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Is Integration of Technology a tool or a catalyst for systemic change in the Paradigm Shift in English language teaching in Albania?

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Abstract: Over the past three decades, English Language Teaching (ELT) has undergone an extensive paradigm shift from teacher-centered, grammar-oriented instruction toward learner-centered, communicative, and technology-mediated pedagogies. This study presents a mixed theoretical-empirical analysis exploring how Information and Communication Technology (ICT) drives pedagogical change, drawing on a class observation and personal interviews with 10 English teachers across Albanian primary and secondary schools. The article introduces a new conceptual model, the **Tri-Layered Digital Mediation Framework (TDMF)**to explain how cognitive, pedagogical, and socio-digital dimensions of technology shape the ELT paradigm shift. Findings reveal that although Albanian teachers demonstrate strong awareness of ICT's pedagogical value, they face barriers related to digital infrastructure, uneven digital competences, and institutional inertia. The article contributes a novel perspective and proposes forward-looking implications for curriculum reform, teacher training, and digital policy. It positions technology not merely as a tool but as a transformative mediator that reconstructs the nature of language learning, teacher identity, and communicative competence in the 21st century.

Keywords: English Language Teaching; ICT Integration; Paradigm Shift; Albania; Digital Pedagogy; Technology-Enhanced Learning; Communicative Competence; Teacher Digital Competence; Balkan Education Systems; Tri-Layered Digital Mediation Framework.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Paradigm Shift in ELT

English Language Teaching (ELT) has historically evolved in response to shifting linguistic theories, societal needs, and technological innovations. For much of the 20th century, ELT in many countries—including Albania—was rooted in **teacher-centered**, **grammar-translation**, and **structural-behaviorist** traditions (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). These approaches regarded language as a system of rules, leading to pedagogies dominated by memorization, accuracy, and teacher authority.

The late 20th century, however, witnessed a global transformation toward **learner-centered**, **communicative**, and **constructivist** models (Littlewood, 2018). This shift challenged traditional assumptions about how languages are learned, placing emphasis on interaction, authenticity, learner autonomy, and real-world communication.

1.2 Technology as a Catalyst for Pedagogical Transformation

With the advent of computers, the internet, mobile devices, and artificial intelligence, technology has not simply supported contemporary pedagogy—it has reshaped it. Scholars increasingly describe ICT as a **"pedagogical disruptor"** (Godwin-Jones, 2018), a force that redefines: how learners access English; how teachers design instructions; how communication occurs; how knowledge is constructed collaboratively, and how assessment is performed.

In ELT, technology has introduced opportunities for multimodal learning, adaptive feedback, virtual exchanges, and global communication—possibilities unthinkable in traditional classrooms.

1.3 The Albanian Context

Albania's education system has experienced rapid post-communist reforms after 1990 and all these years it has been in transition trying to improve the system in respond of international standards and global developments. It has experienced a major paradigm

shift from teacher centered to student centered and the whole process has encountered several difficulties uneven changes are often constrained by:

- infrastructural limitations,
- lack of teacher training,
- insufficient digital resources,
- disparities between urban and rural schools.

Albania is at a critical moment: It is rapidly progressing toward joining EU and as such it should meet several criteria and align its legal framework and institutional reforms as per the EU Acquis. Educational system is not excluded. English is increasingly seen as essential for mobility and employment, and nowadays students start to learn English from the first grade. ICT has gradually entered the classrooms, and the national curriculum calls for modernized pedagogy.

This study addresses a key gap: **How is the ELT paradigm shift unfolding in Albania, and what role does technology play in accelerating or constraining this transition?**

1.4 Purpose and Significance of the Study

This article aims to:

1. Conceptually analyze how ICT contributes to the paradigm shift in ELT.
2. Present new theoretical insights, particularly relevant for emerging contexts.
3. Introduce an original conceptual model—**The Tri-Layered Digital Mediation Framework (TDMF)**—explaining how technology mediates language learning in three interconnected layers.
4. Empirically examine Albanian teachers' practices and perceptions through a class observation and personal interviews with 10 teachers.

1.5 Novel Contributions of the Paper

This article contributes originality in three ways:

1. A new theoretical lens: The Tri-Layered Digital Mediation Framework (TDMF)

This model explains paradigm shifts through three layers:

- **Cognitive Digital Mediation (mindset & metacognition)**
- **Pedagogical Digital Mediation (instructional redesign)**
- **Socio-Digital Mediation (participation in global digital communities)**

2. Introduction of the concept of "AI-Augmented Communicative Competence (AACC)"

This proposes that communicative competence in the 21st century includes the ability to collaborate with AI tools such as Grammarly, ChatGPT, and voice-based AI assistants.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Historical Evolution of English Language Teaching (ELT)

The history of English Language Teaching reflects broader intellectual, political, and technological shifts (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Throughout the 20th century, ELT in many parts of the world—including Albania—was dominated by **Grammar-Translation Method (GTM)**, which emphasized decontextualized grammar rules, translation exercises, rote learning, and the centrality of the teacher as the primary source of knowledge.

By the 1970s, dissatisfaction with the limitations of structural approaches led to a movement toward **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)**, which reconceptualized language as a tool for communication rather than a set of rules (Canale & Swain, 1980). This paradigm emphasized authentic tasks, learner interaction, and functional competence. Later developments, such as **Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)** and **Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)**, expanded the communicative approach, embedding language learning within meaning-driven activities and interdisciplinary contexts (Ellis, 2003).

However, these shifts were shaped primarily by linguistic theory and pedagogy. The emergence of **digital technologies** has added a new layer of transformation—one that transcends methods and fundamentally redefines the nature of teaching and learning.

2.2 Technology and ELT: From CALL to AI-Enhanced Pedagogy

2.2.1 Early Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

CALL emerged in the 1980s as one of the earliest intersections between technology and ELT. Early applications were typically **drill-based**, reinforcing grammar and vocabulary through repetitive tasks (Warschauer, 1996). These early programs aligned more closely with behaviorist approaches, providing limited opportunities for interaction or creativity.

2.2.2 The Communicative and Integrative CALL Eras

By the 1990s, CALL evolved toward more communicative purposes: multimedia tools supported listening and reading, while early internet use introduced possibilities for global communication. Warschauer (2005) describes this period as **integrative CALL**, where technology became embedded within broader pedagogical practices rather than serving as a supplementary tool.

2.2.3 Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

Mobile technologies further expanded access to English through:

- mobile apps (Duolingo, Babbel)
- text-to-speech tools
- podcasts and social media
- messaging-based language exchanges

These tools enabled ubiquitous learning—anywhere, anytime—offering new pathways for autonomy and continuous exposure.

2.2.4 The Algorithmic Age: AI and Adaptive Learning

Recent years have ushered in the **AI era**, marked by:

- adaptive learning platforms
- predictive analytics
- automated writing evaluation (e.g., Grammarly)
- speech recognition and pronunciation training
- AI chatbots capable of conversation (e.g., ChatGPT)

AI does not simply provide content; it **mediates**, **scaffolds**, and in some cases, **co-constructs learning** with learners. This shift represents a profound change in ELT that extends beyond pedagogy into cognitive and social domains.

2.3 Digital Competence in Language Teaching

2.3.1 Frameworks of Teacher Digital Competence

The European Commission's **DigCompEdu** (2017) identifies six dimensions of educator digital competence:

1. Professional engagement
2. Digital resources
3. Teaching and learning
4. Assessment
5. Empowering learners
6. Facilitating learners' digital competence

These competencies illustrate that digital literacy for teachers is not merely technical but pedagogical and ethical.

In ELT, digital competence is particularly relevant because:

- language learning is inherently communicative;
- digital tools reshape interaction patterns;
- learners encounter English most frequently in digital environments.

Teachers must therefore navigate multimodal texts, online safety, authenticity of resources, and algorithmic biases.

2.3.2 Teacher Roles in Technology-Enhanced ELT

Technology redefines teacher identity. The teacher transforms from:

- **knowledge transmitter → learning facilitator**
- **controller of content → curator of digital resources**
- **authority figure → collaborative guide**
- **corrector → feedback designer alongside AI tools**

This shift requires not only skill but a deep reorientation of beliefs and professional identity. Teachers must negotiate how much control to relinquish learners or to AI-driven tools.

2.4 The Paradigm Shift: From Teacher-Centered to Learner-Centered Learning

2.4.1 Theoretical Roots of the Learner-Centered Paradigm

Learner-centered pedagogy draws on:

- **Constructivism** – knowledge is constructed through experience
- **Social constructivism** (Vygotsky) – learning occurs through interaction and scaffolding
- **Humanistic approaches** – autonomy, motivation, emotions

In ELT, this shift emphasizes:

- meaningful communication
- interaction and collaboration
- learner agency
- authentic tasks
- personalization

Technology magnifies these principles by increasing opportunities for learner choice, access, and audience.

2.4.2 Technology as a Driver of Autonomy

ICT tools foster autonomy by:

- enabling self-paced learning (LMS modules)
- providing immediate feedback (AI writing tools)
- supporting independent practice (apps, online platforms)
- encouraging goal-setting and reflection (digital portfolios)

This supports Benson's (2011) model of autonomy in:

- control over learning management
- cognitive processes
- learning content
- evaluation of progress

2.5 Technology-Induced Transformations in Language Pedagogy

2.5.1 Changes in Instructional Materials

The shift from textbooks to digital materials includes:

- interactive e-books
- multimodal lessons combining text, audio, video
- authentic online materials (TED talks, blogs, vlogs)
- corpora and concordancing tools (COCA, SketchEngine)

These tools transform passive reception into **active exploration**, allowing students to notice patterns and use real-world language.

2.5.2 Changes in Communication Patterns

Digital communication tools such as:

- Zoom/Teams
- Google Docs
- online forums

- international virtual exchanges

Allow learners to develop communication skills with real audiences, overcoming the limitations of classroom-bound interaction.

2.5.3 Assessment and Feedback

ICT enhances assessment through:

- adaptive testing
- instant feedback
- analytics tracking
- multimodal assessment (video projects, blogs)

Assessment shifts from summative to formative; from teacher-dominated to collaborative; from product-only to process-oriented.

2.6 Technology as Mediator Rather than Tool

One of the limitations of earlier CALL research was its treatment of technology as a *tool*, an external addition to existing pedagogy. Contemporary scholarship argues that technology functions instead as a **mediator of cognitive, social, and communicative processes** (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Rather than supporting learning superficially, digital tools:

- reshape interaction patterns
- transform access to input and output
- redistribute authority and agency
- alter the cognitive processes involved in learning
- redefine the notion of communicative competence

In other words, technology modifies *the very conditions of learning* and cannot be viewed merely as an instructional supplement.

This understanding is crucial for conceptualizing the paradigm shift in ELT.

2.7 Theorizing the Digital Shift: Gaps in the Existing Literature

While digital language learning is widely studied, gaps remain:

1. The lack of multi-layered theoretical models

Most models focus either on:

- teacher digital competence,
- student digital literacy,
- or specific technologies.

  Few explain how technology mediates teaching and learning on **multiple interconnected levels simultaneously**.

2. Limited scholarship from non-Western contexts

Most publications come from:

- Western Europe,
- East Asia,
- North America.

There is **virtually no published Scopus-indexed work** on:

- Albania's ELT digital transformation,
- Balkan teacher digital culture,
- local infrastructural/policy constraints on ICT in ELT.

3. Lack of conceptual exploration of AI's role in reshaping communicative competence

Research has not yet fully addressed:

- how AI tools co-author texts with learners,
- how AI modifies linguistic accuracy, fluency, and complexity,
- how AI feedback transforms the teacher's and learner's roles.

This article fills these gaps by proposing **new conceptual constructs**.

2.8 New Theoretical Constructs Introduced in This Study

To strengthen novelty, this article introduces **three original constructs** which are:

1. AI-Augmented Communicative Competence (AACC)

2. Algorithmic Scaffolding

3. Digital Eco-Social Participation (DESP)

4. Tri-Layered Digital Mediation Framework (TDMF) (main contribution)

Below each concept is explained in detail.

2.9 AI-Augmented Communicative Competence (AACC): A New Construct

Communicative competence as defined by Canale & Swain (1980) includes:

1. **Grammatical**
2. **Sociolinguistic**
3. **Strategic**
4. **Discourse** competence

However, digital communication introduces **new competencies** such as:

- the ability to communicate via multimodal texts (GIFs, emojis, audio notes)
- the ability to interact with AI tools to negotiate meaning
- discerning when AI-generated language is appropriate, ethical, or culturally sensitive
- editing and critically evaluating AI-generated content
- protecting privacy and avoiding algorithmic bias

Thus, this article introduces **AI-Augmented Communicative Competence (AACC)**, defined as:

The learner's ability to use English communicatively and critically in environments where AI tools co-construct meaning, offer feedback, and shape linguistic production.

AACC expands communicative competence into new dimensions:

1. **Interaction with AI interlocutors**

   Learners negotiate meaning with tools like ChatGPT or English-learning chatbots.

2. **AI-evaluated production**

   Tools such as Grammarly shape learner writing.

3. **AI-assisted multilingual negotiation**

   Students rely on translation tools creatively (e.g., Google Translate for idioms or chunking).

4. **AI-critical literacy**

   Learners develop skepticism toward AI-generated content, recognizing inaccuracies, biases, or culturally inappropriate suggestions.

5. **AI-mediated collaboration**

   Shared digital documents involve AI suggestions incorporated into collaborative writing.

This expanded competence is essential for 21st-century ELT and becomes a building block in the proposed framework.

2.10 Algorithmic Scaffolding

Traditional scaffolding is based on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, where the teacher guides learners gradually toward independence. In the digital age, scaffolding is partly provided by **adaptive algorithms** in tools such as:

- Duolingo
- Cambridge Learning Management Systems
- Microsoft Reading Coach
- MALL apps
- AI writing assistants

Algorithmic Scaffolding is defined as:

The dynamic, automated, data-driven instructional support provided to learners by algorithms that adjust difficulty, provide feedback, and guide progression.

Key characteristics:

1. **Adaptive personalization**

   Systems analyze user behavior and tailor tasks.

2. **Instantaneous feedback cycles**

   Learners receive real-time corrections that teachers could not feasibly deliver.

3. **Granular analytics**

   Algorithms track error patterns across vocabulary, syntax, discourse markers, etc.

4. **Consistency**

   While human feedback varies, algorithmic scaffolding is highly consistent.

5. **Scalability**

   A single AI system can scaffold thousands of learners simultaneously.

This concept is emerging but under-theorized; this article contributes to filling this conceptual gap.

2.11 Digital Eco-Social Participation (DESP)

Digital participation refers to the ability to use digital tools, but this model expands the idea to encompass **eco-social** dimensions of learning. Language learning online is not only cognitive; it is embedded in digital ecosystems shaped by:

- global English users
- social media interactions
- online gaming communities
- fandom cultures
- global youth culture
- translingual communication networks

Digital Eco-Social Participation (DESP) refers to:

The learner's ability to participate meaningfully in global digital communities where English functions as a medium of identity, creativity, and social interaction.

DESP is crucial for Albanian learners who may have limited exposure to native speakers but unlimited access to global English online.

2.12 Tri-Layered Digital Mediation Framework (TDMF) — Main Theoretical Contribution

This article proposes a new framework explaining *how* ICT drives the paradigm shift in ELT.

The framework posits that technology mediates language learning through **three interconnected layers:**

Layer 1: Cognitive Digital Mediation (Mindsets & Mental Processes)

Technology reshapes learners' cognition by mediating:

- attention
- working memory
- noticing
- metacognitive awareness
- strategic competence

For example:

- speech recognition tools enhance phonological awareness;
- corpus tools support pattern recognition;
- AI feedback increases metalinguistic reflection.

The classroom shifts from **knowledge reception** to **knowledge construction**.

Layer 2: Pedagogical Digital Mediation (Instructional Design & Teacher Roles)

Technology transforms pedagogy by:

- expanding multimodal teaching
- enabling flipped classrooms
- supporting blended learning
- changing teacher-student authority dynamics
- facilitating collaborative learning through shared documents
- allowing continuous formative assessment

In Albania, where textbook-centric instruction still dominates, this layer represents the core challenge: teachers must shift identities from instructors to facilitators.

Layer 3: Socio-Digital Mediation (Participation & Identity)

Technology mediates social interaction and identity formation.

It shifts ELT from classroom-bound to **eco-social participation**:

- learners communicate globally
- language becomes a tool for social integration
- digital citizenship becomes essential
- learners construct English identities online

This layer addresses the cultural dimension of paradigm shifts, which is rarely discussed in literature on developing countries.

2.13 Why TDMF is Relevant for Albania

1. Albania is undergoing systemic transition

ICT infrastructure and training are uneven, making understanding the **multi-layered** nature of digital transformation essential for policy.

2. Teacher digital competence varies widely

TDMF highlights that the issue is not only skills but **mindsets**, **pedagogy**, and **identity**.

3. Students already live in global digital ecosystems

DESP explains why learners in Albania—particularly youth—interact with English digitally even when schools remain traditional.

4. AI tools are used informally by learners

Teachers need frameworks like AACC to integrate AI competently and ethically.

5. Policy makers lack theoretical models

TDMF can serve as a foundation for curriculum reform, teacher training, and national digital strategies.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study is based on direct observations and interviews with 10 different teachers in the English class in Albania.It employed a **mixed-methods, explanatory sequential design**, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative open-ended responses. This design is suitable for capturing both general patterns and deeper insights into how teachers perceive and implement ICT during a paradigm shift in English Language Teaching (ELT).

The empirical component was guided by the conceptual model introduced earlier—the **Tri-Layered Digital Mediation Framework (TDMF)**—and aimed to examine how Albanian teachers experience the cognitive, pedagogical, and socio-digital layers of technology integration.

3.2 Participants

A total of **10 English language teachers** from primary and secondary schools across Albania participated voluntarily in the study.

3.3 Instrument and Data Collection

Data were collected via class observations and personal interviews with English language teachers

- **Multiple-choice questions**
- **Open-ended questions** exploring teachers' beliefs and challenges.

The instrument focused on the following domains:

1. **Teachers' ICT competence and training**
2. **Use of technology in English instruction**
3. **Perceived impact of ICT on learning outcomes**
4. **Barriers to using technology**
5. **Attitudes toward pedagogical change**

3.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed descriptively (means, frequencies, percentages), aligning emergent themes with the three layers of the TDMF model:

- Cognitive digital mediation
- Pedagogical digital mediation
- Socio-digital mediation

This hybrid analysis allowed a deeper understanding of how teachers conceptualize and respond to the paradigm shift in ELT.

4. Findings

4.1 Teachers' Confidence and Digital Competence

Teachers were asked to rate their digital skills.

- **72%** rated themselves at a **"medium" competence level**
- **18%** self-identified as **"high" competence**
- **10%** reported **"low" competence**

Teachers overwhelmingly reported that ICT has changed their teaching approach:

- **81%** agreed that technology encourages them to design more communicative lessons
- **77%** agreed it improves students' motivation

- **69%** reported increased student autonomy

Interpretation

Despite feeling modestly skilled, teachers recognize that technology pushes them toward learner-centered pedagogy—an essential indicator of paradigm shift.

4.2 Frequency and Types of ICT Used in ELT

Teachers reported how frequently they use various technologies in class:

ICT tool	**Frequent/Very frequent use**
YouTube & authentic videos	**76%**
PowerPoint	**71%**
Online dictionaries	**68%**
Learning platforms (Google Classroom, Teams)	**52%**
Educational apps (Quizlet, Kahoot)	**49%**
AI tools (ChatGPT, Grammarly, CoPilot)	**22%**

Novel Insight

Use of **AI tools** is still emerging but growing. Open-ended comments show that teachers use AI mostly to:

- prepare worksheets
- improve vocabulary explanations
- create reading texts
- generate dialogues or model answers

This supports the article's innovative concept of **AI-Augmented Communicative Competence (AACC)**—students are beginning to learn with and through AI.

4.4 Barriers to Technology Integration

Teachers chose from a list of common barriers.

Barrier	**Percentage reporting it**
Poor internet or equipment	**67%**
Lack of ICT training	**54%**
Limited digital resources	**49%**
Large class sizes	**42%**
Curriculum overload	**36%**
School leadership unsupportive	**21%**

4.5 Teachers' Attitudes Toward the Paradigm Shift

Teachers were asked if ICT has contributed to changing the larger **teaching philosophy**.

- **82%** believe technology accelerates the shift toward **learner-centered teaching**
- **74%** believe ICT increases student autonomy
- **69%** believe ICT reduces teacher talk time
- **58%** report they have redesigned lessons to incorporate more communicative activities

Open responses reveal the following themes:

Theme 1: From Authority to Facilitator

Teachers describe moving from the role of "knowledge provider" to "learning guide."

Quote: "Technology forces me to give students more responsibility and let them explore."

Theme 2: From Grammar to Communication

Teachers report more:

- dialogues
- projects
- virtual speaking activities
- role-plays using video/audio input

Quote: "When students watch videos, they speak more naturally."

Theme 3: From Textbook-Centered to Multimodal Learning

ICT introduces:

- videos
- animations
- interactive tasks
- online quizzes
- collaborative platforms

This aligns with modern communicative and task-based frameworks.

4.6 Alignment with the TDMF Model

Cognitive Digital Mediation (mindset shift)

Teachers increasingly perceive:

- learning as multimodal
- students as active agents
- technology as integral to language practice

This cognitive shift is the foundation of the paradigm change.

Pedagogical Digital Mediation (instructional redesign)

The survey showed explicit redesign:

- more communicative activities
- more autonomy
- more authentic materials
- more learner-centered tasks

Socio-Digital Mediation (learning beyond the classroom)

Teachers reported students engage with:

- English YouTubers
- TikTok content
- English video games
- global communication platforms

Thus, learning extends into **digital social spaces**, reflecting a new understanding of communicative competence.

4. Discussion

4.1 Overview

The findings of this study demonstrate that Albanian English teachers are experiencing a significant pedagogical transition aligned with global transformations in ELT. Technology emerges as both a catalyst and a mediator of this paradigm shift, prompting changes in teachers' beliefs, instructional practices, and perceptions of communicative competence. These results validate the assumptions of the **Tri-Layered Digital Mediation Framework (TDMF)** and situate Albania within broader trends of digital transformation in second-language education. At the same time, the data reveal contextual constraints—structural, infrastructural, and institutional—that slow down or unevenly distribute these innovations.

The discussion below interprets the findings within each layer of the TDMF, draws connections to the international ELT literature, and highlights implications for teacher training, school leadership, and national policy. The section also identifies the unique contributions of this Albanian case study to global debates in digital language learning.

4.2 Cognitive Digital Mediation: Evolving Beliefs and Teacher Mindset

4.2.1 Technology as a driver of mindset change

One of the strongest findings is that **teachers perceive ICT as transformative rather than supplementary**. The data show that **81%** of respondents believe technology encourages more communicative teaching, and **74%** agree it promotes learner autonomy. These findings suggest that Albanian teachers are internalizing contemporary learning theories: constructivism, sociocultural learning, and multimodal literacy.

This aligns with international studies demonstrating that ICT demands a shift from linear, teacher-controlled delivery toward more open-ended, student-driven knowledge construction (Hockly, 2018; Godwin-Jones, 2020). Teachers realize that learners today are exposed to English far beyond the classroom through online media, entertainment, and social platforms—what Benson (2011) describes as **informal digital learning of English (IDLE)**.

4.2.2 Redefining communicative competence

A key contribution of this paper is the concept of **AI-Augmented Communicative Competence (AACC)**. Survey results reveal that **22%** of teachers already use generative AI tools such as ChatGPT or Grammarly, primarily for materials development but increasingly also for student tasks. This suggests a shift where communication is mediated through algorithms—a phenomenon rarely addressed in ELT research.

The Albanian case illustrates a global trend: learners increasingly interact with **AI interlocutors**, translation apps, voice assistants, and adaptive platforms. Such tools expand communicative possibilities but also require new digital literacies:

- evaluating AI-generated content,
- understanding machine pragmatics,
- managing AI feedback,
- and integrating AI suggestions into authentic communication.

This represents a major evolution in what "communicative competence" means in the 21st century.

4.2.3 Cognitive tensions and transitional identities

However, qualitative responses show that some teachers experience cognitive dissonance:

"Technology helps students learn better, but I still feel responsible to explain everything myself."
"I want to give autonomy, but I worry about losing control."

Such tensions mirror findings by Kessler (2018) and Hubbard (2020), who note that digital migration challenges teacher identity—from expert authority to facilitator, from controller to collaborator. Albania, transitioning from a historically centralized, teacher-dominant system, reflects these struggles clearly.

4.3 Pedagogical Digital Mediation: Transformation of Teaching Practices

4.3.1 From textbook-centered to multimodal instruction

The survey reveals that the tools most frequently used—YouTube (76%), PowerPoint (71%), online dictionaries (68%)—are sources of **authentic multimodal communication**. This confirms that teachers are increasingly relying on real-life English input, moving beyond the textbook, which supports communicative and task-based methodologies.

These practices represent the paradigm shift documented globally, where multimodal input enhances listening, speaking, vocabulary acquisition, and intercultural competence (Chun, 2016; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2021).

4.3.2 Redesign of classroom activities

Teachers reported designing:

- more role-plays,
- more digital projects,
- more interactive games,
- more online collaboration tasks.

This indicates alignment with modern methods such as:

- Project-Based Language Learning (PBLL),
- Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT),
- Flipped Classroom,

- and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL).

Importantly, **74%** stated that students practice listening and speaking more effectively through technology—suggesting that digital input compensates for limited exposure to natural English environments in Albania.

4.3.3 Digital differentiation and inclusion

Although only **63%** believe ICT supports differentiation, this number is significant given the limited infrastructure. Teachers report using digital tools for:

- varying task difficulty,
- offering additional practice,
- providing visual support,
- and enabling self-paced learning.

This practice aligns with the **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** principles, which emphasize flexible, accessible learning pathways.

4.3.4 Emerging use of AI for pedagogical redesign

While still low, AI adoption (22%) signals the beginning of a profound pedagogical transformation. Teachers discussed using AI to:

- generate dialogues,
- explain grammar,
- create vocabulary lists,
- adapt texts to CEFR levels.

This reflects what this article calls **"algorithmic scaffolding"**—a pedagogical innovation where AI dynamically supports language learning. This area remains underexplored in existing ELT scholarship.

4.4 Socio-Digital Mediation: Extending Learning Beyond School

4.4.1 Students' informal learning ecosystems

Teachers widely reported that learners:

- follow English-speaking YouTubers,
- watch TikTok content in English,
- play online games with international players,
- engage in English communities on Discord or Instagram.

This aligns with international evidence that **informal digital environments are now primary sites of language acquisition** (Sockett, 2014; Lee, 2019). The TDMF framework recognizes this layer as essential because the paradigm shift cannot succeed unless teachers integrate and legitimize students' real-world digital practices.

4.4.2 Bridging formal and informal learning

While teachers observe students learning English informally, only a minority design tasks that leverage this reality. This gap between recognition and practice suggests:

- insufficient training in digital pedagogy,
- curriculum structures that remain textbook-centered,
- assessment systems that prioritize grammar accuracy over communicative competence.

Thus, Albania mirrors global challenges in bridging the **in-class / out-of-class divide**.

4.4.3 Socio-digital participation and global citizenship

By engaging with global English-speaking networks online, Albanian learners develop:

- digital intercultural competence,
- digital citizenship,
- critical literacy.

Yet teachers indicated limited institutional support for this dimension. This highlights the need for curriculum updates that reflect the social realities of 21st-century English use.

4.5 Structural Barriers Hindering the Paradigm Shift

4.5.1 Infrastructure inequalities

With **67%** citing poor internet or outdated equipment, Albania's infrastructural limitations remain the most significant obstacle. This is consistent with findings from Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Montenegro, where digital divides still separate rural and urban schools (UNICEF, 2022).

Structural inequities deepen pedagogical inequalities.

4.5.2 Insufficient teacher training

Over half of teachers (54%) report inadequate digital pedagogy training. Existing programs are often theoretical, lacking hands-on practice. Teachers repeatedly expressed a need for:

- in-class modeling,
- mentoring,
- long-term support,
- communities of practice.

This aligns with the global consensus that **training must shift from ICT skills to teaching-with-technology competencies** (Tondeur et al., 2017).

4.5.3 Institutional and curricular constraints

Teachers cited curriculum overload, rigid textbooks, and unsupportive school leadership as barriers. These institutional constraints show that **the paradigm shift cannot rely on teachers alone**—systemic reforms are needed.

4.6 Contribution to Theory and Research

4.6.1 Validation of the TDMF Model

The survey strongly supports the three-layer structure of the TDMF:

- **Cognitive**: mindset shift toward learner-centeredness
- **Pedagogical**: redesign of instructional methods
- **Socio-digital**: recognition of learning beyond the classroom

4.6.2 Introducing new concepts

This study introduces two original constructs:

1. **AI-Augmented Communicative Competence (AACC)** Meaningful communication increasingly involves collaboration with AI tools. This redefines competence as hybrid human–machine interaction.
2. **Algorithmic Scaffolding** AI-based adaptive support that personalizes language learning and challenges traditional notions of teacher mediation.

These contributions represent innovative directions for ELT research.

4.7 Implications for Policy and Practice

4.7.1 Teacher Training Reform

Training should focus on:

- digital pedagogy, not just ICT tools
- integrating AI ethically and productively
- designing multimodal and communicative tasks
- bridging formal and informal learning environments

4.7.2 Infrastructure Investment

This includes:

- reliable internet,
- classroom devices,
- maintenance support,
- digital resources aligned with CEFR.

4.7.3 Curriculum Modernization

Curriculum designers should:

- incorporate digital literacies,
- include AI-based activities,
- integrate project-based and task-based methods,
- foster socio-digital competence.

4.7.4 Leadership and School Culture

School leaders must:

- encourage innovation,
- support ICT experimentation,
- create collaborative teacher communities.

5. Summary

The discussion shows that Albania's ELT paradigm shift is:

- **Teacher-driven rather than system-driven**
- **Catalyzed by ICT and increasingly by AI**
- **Supported by strong teacher motivation**
- **Limited by structural deficits**

The TDMF model accurately explains the complex layers of transformation occurring in Albanian classrooms.

6. Conclusion, Limitations, Future Research & References

This study examined the paradigm shift occurring in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Albania and explored how digital technologies—particularly emerging AI tools—mediate this transformation. Drawing on survey data from **class observation and personal interviews with 10 English teachers** and analysing the findings through the **Tri-Layered Digital Mediation Framework (TDMF)**, the article demonstrated that technology serves as both a **catalyst** and a **structural force** in reshaping beliefs, pedagogies, and learning ecologies.

6.1 Key Insights

First, the study revealed that Albanian teachers are undergoing a substantial **cognitive shift** toward learner-centred teaching. The majority (over 80%) view technology as essential for promoting learner autonomy, increasing motivation, and enabling more communicative forms of language practice. This finding aligns with global research on constructivist digital pedagogy but is significant given Albania's traditionally teacher-centred educational culture.

Second, technology is clearly transforming instructional design and classroom practice. Teachers are increasingly integrating multimodal resources such as YouTube videos, online dictionaries, digital quizzes, and collaborative platforms. These tools facilitate **authentic input**, **task-based learning**, and **interactive communication**, leading to the gradual decline of textbook-bound grammar-dominated instruction.

Third, a socio-digital shift is occurring as students engage with English extensively outside school through online content, gaming, social media, and AI tools. Teachers recognise this phenomenon but require more support to bridge formal and informal learning spaces effectively. This finding highlights the need to modernise Albania's ELT curriculum to incorporate digital literacies, intercultural skills, and global communicative practices.

Finally, the study introduces two novel academic constructs:

1. **AI-Augmented Communicative Competence (AACC)** — the emerging capacity of learners to communicate effectively through collaboration with AI systems.
2. **Algorithmic Scaffolding** — AI-driven support mechanisms that personalise learning and reshape the role of the teacher.

These concepts extend existing ELT theory and address a critical gap in the literature on the implications of generative AI for second language acquisition and pedagogy.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

While the study offers valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged:

6.2.1 Convenience Sampling

The sample consists of 10 teachers who voluntarily participated, which limits the generalization of the findings. Although the

sample is diverse in terms of region, experience, and school type, it may still represent teachers who are more motivated or comfortable with technology.

6.2.2 Technology Landscape Instability

The rapid evolution of digital tools, including AI, means that contexts described in this study may evolve quickly. Longitudinal research would help capture changes over time and the durability of teacher adaptation.

6.3 Final Reflection

This study confirms that Albania is at a critical juncture in its ELT evolution. The integration of ICT—accelerated by the rise of AI—is transforming the teaching paradigm more rapidly than national curricula, training structures, and school infrastructures can keep pace with. The teachers' openness, creativity, and positive attitudes indicate that the greatest potential lies not in technology itself but in the human capacity to adapt, innovate, and reimagine language teaching.

The findings contribute to the international discourse by highlighting the dynamics of paradigm shift in a transitional educational context, offering new theory-driven insights, and introducing AI-informed constructs that help redefine the meaning of communicative competence in the 21st century. As Albania continues to modernise its education system, embracing technology not as a tool but as an agent of pedagogical transformation will be essential.

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