Technology-Enhanced Language Learning in Community-Based Classes for Adult Migrants: Post-Pandemic Potential?

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Abstract

This paper reports on a research project developed in partnership with Fáilte Isteach, an initiative which welcomes migrants and promotes integration through volunteer-led English conversation classes in local communities across Ireland. The research considers the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this community-based language support for adult migrants by investigating the experience of online learning in Fáilte Isteach classes. It also explores the potential of technology-enhanced approaches to learning in these informal language classes in the post-pandemic environment. This mixed-methods study involved an initial survey of Fáilte Isteach learners and tutors to understand their perspectives on online learning during the pandemic, followed by a series of training workshops for Fáilte Isteach tutors, in which they could engage with digital tools and create technology-enhanced language learning resources for use with their own classes. Findings from the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data collected through the survey and the workshop series revealed challenges associated with online learning during the pandemic, particularly regarding access to technology, digital skills, and the lack of social interaction in the online environment. Nevertheless, both learners and tutors identified positive aspects of their online experience and expressed interest in blended approaches as a complement to face-to-face learning. The findings of this research demonstrate the value of training in relation to digital engagement, as evident in the development of technology-enhanced resources through the workshop series. They further indicate how the use of accessible digital tools may benefit adult migrant learners and volunteer tutors in community-based language classes in the post-pandemic context. They also highlight the increasing need for English language support for adult migrants in Ireland and the valuable role of informal volunteer-led classes in local integration.

Keywords: adult migrants, technology-enhanced language learning, community-based learning

Introduction

Responding to the language learning needs of adult migrants is an important aspect of integration and social inclusion. As societies become increasingly digitised, the potential role of technology-enhanced approaches to language learning (TELL) among migrant learners should also be explored. This is particularly relevant as the COVID-19 pandemic has led to

the expansion and development of digital learning, including in relation to language education for adult migrants. This paper focuses on research conducted through the Irish Research Council's New Foundations 2021 programme in partnership with Fáilte Isteach, an initiative which supports migrant integration through the provision of volunteer-led English conversation classes across Ireland. This research aimed to investigate the impact of the pandemic on community-based English language support for adult migrants delivered through the Fáilte Isteach initiative. It also sought to provide research-informed training which would enable Fáilte Isteach tutors to engage with technology-enhanced language learning, i.e., any use of digital tools or resources to support migrant learners in their English classes.

Language Learning among Adult Migrants in Ireland

Due to significant immigration over the last three decades, Ireland has become a linguistically and culturally diverse society. Although international mobility was curtailed due to the pandemic, results emerging from the 2022 census indicate a substantial increase in net inward migration since 2016 (Central Statistics Office, 2022a). Recent arrivals include many people who have experienced forced displacement; in 2022 alone, almost 70,000 Ukrainians were admitted under an EU temporary protection directive following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, while over 13,000 people from other countries applied for international protection in Ireland (Central Statistics Office, 2022b; McGee, 2023).

International research (Beacco et al., 2017; Capstick, 2020) has identified learning the language of the host community as a key factor in the integration of adult migrants and, in Ireland, proficiency in English has been linked to greater access to employment and enhanced social inclusion (McGinnity et al., 2020). English language training for adult migrants in Ireland is provided through adult education services delivered by state-run Education and

Training Boards (ETBs) (Mishan, 2019; Benson, 2019). A recent national review of this ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) provision noted that its duration, generally two to four hours of classes per week, is considerably less than international norms (Kett, 2018) although more intensive courses have been made available to resettled refugees (Arnold & Quinn, 2016). Most adult learners who attend these formal ESOL courses are at an early stage of English language proficiency development, their previous educational experience is often no higher than completion of secondary education, and some learners have limited L1 literacy (Kett, 2018; Ćatibušić, Gallagher & Karazi, 2019; International Organisation for Migration, 2021). Research has shown that access to ESOL provision may also be affected by issues relating to gender, disability, caring responsibilities, and transport (Ćatibušić, Gallagher & Karazi, 2021). In addition, places on ESOL courses are limited (Benson, 2019), with oversubscription a significant challenge due to the rising numbers of people seeking English language training.

Community-based Language Support

Beyond formal ESOL courses, many adult migrants attend informal English language classes organised within their local communities. The Fáilte Isteach initiative, established in 2006 by Third Age – a voluntary organisation which promotes active social engagement among older people, is the largest provider of such classes in Ireland with 170 groups involving over 1,500 volunteer tutors and approximately 4,500 migrant learners nationwide (Fáilte Isteach, 2022). Fáilte Isteach tutors, who are generally older people, work with small groups of adult migrants in community-based settings, offering conversation-oriented classes which support English language learning and foster integration on a local level (Loxley & Lyons, 2013).

Research has shown that informal language classes can promote intercultural dialogue and support a two-way integration process (Chick, 2019). Their potential for building social

capital through the development of local networks has also been highlighted (Etherington, 2019; Mishan, 2019). Furthermore, the learner-centred, negotiated nature of these classes enables adult migrants to focus on topics of personal relevance and to develop confidence in communication; this can support older, lower proficiency, and pre-literate learners who may find formal instruction intimidating (Chapman & Williams, 2015). Engaging in meaningful language learning activities that develop learners' individual skills can also promote well-being and support post-traumatic growth, which may be beneficial for people who have been forcibly displaced (Palanac, 2022). While access to funding and resources is often limited, and training for tutors is a further challenge (Chapman & Williams, 2015; Etherington, 2019), volunteer-led language classes can thus serve as an important supplement to formal ESOL instruction. This is evident in Ireland, where the Fáilte Isteach initiative makes a vital contribution to the linguistic integration of adult migrants and the development of intercultural understanding within communities (Loxley & Lyons, 2013).

Technology-Enhanced Language Learning with Adult Migrants

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was a catalyst for increased engagement with technology across all educational sectors as public health restrictions led to a rise in online learning. Language education for adult migrants was no exception, with various approaches taken internationally to maintain the provision of instruction; including transition to online courses, one-to-one online support, and hybrid classes (OECD, 2021; Lewandowski, 2021). In Ireland, both formal and informal English language support for adult migrants moved online during the pandemic, with limited opportunities for face-to-face learning. Evidence suggests that online classes may increase access to language education for some migrant learners, including women (OECD, 2021). However, the lack of physical presence in online

learning has been identified as a significant challenge with respect to fostering social

interaction and integration (Capstick, 2020; Drolia et al., 2022).

Studies emerging from the pandemic have highlighted the need for training in relation

to technology-enhanced language learning with adult migrants and have shown the value of

supporting digital engagement among learners (Xu & Buckingham, 2021; Rahim, 2022;

Wood, 2022). In the Irish context, McGinnity et al. (2020) have noted the potential of

technology to support English language learning among adult migrants, although this requires

further exploration. Therefore, to advance research on this issue in Ireland, this study

investigated (i) the impact of the pandemic on community-based English conversation classes

and (ii) how technology could be used to enhance language learning and support integration,

considering the role of blended learning after the return to face-to-face classes.

Methodology

Research Design

Shaped by the principles of engaged research (Campus Engage, 2022), this project involved

working with a community-based organisation, Fáilte Isteach, to produce outputs with

positive impact for adult migrant learners and volunteer tutors working with them. Reflecting

the collaborative nature and pragmatic perspective of this study, a mixed-methods approach

was adopted, following a sequential design which drew on a range of quantitative and,

particularly, qualitative data sources (Riazi & Candlin, 2014). The research comprised two

stages; (i) an anonymous online survey of Fáilte Isteach learners and tutors to understand

their experience and perspectives in relation to online learning and (ii) a series of workshops

for Fáilte Isteach tutors, informed by the findings of this survey, which enabled participants

to create their own technology-enhanced resources for language learning. Ethical approval for

this research was obtained from the School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences, Trinity College Dublin.

Initial Survey

Two versions of the online survey were developed for Stage I of the project, one for learners (multilingual) and one for tutors (in English). Both versions were circulated by Fáilte Isteach's National Project Manager among local coordinators who could then share the survey with tutors and adult migrant learners in their groups. The data collected from the learner survey were predominantly quantitative (although a few open-ended items were included) while the tutor survey was more qualitative in its focus. In all, 138 valid responses to the survey were recorded, 44 from learners and 94 from tutors, but it should be noted that the survey, which was circulated between January and March 2022, was affected by the continued prevalence of COVID-19. During this time, most Fáilte Isteach classes were still operating online, and some groups did not resume activities until face-to-face learning was feasible.

Workshop Series for Tutors

Stage II of this research involved a series of six online workshops for volunteer tutors, developed in collaboration with Fáilte Isteach and informed by the findings of the initial survey. These workshops on technology-enhanced language learning and integration (TELLI) sought to create a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), through knowledge-sharing and hands-on engagement with accessible digital tools. Through the workshops, tutors were thus enabled to create technology-enhanced language learning resources for their own Fáilte Isteach classes. Information about the TELLI workshop series was shared by Fáilte Isteach's National Project Manager among local coordinators, and explicit consent to

participate was obtained from 14 tutors (maximum capacity was 15 due to the interactive nature of the workshops). The workshops were held weekly via Zoom through April and May 2022; each session was 90 minutes long and was video recorded. Participating tutors also had access to the workshop resources, including relevant digital tools and English language learning supports, via the project's virtual learning environment (VLE) which was hosted on Moodle. A weekly reflective journal was also provided on the VLE to facilitate one-to-one support. Workshop content covered issues raised in the initial survey and, in the final session, tutors presented the technology-enhanced language learning resources they had developed during the series.

Table 1

TELLI workshop topics

WEEK	WORKSHOP TOPIC
1	Using digital tools during and after the pandemic
2	Visual, audio, and multimedia resources to support language learning
3	Creating resources for technology-enhanced language learning
4	Interactive games and activities for language learning
5	Technology to support integration and intercultural understanding
6	Presentation of tutor-created resources

Following the workshops, participating tutors were invited to attend online focus groups, two 45-minute sessions held in early June 2022, to discuss their experience of the series and how this may relate to their voluntary work with Fáilte Isteach. Five tutors attended these focus groups which were also recorded. The recordings of the six workshop sessions and the two focus groups were then fully transcribed. Three short anonymous online surveys were also

developed so that tutors participating in the workshops could share their views at the beginning, middle, and end of the series to enable needs analysis and evaluation.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data from both versions of the initial survey of Fáilte Isteach learners and tutors, as well as from the three short surveys for workshop participants, were analysed using descriptive statistics. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) was used to analyse the qualitative data collected. This included responses to qualitative items in the initial survey, and the various sources of qualitative data arising from the workshop series: transcripts of the recordings of the workshop sessions and the focus groups; chat comments, whiteboards, and slides which tutors created during the workshops; weekly journal entries posted on the VLE; and qualitative responses to the workshop surveys. Following Braun and Clarke (2022), the process of analysis involved: familiarisation with the data through repeated engagement, manual coding of the diverse sources of qualitative data, generation of initial themes, development of these initial themes, final definition of core themes, and further reflection on these themes in the reporting phase. This analysis resulted in the following findings in relation to how adult migrant learners and volunteer tutors experienced online learning and what role, if any, technology may play in community-based language classes in the post-pandemic environment.

<p align="center">Initial Survey Findings</p>

Learner Survey

There were 44 valid responses to the survey for learners. This multilingual survey was completed in seven languages: English, Arabic, Chinese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian and Russian. 70% of the participating learners were aged between 30 and 49 years, and 80%

identified as female. These learners came from 20 different language backgrounds; 59% of them had lived in Ireland for at least three years, with 47% describing their English language proficiency as "Intermediate" (according to their Fáilte Isteach class level). At the time of the survey, 70% of these learners were still attending online classes only, and 82% had attended online Fáilte Isteach classes during the pandemic. Most of the 36 learners who had experienced these online classes said they attended weekly, using computers or mobile phones. Poor internet connection was the most frequently reported challenge encountered by these learners, with other prominent issues including access to devices, concentration online, and speaking in online classes.

Regarding the mode of learning they found most useful, 63% of the 35 learners who expressed a preference chose a combination of face-to-face and online learning, as opposed to solely face-to-face or online options. When asked if using technology could help them to learn English, all 41 learners who responded to this question agreed that it could. While learners felt that face-to-face classes are better for social interaction, they highlighted the range of multimedia resources available in English, the benefits of digital tools for developing listening, pronunciation, and vocabulary skills, and the accessibility of online learning, which saved them transport costs and time. As one learner commented, "thanks to technology I can always check the translation of an unknown word, whether I wrote something correctly, how to pronounce it and that is how I learn".

Tutor Survey

There were 94 valid responses to the survey for tutors; 67% of these participants were aged 60 years or over, and 73% identified as female. 63% of the participating tutors had volunteered with Fáilte Isteach for at least three years and 80% had tutored online at some time during the pandemic. 68 of the 75 tutors who had held online classes described this

experience in some detail; their classes were generally once or twice per week, with two to four learners per class, typically at Beginner or Intermediate level. The digital tools tutors reported using most frequently in these classes were Zoom and WhatsApp.

Tutors highlighted technical and environmental challenges in the online learning context, including learners' lack of access to computers and limited privacy in communal Direct Provision centres for people seeking international protection. They also mentioned their own, as well as their learners', unfamiliarity with using digital tools. Many tutors pointed out the difficulties of sustaining interaction and ensuring comprehension in the online learning environment, and how this impacted learners' motivation and attendance. The benefits of online learning were also acknowledged, particularly its capacity to support continued language learning and social connection during the pandemic. Tutors noted the flexible timing of online classes and how they reduced costs relating to travel and childcare. Some mentioned the range of digital resources available and how these could be used to respond to learners' individual learning needs. They also remarked on the new digital skills that they and their learners had acquired through online learning.

Regarding the role of technology in Fáilte Isteach classes, 96% of the 80 tutors who responded to this question felt that digital tools could help to support English language learning and integration. 73 of these tutors explained the potential advantages of using digital tools in their post-pandemic classes, for instance, how technology could enhance adult migrants' access to language learning and their opportunities for social inclusion (e.g., developing digital skills for employment and education). They also highlighted how a wide variety of digital tools, including multimodal resources and interactive games, could be used to support learner engagement across different language skills and proficiency levels. Themes generated from analysis of tutors' qualitative responses to the survey are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2

Tutors' Perspectives on Digital Learning

THEMES	Online challenges	Online benefits	Potential of technology
SUB-THEMES	● Technical and environmental issues ● Reduced participation in online classes	● Continuity during the pandemic ● Flexibility and innovation	● Access and inclusion in a digitised society ● Supporting learner engagement

Concerning the mode of learning in Fáilte Isteach classes, 67% of the 81 tutors who expressed a preference felt a combination of face-to-face (F2F) and online learning would be most useful. While most tutors felt face-to-face classes are better for social integration, they acknowledged the role of digital tools in life and learning today, as one tutor remarked, "most people now use technology, so it makes sense to integrate it into our activities". Tutors who explained their interest in exploring technology-enhanced learning also expressed a desire for training in this field. A summary of the survey findings was disseminated to Fáilte Isteach tutors in April 2022, along with information about the training workshops.

Workshop Series Findings

Key Themes

The profile of participants in the TELLI workshop series was similar to the initial survey for tutors regarding age and gender (ten women and four men). In the needs analysis survey completed prior to the start of the workshops, most of the 14 participating tutors reported that they had more than one year's experience of volunteering with Fáilte Isteach and that they

worked with learners with varying levels of English language proficiency, from Beginner to Advanced. At the beginning of the workshop series, six tutors were delivering online classes only, with a further two involved in both online and face-to-face classes. Some tutors had worked with refugees and people seeking international protection, e.g., through online classes with learners in Direct Provision centres and face-to-face classes for learners who had recently arrived from Ukraine. The reflexive thematic analysis of the qualitative data collected throughout the TELLI workshop series, summarised in Table 3, generated three overarching themes: (i) digital apprehension, (ii) digital engagement, and (iii) adjusting to new realities.

Table 3

Themes Identified in the Workshop Data

THEMES	Digital apprehension	Digital engagement	Adjusting to new realities
SUB-THEMES	- Fear and resistance - Digital disadvantage	- Digital potential - Experimentation - Creativity	- Transition and uncertainty - Role of technology?

Digital Apprehension

The perspectives of tutors towards online learning during the pandemic and their thoughts on the future delivery of Fáilte Isteach classes indicated some apprehension in relation to the use of digital tools. During the workshop series, tutors talked about how they had been "afraid" of using a smartphone and how they felt "nervous" about things going wrong with technology in their online classes. Resistance to technology due to fears around online security and

privacy, attributed by some tutors to age, was another issue raised. Apprehension was also evident among tutors regarding digital disadvantage in technology-enhanced learning with adult migrants. Tutors highlighted challenges they had encountered in their online classes during the pandemic, including problems with internet connection in rural areas. The risk of exclusion was pointed out, as tutors were aware that not all adult migrant learners have adequate technological skills or resources to engage in digital learning. Tutors noted that many learners who had participated in their online classes relied on mobile phones as they did not have access to computers or other hardware. One tutor noted that "it was difficult for some learners as wi-fi in the Direct Provision centres was not very good, some participants only had a smart phone so [the] visual was difficult for some".

Above all, tutors emphasised the social aspect of learning and how they felt this was lacking in their online classes. They talked about "missing that human interaction" and how it was "hard to build up a rapport" with learners in the online classroom, noting that this may have contributed to unpredictable and reduced attendance. Tutors also pointed out how online classes seemed particularly challenging for learners at an early stage of English proficiency development and how concentration and motivation levels appeared to be lower online.

Digital Engagement

Despite their apprehension, another theme identified through the analysis of the workshop data related to tutors' engagement with technology-enhanced language learning. Drawing on experience from their Fáilte Isteach classes during the pandemic, tutors highlighted the potential of using digital tools and identified advantages of online learning in relation to flexibility and convenience. As one tutor expressed, "the benefits are kind of reaching more people, and flexibility around times, and also then the options for additional classes".

Tutors' active engagement in the workshops also revealed their capacity for experimenting with digital tools. Informed by the findings of the initial survey and the goals expressed by tutors in the pre-workshop needs analysis, a range of accessible digital tools (e.g., Zoom functions, Google apps, tools for creating and/or using videos, polls, quizzes and collaborative activities, and multilingual resources) was demonstrated in the workshops, allowing frequent opportunities for hands-on engagement. The notion of risk-taking and "moving beyond your comfort zone" was apparent among tutors; they also recognised how the pandemic had forced them into new territory and prompted innovation. Tutors mentioned "learning rapidly" during the TELLI workshop series and being "excited" about trying out the digital tools covered. Peer support was a prominent feature of the workshops, and this enabled participants to foster a community of learning. The researchers' provision of individual feedback on the weekly journal reflections and their support with the trialling of tools in the workshop sessions were also identified by tutors as aids to engagement. Overall, tutors viewed the workshop series as a "unique facility" which was of "huge benefit" to them in their work with Fáilte Isteach.

Creativity was another important aspect of digital engagement. This was evident in tutors' development of a range of innovative resources, guided by their learners' needs and interests, which they could use in their own Fáilte Isteach classes. The resources developed by tutors during the workshops included a recipe e-book, a photo-based conversation activity, a role play with interactive support, video-based online quizzes, a multimodal presentation, a collaborative digital illustration of verb forms, digitally generated vocabulary games, and a journey-planning activity using public transport websites and apps. These learning activities were then compiled as part of an open-access digital resource pack for Fáilte Isteach tutors. To create these resources, tutors used freely available digital tools such as quiz creators (e.g., Google Forms, Kahoot! Quizlet and other puzzle generators), online videos, digital photos,

PowerPoint, Zoom functions, and authentic material from public service websites. While the focus was typically on the development of oral skills, some activities also supported reading and writing in English, from letter recognition for learners unfamiliar with the Latin alphabet to more complex written production. Tutors also embedded opportunities for intercultural understanding and integration support in each of their resources, from the "culturally affirming" sharing of recipes to learning about health or transport services in Ireland.

In the final workshop and the subsequent focus groups, tutors highlighted the potential of their interactive games and quizzes to enhance learner engagement in an enjoyable way which one tutor observed was "not threatening" for refugees and displaced people. Another tutor presented a video-based quiz they had created as an out-of-class activity and shared feedback from a learner, who described the quiz as "amazing" and "super fun" and suggested ideas for its development. Learner involvement was a key factor in this tutor's satisfaction with the outcomes of the activity which, in their own evaluation, "gave a possibility for further conversations in the future, also further quizzes… so I felt it was an overall great success".

Adjusting to New Realities

Another theme identified in the data from the TELLI workshop series related to change and adjustment to new realities in the post-pandemic period. This concerned the range of challenges faced by tutors following the upheaval of the pandemic and other global events which have impacted migration into Ireland. A sense of transition and uncertainty was tangible among tutors involved in the workshop series during the return to face-to-face learning. This was further affected by the arrival of rising numbers of people seeking refuge in Ireland, from Ukraine and other countries, which resulted in increased demand for Fáilte Isteach classes. Tutors highlighted the need for greater awareness of trauma when working

with people who have arrived from situations of conflict, mentioning how Fáilte Isteach has

provided online training on trauma-informed practice. They also highlighted the risk of

disparity in the supports for people seeking refuge, as Ireland's positive response towards

displaced Ukrainians has contrasted with its reception of those from other war-affected

countries, leading to what one tutor described as a "two-tiered system that is precarious".

Issues relating to the specific needs of certain groups of learners were also pointed out, for

example, supports for older learners who may be "intimidated by the language and culture".

Looking ahead, tutors considered the possible role of technology in responding to

current challenges in their Fáilte Isteach classes. They raised the question of how digital tools

could be used in the face-to-face learning environment, with some proposing approaches such

as building a digital collection of resources for their own Fáilte Isteach group. However, they

agreed that the success of any such projects would depend on both tutors' and learners'

access to adequate digital resources. They also mentioned the value of training in the use of a

core set of accessible digital tools to allay fears regarding technology-enhanced learning. One

tutor captured the post-pandemic dilemma in relation to the role of technology in Fáilte

Isteach classes:

> After Covid, I felt we had a big chance to integrate IT more successfully as a complement to the face-to-face, but there's the mindset that says, Covid is finished, unplug the computers and let's get back to chalk… it's not either/or, there's a place for both.

Other tutors acknowledged the value of maintaining an online option for older or medically

vulnerable learners and tutors, and for women with small children.

The use of technology to facilitate peer support was recommended, e.g., through

regular Zoom meetings and social messaging within local Fáilte Isteach groups, while

collaboration among tutors to build technology-enhanced resource collections for their groups

was also suggested. Finally, the need for wider community support for adult migrants was

emphasised by tutors, e.g., through links with public libraries, which could include access to and the development of a range of technological resources to support language learning.

Discussion

Perspectives on Online Language Learning during the Pandemic

The findings of this research, from both the initial survey and the TELLI workshop series, provide insights into the experience of online learning in community-based English conversation classes for adult migrants in Ireland during the pandemic. They highlight the challenges of online learning in informal language classes in which volunteer tutors and adult migrant learners, particularly refugees and people seeking international protection, may not have the technological resources or digital skills required for engagement. This indicates the potential for digital disadvantage among migrant learners who may lack the resources and/or digital literacy to participate in online learning (Capstick, 2020; OECD, 2021). Reduced interpersonal interaction in the online learning environment, and its impact on the building of supportive relationships with learners, was also raised by participants (Capstick, 2020; Drolia et al., 2022). Nevertheless, some benefits of online learning (OECD, 2021) were apparent in this study; for instance, learners and tutors appreciated the greater flexibility in the scheduling of online classes which could save time and travel expenses and make classes more accessible for women with children.

Technology-enhanced Language Learning in the Post-pandemic Environment

In the initial survey, learners and tutors expressed a preference for some combination of face-to-face and digital learning. Tutors further recognised the potential of blended approaches to learning to "complement" face-to-face classes, a finding which aligns with contemporary

research into the incorporation of digital learning in language education for adult migrants (Wood, 2022). According to tutors in this study, online learning during the pandemic increased their awareness of the variety of accessible digital tools and multimedia resources which could support language learning and integration within their classes. This was evident in the technology-enhanced resources that tutors created during the workshop series which form a significant part of the open-access digital resource pack for Fáilte Isteach tutors developed as a key output of this project. They also demonstrate how, in the Irish context, digital learning may provide new opportunities for English language development (McGinnity et al., 2020).

The workshop series enabled tutors to experiment and engage with freely available, easy-to-access tools which were relevant to their own English conversation classes. This highlights the value of training as well as the potential to create new opportunities for the development of digital skills among adult migrants (Rahim, 2022; Xu & Buckingham, 2021). In Ireland, during and since the pandemic, digital engagement has become increasingly important, e.g., to access employment, education, and information about public services. Technology-enhanced approaches to language learning within the supportive community-based context of Fáilte Isteach classes could therefore, as tutors demonstrated through the activities they developed in the workshops, help adult migrants to navigate these digitised systems. Another feature of the post-pandemic context in Ireland has been the rising demand for community-based English language support, particularly due to the arrival of large numbers of displaced people from Ukraine and other countries. One of the issues raised by tutors in the workshops was the need for trauma-informed training (Palanac, 2022), which Fáilte Isteach has started to provide. The workshop series also covered a range of online resources, including multilingual tools, which may be useful for tutors working with learners who are seeking refuge in Ireland.

Conclusion

The findings of this research highlight challenges associated with online learning in the context of community-based language classes for adult migrants during the pandemic. At the same time, they point to the potential of blended approaches to language learning among adult migrants and show how accessible digital tools can be used in face-to-face classes and for additional out-of-class learning. Online resources and multilingual tools can also be used to support intercultural understanding and integration. As the workshop series demonstrated, hands-on training with opportunities for experimentation can enable volunteer tutors to develop their own resources using accessible digital tools. This study also suggests that, as societies become more diverse and digitised, the need for technology-enhanced approaches to language learning and integration with adult migrants is likely to increase.

The limitations of this study must, however, be acknowledged. This research was conducted within a strict timeframe during a period of significant change regarding pandemic-related public health regulations and migration patterns in Ireland; factors which may have impacted participation in the initial survey. In addition, to ensure that the online workshops were as interactive as possible, only a limited number of tutors could participate. Greater gender balance among participants in this study may also have been beneficial although it must be recognised that most Fáilte Isteach tutors are women. Furthermore, with additional time and resources, it would have been worthwhile to investigate in more depth learners' experience of using digital tools in community-based language classes and, given the rising numbers of people seeking refuge in Ireland, to explore issues relating to the impact of trauma on language learning and integration.

Recommendations

Despite its limitations, this research highlights some important issues regarding the experience of online learning among volunteer tutors and adult migrant learners and what role, if any, technology may play in community-based language classes in the post-pandemic environment. As a result, the following recommendations can be made for practice:

1. Maintain the provision of an online learning option for adult migrants who would not otherwise be able to attend face-to-face classes.

2. Encourage blended approaches to learning that can incorporate the use of accessible digital tools in face-to-face classes and support out-of-class learning.

3. Provide ongoing training for tutors regarding the use of accessible digital tools to support English language learning and integration.

4. Enable the sharing of tutor-created resources through digital collections of activities.

5. Explore how technology can be used to facilitate peer support among volunteer tutors and to raise tutors' awareness of trauma-informed approaches to language learning.

6. Ensure that community-oriented integration initiatives in Ireland, such as Fáilte Isteach, are appropriately resourced to respond to post-pandemic patterns of migration and communication.

7. Provide greater access to English language training and digital skills development for adult migrants in Ireland, in both formal and informal learning environments.

The recommendations above reflect the findings of this research in relation to community-based English conversation classes and, on a wider level, language and intercultural support to promote integration in Ireland. Acknowledging that this was a small-scale project, further research into language education for adult migrants in Ireland is recommended, particularly studies that focus on the learner experience.

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