SP Publications
International Journal Of English and Studies (IJOES)
An International Peer-Reviewed and Refereed Journal; **Impact Factor:**8.337(SJIF)
ISSN: 2581-8333|**Volume 8, Issue-9(September);2026**

Technology-Based English Teaching for Inclusive Classrooms

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Article Received: 27/08/2026
Article Accepted:29/09/2026
Published Online:30/09/2026
DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.09.398

Abstract

Technology in the teaching of English can provide expanded opportunities to learn when it can accommodate variations in language ability, disability, and socioeconomic status and access to educational resources. Digital use, however, does not necessarily lead to an inclusive classroom. It summarizes materials and resources that are accessible, assistive technology, flexible activities and how to do them, support in multiple languages, and assessment. It also takes into account several issues of access, teacher training, privacy, and the responsible use of AI. Digital resources are illustrated through practical examples that demonstrate how to link digital resources to listening/speaking, reading, and writing goals. The article asserts that the core elements of inclusion are grounded in practical participation of the learner, individual and institutional support, and reflective teaching. The educational value of technology emerges when technology can eliminate obstacles to learning while maintaining clear learning goals and opportunities for human interaction.

Keywords: UDL, Accessibility, Digital literacy, educational technology, Inclusive education, English language teaching

Introduction

An inclusive English class is a class that creates opportunities to learn for all students of all abilities, backgrounds, and learning experiences. Students can have varying levels of English language knowledge, confidence in communication, reading ability, access to devices, and need for extra support. There are some students who have disabilities which affect their interaction with classroom materials. Others report difficulties related to poverty,

lack of geographic access, disrupted schooling or inability to use the English language. It is important to be aware of these differences without assuming a group can't learn, as this is inclusive teaching.

The report “Inclusion and Education” by UNESCO (2020) focuses on exclusion linked with the learners' backgrounds, identities and abilities. The scope of its definition of 'inclusion' has implications for the context of English language teaching in terms of barriers beyond physical ones in the classroom. A student can be in each lesson but still not be able to comprehend instructions, participate in lessons, or complete assignments. Inclusion thus entails a consideration of what can actually be accessed and done in the educational setting.

There are multiple potential solutions for using technology to overcome some of these obstacles. Digital texts can afford different ways of presenting text, classroom explanations can be recorded for students to review and reading response tools give another space for practice. However, these possibilities will rely on the availability of specific resources and the conditions in which they are used by students. If a video has inaccurate captions, a scanned document is not readable, or an assignment is a web-based project that requires an internet connection all the time, this can create challenges rather than eliminate them.

It is therefore necessary to be careful when considering how technology and inclusion go hand in hand. Technology and its benefits and risks in the educational context are explored by UNESCO (2023), with a focus on access, equity and inclusion. It provides a discussion that can be used to assess technology based on educational needs rather than automatically assuming that digital delivery is always good. If it is given as a tool for a distinct language task, it is relevant for English teachers to ask whether the tool facilitates student engagement in that language task.

Inclusion and the Design of English Learning

The first step in inclusive teaching is to recognise obstacles in the relationship between learners, tasks, and classroom context. A difficulty should not immediately be interpreted as a weakness of the student. For instance, if a student cannot finish an online reading task, this could be a result of issues with the formatting, instructions or simply the device used. It is crucial for teachers to examine these possibilities before they can consider the type of support that is needed. This focus shifts perspectives to what might be done differently to enable participation.

It is helpful to consider Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a planning framework to implement such changes. In CAST's (2024) guidelines, there are several means of engagement, representation, and action and expression in educational design. They

include the themes of learner agency, available tools, belonging, and respect for languages and dialects. This structure helps teachers to consider what will vary when creating learning opportunities. It will not eliminate the requirement for any accommodations or specialist support for individual pupils.

These aspects can be used as a guideline to plan and make decisions in English teaching. The teacher introducing a reading text may include an explanation of some unfamiliar words as well as an optional audio version. Students could develop their own ideas and then share them with a partner. They can express their ideas in writing or orally, where applicable to the objective. The following are some of the suggested applications for flexibility in design, not necessarily a claim of equal learning outcomes for all flexible applications.

Flexibility needs to be coupled with the skill that is being taught. Different types of response formats may be appropriate if the purpose is to understand ideas in a text. Students should have an opportunity to create and edit written works if the purpose is writing a formal letter. Similarly, reading a transcript cannot always substitute for a listening assessment without altering the skill assessed. These differences should be made explicit in inclusive planning and accommodations should be made that resonate with the learner and the task.

The research directly related to English learners further indicates the need for caution. In a review of technology usage by English learners at risk or with disabilities, Jiang et al. (2022) examined the use of technology to support English language learning. Their analysis includes technological tools, learning outcomes, and learner perceptions, while identifying a limited body of evidence and the need for further research. As such, promising practices are to be assessed within their classroom setting rather than generalised as solutions for all learners.

Learners should also be included in planning that would be considered inclusive planning. Teachers may inquire about the materials that can be opened, whether the assignments are understandable, and why the assignments cannot be completed. Wherever needed, these questions can be discussed individually. It should not be the student's responsibility to share their personal situation in public to receive reasonable support. An initial access check and frequent feedback can play a role in guiding teachers to make informed choices about classroom resources.

Technology for Language Skills and Classroom Participation

Technology-based activities should begin with a language objective. A teacher can have students determine the central theme of a discussion, ask follow-up discussion questions, comprehend a brief article or arrange a paragraph. Choosing the objective first

makes it easier to decide on the use of technology and to find out if it can add anything useful. It also avoids having lessons become demonstrations of applications, rather than opportunities for language learning.

In listening lessons, teachers can make listening materials with clear speech and appropriate instructions. One suggested activity is for students to listen to directions and to identify a place on a basic map. Consider having students review key vocabulary, listen for the general message, and then practise listening for details again. If learners have appropriate devices, downloadable audio can be available for an extra practice method. Means should be provided for students who are not able to practice at home to have equivalent access in a classroom setting.

Captions/transcripts must be used with purpose. A teacher may present a transcript to learners after a first listening during practice sessions and request the learners to compare their understanding with what is on the paper. This transforms transcriptions into a tool for language analysis. If a learner requires captions or a different form of accommodation in order to gain access to the activity, then the teacher should provide for it in the planning. Automatically generated subtitles need to be reviewed before they are used in the curriculum. Any application that involves vocal interaction can be included in speaking activities, such as voice recordings, paired exchanges or brief presentations. For instance, one could instruct students to write a description of a place they know and record themselves and then choose a single aspect of their speaking to improve. Teachers may request that they concentrate on sequence, clarity, or descriptive words. The recording alone should not be assumed to enhance speaking skills; it should be used to facilitate reflection on the material.

Giving some thought and picking the right words might help to make speaking more manageable. There could be an opportunity for students to practise with a partner and use a small set of notes when making their initial presentation or a presentation to a larger group. Flexibility in the task allows teachers to make it more challenging as learners become familiar with it. A classroom recording option is essential when students have no quiet space or device outside college. Public uploading should not be a routine requirement to demonstrate speaking skills.

When it comes to reading, teachers choose from selectable text, easy-to-read headings, manageable paragraph breaks, and simple navigation. An accessible document should enable the reader of the document to find information without undue difficulty. A suggested lesson might have students identify the writer's claim and mark supporting details, and explain the meaning of one unusual word from the text through the context it provides.

An equivalent printed activity may be used for this purpose or the process may be facilitated by digital annotation, if one is available.

Text-to-speech tools or other assistive devices may be included in an individual learner's support. Fernández-Batanero et al. (2022) discussed AT for students with disabilities and the findings showed both positive effects from AT towards inclusion and accessibility as well as limitations such as teacher education, information and accessibility. Their review evaluates education in general and their conclusions cannot be assumed to reflect progress in each and every component of English. It nevertheless establishes the link between assistive technology and inclusive educational planning.

Digital documents can be used to support writing activity planning and revision. Pupils may use a short outline, write a passage, discuss, and then produce revised work with a comment on the changes made. One question or two might be used as prompts for students to give feedback to each other: Is the main idea clear, and do supporting details relate? This allows learners to work on a single aspect of language, rather than attempting to fix all of those at once.

Automated suggestions should be a topic for discussion rather than instructions to be accepted. A suggested correction can be shown to a learner who can then compare it to the intended meaning and explain which one he has chosen. If spelling, grammar or speech-to-text tools are allowed, teachers should explain their contribution to the assignment. There can be variation between supported practice, independent assessment and tasks with an agreed accommodation. Images, pronunciation, and definitions, along with contextual examples, can be linked to vocabulary learning. Public services language could be explored; for example, students could select a few words like “appointment,” “application,” and “assistance” to include in a small glossary of words. From there, they could speak or write a brief dialogue or even an email using these words. It is important for teachers to verify the accuracy of definitions and examples. When students use the vocabulary meaningfully rather than just copy it down, the glossary becomes useful.

Support for other languages can be incorporated in an effective way. Students may be asked to consider, verbally and/or in writing, the differences in meaning and/or use from one language to another by pairing an English expression with a similar one in a familiar language. The proposed objective would be to make the student relate what he/she already knows with the new expression. There needs to be provision for the teachers to enable pupils to access opportunities to use English for the purpose it was designed for. Where used, translation tools should be checked as an apparently fluent translation may not convey the meaning.

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In group work, it is important to establish clear responsibilities. In a team that is creating a digital poster, someone can form the structure of the information, someone can write the text, and someone can make sure that there is an understandable message. Roles should be rotated to avoid tying control of the device solely to access. A brief individual response may be requested from each learner too. This is to serve as a differentiation tool for the teacher to determine group participation from individual understanding.

Language learning and a familiar social issue can come together in a multidisciplinary task. Students will be able to create an easily understood guide to the library, health centre, transportation, and main offices on the campus. It will include reading notices and asking questions, organising information and writing to an audience. Teachers must ensure they give verified information and avoid asking students to gather unnecessary personal information. The example represents a possible example of situations where language, digital communication and social awareness are integrated. Accessible alternatives must be available from the start with such projects. Students may refer to printed charts, handwritten outlines, or printed source materials, and use shared institutional devices at scheduled times. The teacher may be able to evaluate the clarity and appropriateness of the English message apart from the decorative features. Such arrangements can contribute to providing an environment that avoids 'stealth requirements' when designing a language assignment, e.g., costly software or complex design knowledge.

Challenges, Assessment, and Responsible Implementation

Getting access is a constant problem in technology-based teaching. Teachers should determine if students can easily access a suitable device, connection, and the necessary time to complete digital work before assigning it. A learner's ability to receive a message does not mean that he or she can edit a long file or participate in a live session. A plan should account for the real needs of every activity.

The priorities for equity of education and opportunities and challenges around digital and online education are addressed in India's National Education Policy 2020. It emphasises the need to address the digital divide and prepare teachers for online teaching (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). While the following policy directions can provide a useful background for inclusive English teaching, a policy statement makes no claims about the resources available for implementation at all institutions.

A sensible solution is to create a small number of workable access routes. Assignments might be made using a main platform and small downloadable files – and could be announced as early as possible. If it is difficult to submit online, the language learning goal may be met with a different method agreed to by an individual student and appropriate

for the language involved. Institutions should make these arrangements explicit, ensuring support is not dependent on learners having to make repeated requests for exceptions.

Accessibility and language pedagogy should be covered in addition to being taught in terms of technical operation in teacher preparation. Examples of training might include editing and/or reviewing an unreadable worksheet, checking captions, preparing clear digital instructions, or creating feedback on a recorded response. Teachers have to be given time to practise these and to share scenarios with fellow teachers where they have encountered problems. Briefly demonstrating features of the software is not enough preparation for decisions for diverse learners with diverse assessment needs.

Formative assessment should be directed toward the learning targeted. An attractive presentation does not necessarily prove good communication skills in English; an uninteresting presentation does not necessarily show poor English communication skills. A rubric can separate criteria, including organisation, vocabulary, clarity and audience awareness. Marks will only be given for technical presentation when this is an explicit and taught part of the assignment. Another point to note by teachers is that they should also differentiate between the supported work and independent work. During the learning process, students can appropriately use glossaries, models, peer discussion, or approved assistive tools with the teacher's permission. Where appropriate, the allowed support needs to be communicated before the task is assessed and be consistent with the rationale behind the task. Planning should include consideration of agreed disability accommodations. Specify learning objectives to prevent pupils from getting confused about assessments being based on their knowledge of English or their digital competencies – or both.

Feedback must be accessible and useful. Long oral feedback, in this regard, can be inappropriate for a learner who prefers text feedback, and dense text-based feedback can be hard for the other learner to understand. With the learner, teachers can agree on a reasonable structure of feedback along with a few priorities. The students then have the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding by revising or by giving a brief description of their next step.

But with AI, there are more possibilities – and obligations. A teacher may also choose to use a generative system to formulate questions for discussion with students or to come up with an initial version of a classroom dialogue. All outputs must be checked before being used in the classroom for accuracy, linguistic level, appropriateness and bias. These ideas are merely potential ways to use a specific AI-generated resource and shouldn't be viewed as proof that it is better than any other created source of information.

The importance of a human-centred approach to the use of generative AI in education and research is one of the key recommendations made by Miao and Holmes (2023). They offer guidance on privacy, human agency, inclusion, linguistic and cultural diversity and emphasise examination of educational appropriateness by institutions. In the case of English learning, this means thoughtful choices and monitoring over the use of AI tools instead of their unrestricted use.

Students must have clearly defined rules concerning the use of AI, if it is allowed. Students might be asked for a writing assignment to detail the support they got, keep a first draft, and describe some revisions. When AI use is not required, teachers might prefer activities that involve discussion in the class, interpretation of a shared text, and/or guided writing. A student should not be required to purchase a paid AI service as a part of the normal course requirement.

Care should be taken when there is any recorded speech, images, writing or identifiable information of the learners that is being gathered. Teachers can minimise unnecessary uploading and use institutionally approved arrangements where available. It is typically possible for a speaking task to be done without posting it openly on a social network. Learners should be made aware of the individuals who will gain access to their work and the reasons behind the collection of their work.

Implementation should be done in a step-by-step manner that is handled in manageable reviews. An English department can start with one accessible reading unit and one supported speaking activity, then explore participation and language work. Learner feedback may pick up on unclear instructions and/or access problems, and student responses may determine if the activity achieved its goal. Any claims of effectiveness should be in step with what evidence has been gathered. Progress in language is not guaranteed with positive reactions.

Conclusion

A technology-based English teaching approach can be used to promote inclusion through attention to learner access, participation and language goals. A variety of resources that are accessible, thoughtfully chosen assistive tools, learning opportunities and/or schedules that are open, and well-designed assessment plans provide practical suggestions as a place to start. Their value lies in their use in teaching and whether learners can participate in teaching activities in a meaningful way. Teachers should therefore assess the practices in the classroom in their respective situations and not take it for granted that a classroom tool will work for all. Institutions need to back this work, and provide adequate resources, training, and procedures.

At the same time, there is a need to continue attending to learner experience in inclusive English education. Students need to be given opportunities to discuss difficulties, get appropriate support, and participate in class decision making. Technology can help support these goals but responsibility for educational decisions remains with teachers and institutions. Its strongest contribution is to make worthwhile language learning accessible while maintaining interaction, learner agency and challenging academic outcomes.

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