversations or presentations reducing performance anxiety and increasing confidence. Ultimately, the integration of AI into my language routine reflects a hybrid model of learning, where artificial and human resources coexist to support linguistic development. This blended interaction has not only increased my access

to language input and feedback but has also enriched my problem-solving, self-regulation, and adaptive communication hallmarks of deeper learning in the digital age.

DISCUSSION

This autoethnographic account has traced the evolving relationship between technological innovation and English language acquisition, using the Deeper Learning Framework to interpret personal milestones. The three emergent themes: expanding access to immersive content, rising learner autonomy through personalization, and the convergence of human and artificial interaction reveal how technology has not only supported language development but also fundamentally reshaped the learning process itself. The first major insight centers on the shift from limited exposure to rich, multimodal immersion. The progression from cassette tapes and printed dictionaries to on-demand digital media exemplifies how access to authentic language input has been democratized. Tools like YouTube, podcasts, blogs, and interactive platforms have enabled learners to absorb English in varied registers and cultural contexts, supporting deeper engagement with both academic content and real-life communication (Gilmore, 2007; Godwin-Jones, 2018). This expanded exposure contributes directly to content mastery and communicative fluency, two central dimensions of deeper learning. Secondly, the findings highlight the critical role of learner agency in digital environments. The ability to choose materials, set personal goals, and receive tailored feedback reflects a clear shift toward self-directed and personalized learning. Mobile apps and AI-enhanced writing assistants empowered me to take ownership of my learning journey. Beyond rote practice, these tools fostered reflection, self-evaluation, and metacognitive awareness—all necessary for navigating complexity and ambiguity in authentic communication settings (Benson, 2013; Little, 2007). This autonomy was not passive but actively constructed through iterative decision-making, aligning with what Lee & Song (2016) describe as the development of critical thinking in online learning ecosystems. The third theme reveals how AI technologies are increasingly central to communicative practice. While traditional digital platforms facilitated human-to-human collaboration, contemporary tools such as chatbots simulate real-time interaction and provide instant, adaptive feedback. These AI-driven experiences offered new forms of scaffolded practice, particularly in writing and speaking, where fear of error or judgment often inhibits learner progress. Importantly, they enabled low-stakes experimentation, rehearsed fluency, and refined grammar and style—contributing to increased confidence and feedback literacy (Reinders & Benson, 2017; Wang & Vásquez, 2012).

However, effective use of AI tools requires critical literacy. Learners must interpret, evaluate, and selectively adopt AI-generated suggestions. This process cultivates problem-solving and reflection, reinforcing deeper learning by engaging with technology not as an answer-provider, but as a dialogic partner in learning (Ranalli, 2018; Chun, 2016). It also reveals the potential for AI to support lifelong learning by enabling iterative feedback loops that were once limited to classroom-based instruction. Yet, this study also acknowledges its limitations. As a personal narrative, the findings are context-bound and shaped by the author's specific technological environment, cultural background, and learning preferences. Subjective interpretations, emotional bias, and selective memory may affect the generalizability of insights (Ellis et al., 2011). Future inquiries might include multiple autoethnographic voices or mixed-method approaches to better explore the interplay between digital tools, learner agency, and cognitive development. Overall, this reflection demonstrates that technology, when used thoughtfully and strategically, is not merely a tool but a learning companion. It repositions learners as co-designers of their educational journey, capable of navigating both machine-generated guidance and human interaction with agility. The findings advocate for language education models that

integrate both formal and informal learning spaces, where autonomy, critical inquiry, and adaptive use of digital tools are not just supported but essential.

CONCLUSION

This investigation has illuminated the transformative role of technology in shaping one learner's English language development over time. Through personal reflection grounded in the Deeper Learning Framework, the study reveals how the transition from analog tools to sophisticated digital and AI-assisted platforms enabled progressively immersive, autonomous, and interactive learning experiences. The narrative also demonstrates that English language acquisition is not solely a cognitive process, but a sociocultural journey deeply intertwined with evolving technological landscapes. Each technological era from cassette tapes, radio broadcasts to mobile apps and conversational AI offered not only new resources but also demanded new learner strategies and mindsets. What began as a solitary, resource-scarce effort evolved into a highly personalized, self-directed, and richly mediated learning process. Across this field, the integration of technology consistently scaffolded deeper learning competencies: mastery of content, collaboration, effective communication, self-regulation, and critical thinking. These competencies did not emerge in isolation but developed recursively through meaningful engagement with technology, reflection on challenges, and adaptation to new affordances. Ultimately, this study affirms that technology, when leveraged thoughtfully, can cultivate not just linguistic proficiency but also learner autonomy, metacognitive awareness, and a lifelong orientation toward growth.

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