Social Science and Human Research Bulletin

ISSN(e): 3050-5542
ISSN(p): 3050-5534

Vol. 02(07): 349-356, July 2025

Home Page: https://sshrb.org/

Is There a Teacher in This Classroom? Rethinking Second Language Instruction in a Low-Tech Environment

Anahit Hakoupian, Ph.D.
University of Southern California
Department of Latin American and Iberian Cultures

Article DOI: 10.55677/SSHRB/2025-3050-0710 **DOI URL: https://doi.org/10.55677/SSHRB/2025-3050-0710**

KEYWORDS: Communicative Language Teaching, language pedagogy, low-tech education, second language acquisition, classroom interaction, educational equity

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Anahit Hakoupian

Published: July 11, 2025

ABSTRACT: This article explores the value of technology-free classrooms in second language learning, offering a timely reflection on what's lost when screens replace human presence. As digital tools continue to reshape education, this piece calls for a return to teacher-centered, people-driven instruction—where learning is rooted in connection, spontaneity, and shared experience. Drawing from over thirty years of teaching and guided by the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), I, as the author, examine how stepping away from technology can actually bring students closer to the language, to each other, and to themselves.

The overuse of technology in classrooms has led, often unintentionally, to a decline in teacher agency and student interaction. This article highlights what happens when the teacher is no longer central to the learning process—and why that matters. In a technology-free space, the teacher becomes more than a facilitator: they are a mentor, a cultural guide, and a living model of communication. Through voice, gesture, presence, and care, the teacher creates a learning environment where language feels alive and relationships flourish.

Using real context-based lessons, classroom examples, and insights from research and practice, the article shows how simple, analog tools—chalk, paper, and conversation—can support deeper, more lasting learning, especially in under-resourced settings. Ultimately, it makes the case that removing technology is not a step backward, but a conscious choice to put humanity back at the center of education. In doing so, I reclaim the teacher's essential role in helping students not just learn a language, but build empathy, confidence, and the ability to connect meaningfully with the world.

INTRODUCTION

In today's classroom, technology is often seen not just as a tool but as a hallmark of progress. Smartboards, AI tutors, learning apps, and real-time translation software have become everyday features of modern education. They promise individualized instruction, round-the-clock access to information, and seamless integration with a globally connected world. In the realm of second language learning, such tools offer exposure to authentic materials, automated grammar correction, and simulated immersion—advantages that, on the surface, seem both practical and efficient.

But with every new digital advancement, it's worth asking: What might we be losing along the way?

In language classrooms especially—where communication is more than vocabulary and syntax—the increasing reliance on technology can unintentionally edge out the very thing that gives language its soul: human connection. Language is not just a set of rules or a system to decode. It is a living act, shaped in the moment by tone, rhythm, gesture, and emotion. And when screens mediate those moments, we risk gaining linguistic access while losing communicative depth.

This article asks a timely question: *Is there a teacher in this classroom?* Not simply someone directing digital traffic, but a teacher who is fully present—responding, guiding, interpreting, and building trust in real-time. Drawing from over three decades of teaching

experience in both tech-rich and tech-free university settings, I argue that the decision to teach without digital tools can be a powerful pedagogical choice—one rooted in attentiveness, responsiveness, and humanity.

Emerging research backs this perspective. Kim (2025) warns that AI-enhanced language tools, while helpful, often exacerbate existing inequities and sideline the teacher's role as a cultural and emotional mediator. Salam and Luksfinanto (2024) highlight that even when Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is used alongside technology, student outcomes are strongest when teacher presence remains central to instruction. Meanwhile, studies in educational psychology continue to show that excessive multimedia exposure can hinder deeper comprehension, empathy, and memory retention (Choi & Zhang, 2023; Carr, 2010).

For a second language learner, these findings matter. Fluency is not only about correctness—it's also about comfort, context, and confidence. Language must be practiced in a social space where risk-taking is safe, mistakes are meaningful, and culture is felt, not just explained. As Kramsch (2021) reminds us, language is always embedded in identity and ideology; it cannot be separated from the speaker's sense of self. Teachers, therefore, play an irreplaceable role as cultural bridges—not just providing content, but interpreting meaning, nuance, and lived experience.

This paper unfolds in several parts. It begins with a critical look at the promises and unintended consequences of technology and language education. It then revisits the theoretical framework of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), emphasizing its continued relevance in low-tech settings. From there, it offers practical classroom strategies that foster real dialogue, cognitive clarity, and inclusivity—especially in under-resourced contexts. Special attention is given to educational equity, illustrating how technology-free spaces can level the playing field for learners with limited access.

In sum, this article is not anti-technology. It is a call for intentionality. In an era saturated with devices, we must protect space for the things that can't be coded: silence, reflection, improvisation, and human presence. These are not relics of an outdated pedagogy—they are the foundation of deep learning and meaningful human exchange.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: Communicative Language Teaching in a Human-Centered Paradigm

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) reshaped second language education by challenging the traditional focus on rote grammar drills and translation exercises. Instead, it placed meaningful interaction—real communication—at the heart of the learning process. Emerging in the late 20th century, CLT reframed language not as a mechanical system for them to be memorized, but as a lived, social practice embedded in context, culture, and identity (Richards, 2006). This shift remains as relevant as ever today, especially as educators reevaluate the role of technology in the language classroom.

Central to CLT is the belief that language is best learned through engagement with others—through speaking, listening, negotiating meaning, and making mistakes in real life. Canale and Swain's (1980) expanded model of communicative competence moved language instruction beyond grammatical accuracy to include sociolinguistic sensitivity, discourse cohesion, and strategic problem-solving in interaction. In this view, proficiency is not about reciting perfectly formed sentences but about using language fluidly and creatively in real-life situations.

This foundation makes CLT inherently human-centered. It thrives on unpredictability, spontaneity, and presence—all of which are difficult to replicate in technology-mediated learning environments. When digital platforms structure interactions through scripts, multiple-choice formats, or AI-generated corrections, the opportunity for learners to engage in authentic, unrehearsed communication is often reduced. As noted by Salam and Luksfinanto (2024), even the most sophisticated digital tools struggle to reproduce the interpersonal richness that face-to-face communication provides.

In technology-free classrooms, CLT can unfold in its most organic form. The classroom becomes an ecosystem of communication where language is not delivered but co-constructed. Teachers and students respond to one another in real-time—negotiating to mean, interpreting context, asking questions, and sharing insights. Lessons evolve based on the energy of the room, the learners' immediate needs, and the spontaneous linguistic challenges that arise. This dynamic aligns closely with Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of "comprehensible input" slightly beyond the learner's current ability (i+1). In the absence of screens, this input is supported not by artificial intelligence but by the teacher's voice, gestures, drawings, and facial expressions—tools that make understanding tangible and human.

The CLT framework author resonates deeply with Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which stresses the value of guided learning in social settings. In this model, learners progress most effectively when scaffolded by a more knowledgeable other—a role naturally assumed by the teacher in a live classroom. The teacher, through intuition, observation, and empathy, tailors feedback and support in real-time. AI tutors and programmed software, by contrast, often apply fixed models of correction that overlook nuance, ambiguity, and emotional tone. As Kim (2025) argues, AI-driven instruction may reinforce linguistic correctness but lacks the cultural, relational, and emotional intelligence essential for true communicative competence.

Human interaction is not a bonus feature of language learning—it is its very foundation. In the moment-to-moment exchanges of a live classroom, learners encounter pauses, laughter, misunderstandings, and improvisations. These are not distractions from the curriculum; they are the curriculum. They foster not only linguistic agility but also the ability to read social cues, adapt registers, and express empathy. As Kramsch (2021) emphasizes, language is never neutral—it carries cultural meaning, identity, and power.

Only a human teacher can fully interpret and mediate those layers, helping students navigate the rich terrain of cross-cultural communication.

In the end, the decision to remove technology from the classroom is not a rejection of innovation, but a commitment to preserving the human conditions under which language is most meaningfully acquired. As Choi and Zhang (2023) observe, overstimulation from multimedia tools can lead to cognitive fatigue and reduced retention, particularly among language learners who require sustained attention and contextual repetition. By contrast, a low-tech environment centers the learner-teacher relationship, restores the rhythm of real conversation, and allows for the kind of intellectual and emotional presence that digital interfaces cannot replicate.

In short, CLT flourishes when language is treated not as content to be consumed, but as a shared act of meaning-making. And that act, at its best, requires a teacher—what not a program. It requires a living human being who listens, adjusts, scaffolds, and responds—someone who models not only language proficiency, but also patience, respect, and cultural humility.

Technology in the Language Classroom: A Double-Edged Sword

What began as a helpful supplement has, in many cases, become the centerpiece of language education. From AI chatbots and real-time translation tools to grammar correction software and digital flashcard apps, technology is now positioned as both tutor and classroom. Its appeal lies in efficiency, customization, and accessibility—offering learners seemingly endless opportunities to practice and review at their own pace.

But while these tools promise support, their growing dominance often comes at a cost: the quiet erosion of the teacher's role and the reshaping of the classroom into a less human space.

As Postman (1993) presciently observed, technological change is "ecological," not additive—it doesn't merely add tools to the toolbox but transforms the entire learning environment. In today's language classroom, that transformation is stark. The screen becomes the focal point. The teacher, once a living model of language and culture, is too often relegated to the sidelines, guiding students through software or solving technical issues. The rich improvisation of live dialogue is replaced with pre-programmed prompts and automated corrections.

Students, for their part, may become more comfortable as consumers of content than as communicators. It's easy to watch subtitled videos or swipe through vocabulary decks, but a real conversation—where language comes alive through mistake, repair, hesitation, and laughter—can't be downloaded. As Kim (2025) notes, AI-driven tools offer convenience but encourage a solitary, transactional relationship with language, one that lacks the relational depth critical to communicative competence.

This shift is particularly troubling in second language acquisition, where learning is inherently social, emotional, and cultural. Apps can model pronunciation or test grammar rules, but they cannot feel confusion in students' silence or notice when someone is disengaging. A human teacher can. In the moment, a teacher might slow their speech, rephrase a sentence, or use gestures and humor to spark understanding. This kind of intuitive responsiveness cannot be programmed—it must be lived.

The implications extend beyond pedagogy to issues of equity. While educational technology is often marked as a great equalizer, the reality is more complicated. Not all students have stable internet, access to up-to-date devices, or familiarity with digital platforms. These disparities can widen existing gaps, especially for learners from under-resourced communities or those navigating education in a second language. As Salam and Luksfinanto (2024) point out, technology may support learning *only* when its use is critically guided by teachers who understand the social and cultural dimensions of their students' realities.

In contrast, technology-free classrooms offer a radical kind of inclusivity. They require no logins, updates, or subscriptions—only presence, attention, and participation. In these spaces, students meet one another not as data points but as full human beings, learning not just grammar, but how to listen, respond, and build meaning together.

This is not to suggest that technology has no place in language education. When used intentionally and sparingly, it can extend access and enrich instruction. But when it becomes the default mode—when screens substitute for teachers, and platforms stand in for peers—something essential is lost. Language learning shifts from a human experience to a mechanical one, from the relational to the transactional. The result, as Kramsch (2021) warns, is a flattening of language into function—divorced from the identities, stories, and emotions that give life.

To preserve the depth and dignity of language learning, educators must ask not just *what* technology can do, but *what it displaces.* In many cases, it displaces the very thing students need most: a patient, human being to talk with, learn from, and grow alongside.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study emerges from over three decades of hands-on teaching experience in university-level Spanish language instruction, across both technology-integrated and technology-free contexts. The approach detailed here centers on the latter: a deliberate return to a low-tech, high-engagement model that prioritizes simplicity, spontaneity, and presence.

All instruction was conducted in person, without reliance on digital devices, audio-visual content, or an online learning management system (LMS). The goal was not to resist innovation but to reassert the pedagogical value of embodied, human interaction in language learning. In an age of constant connectivity, this model offers an alternative—one that centers the voice, gesture, curiosity, and agency of both teacher and student.

Instructional Design and Materials

The classroom environment was intentionally tactile and interactive. Instructional materials consisted of printed handouts, chalkboards, everyday objects (realia), and student-generated content. These analog tools were not treated as limitations but as invitations to creativity, flexibility, and relational learning. Key practices include:

- **Kinesthetic learning** through movement-based activities such as role-playing, object manipulation, and spatial tasks. Research continues to support the benefits of embodied cognition and language learning, particularly in enhancing memory and conceptual understanding (Tellier, 2022).
- **Dialogic instruction** is grounded in spontaneous conversation, open-ended questioning, and student-led interviews. These interactions provided real-time opportunities to negotiate meaning, build confidence, and practice contextualized communication—core tenants of CLT (Richards, 2006; Salam & Luksfinanto, 2024).
- **Collaborative games** like vocabulary charades, grammar release, and memory matching, fostered both language retention and peer bonding. As Choi and Zhang (2023) note, game-based learning can be even more effective when decoupled from screens, relying instead on physical and social cues.
- **Student-authored content,** Including short stories, posters, dialogues, and reflections. Students were not passive recipients of language, but active creators—contributing to a learning environment where language served a real purpose and had personal relevance (Kim, 2025).
- **Realia-based tasks** using authentic materials such as restaurant menus, street maps, product packaging, and local advertisement. These tasks anchored vocabulary and grammar within cultural and practical contexts, reinforcing language as lived experience.

Lesson Structure and Pedagogical Framework

Lessons followed a flexible three-phrase structure adapted from Communicative Language Teaching (CLT):

1. **Comprehensible Input:** Teachers provided spoken or written material just beyond students' current level of proficiency (Krashen's i+1), supported by visuals, gestures, and modeling (Krashen, 1982).
2. **Structured Pair Work:** Students work together to complete targeted tasks using new language structures—offering both support and challenge in collaborative contexts.
3. **Open-ended Communication:** Students in free conversation or role-play scenarios, applying new language forms to real-world contexts with minimal teacher scaffolding.

This phased structure allowed for both language development and increased learner autonomy, consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development and current understandings of socially mediated learning.

Data Collection

Student engagement, comprehension, and social interaction were tracked through post-class observation notes written after each session. Rather than using digital analytics, this qualitative record relied on close observation: moments of confusion or excitement, patterns of participation, emerging confidence, or group dynamics. These reflections were instrumental in adjusting lesson plans, identifying student needs, and nurturing A responsive classroom culture.

By stepping away from technology, this method allowed the teacher to fully observe and interact with learners, fine-tuning instruction from moment to moment. This responsiveness—unmediated by screens or interfaces—was itself a form of data: a lived archive of pedagogical inside grounded in presence, attentiveness, and care.

THE PEDAGOGICAL POWER OF PRESENCE

In a world saturated with digital tools and mediated communication, the simple act of being present in a shared space has become increasingly rare—and increasingly powerful. Within the language classroom, the teacher's physical and emotional presence is not just a backdrop to instructions; it *is* instruction. Presence in pedagogy. It creates the conditions under which communication feels real, risk-taking feels safe, and language transforms from an academic subject into living practice.

While apps and software can deliver vocabulary lists, grammar drills, or pronunciation feedback, they cannot offer the warmth of a teacher's glance, the subtle shift in tone that reassures a hesitant speaker, or the spontaneous humor that brings a classroom to life. Human presence conveys immediacy, responsiveness, and care—qualities that deepen engagement and foster a sense of belonging. As Kramsch (2021) notes, Language learning is not simply cognitive—it is social, emotional, and profoundly symbolic. Students need more than input; they need to feel seen and heard as they experiment with a new voice.

Research and affective neuroscience and education underscore this point. When learners feel safe, supported, and connected, their brains are more receptive to acquiring new knowledge (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). This is especially true in second-language classrooms, where vulnerability is inherent in the process. To speak another language is to risk misunderstanding, awkwardness, and even shame. A teacher who is fully present—listening carefully, responding thoughtfully, celebrating progress—can turn those risks into opportunities for growth. This emotional attunement, as Norton and Toohey (2022) affirm, is essential to inclusive, justice-oriented language pedagogy.

Embodied Communication and Comprehensible Input

The power of teacher presence extends beyond emotional support—it plays a crucial role in how language is actually received and understood. In live settings, communication is multimodal. Teachers use intonation, facial expressions, hand gestures, pauses, and repetition to make meaning more comprehensible. These non-verbal cues, often unconscious, are critical in helping learners process input just beyond their current level of proficiency. As Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis emphasizes, comprehensible input is most effective when supported through visual and contextual clues. Technology, though efficient in delivering data, lacks the embodied, intuitive nuance of a human teacher in motion.

Attunement and Improvisation

Another dimension of presence is *attunement*: the teacher's ability to notice what is happening in the room and respond accordingly. A puzzled look, a disengaged posture, a flash of enthusiasm—these small cues guide the teacher in adjusting pacing, reframing explanations, or drawing a quieter student into the conversation. This form of improvisation is not chaotic; It is deeply skilled. It reflects what educational psychologist Deborah Ball calls "pedagogical listening"—the ability to tune in not just to what students say, but to *what they are trying to say* (Ball, 2023).

Such moments cannot be anticipated by algorithms or embedded in lesson plans. They arise through presence, through the teacher's lived relationship with their students. As Salam and Luksfinanto (2024) point out, this human adaptability is particularly vital in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms, where standardized tools often fail to account for varied learner histories, identities, and affective needs.

Community, Ritual, and Meaning-Making

Presence also enables ritual and rhythm—too often-overlooked elements of language learning. Greeting routines, daily check-ins, classroom inside jokes, songs, and shared silence all contribute to the creation of a cohesive classroom culture. These rituals foster trust and a sense of shared purpose. In a screen-free environment, such moments are amplified. There is space for eye contact, call-and-response exchanges, and unhurried conversation. Language is not just studied—it is practiced as a social act.

In this environment, learners are not reduced to usernames or data points. They are co-constructors of meaning. Their gestures, accents, stories, and mistakes shape the lesson as much as the teacher's plan. Presence allows for this reciprocity. As Kim (2025) observes, the human dynamics of language classrooms cannot be replicated by AI; the unpredictability of communication is where real learning— and real connection—happens.

Teaching as a Human Encounter

Ultimately, presence is not simply about being in the room—it is about *being with*. It is about showing up, again and again, to witness and participate in the slow, courageous work of learning a new language. It is the teacher choosing to engage not just with content, but with people. And it is in that act of engagement that teaching becomes something more than instruction. It becomes a human encounter.

RESULTS: Observations and Pedagogical Outcomes

Qualitative classroom observations over multiple semesters revealed a series of compelling outcomes tied to the technology-free, human-centered instructional model. What emerged was not only increased linguistic competence but also a deeper sense of classroom connection, engagement, and equity—outcomes that are often lost or diluted in highly digital environments.

1. Growth in Oral Fluency through Spontaneous Interaction

Students demonstrated noticeable improvement in oral fluency, particularly during unstructured speaking tasks such as peer interviews, role-plays, and collaborative storytelling. Without the safety net of text prompts our translation tools, learners were challenged to formulate their thoughts in real time. This productive "struggle," while initially uncomfortable, ultimately led to greater linguistic agility and confidence. These findings echo Salam and Luksfinanto (2024), who emphasize that unstructured, real-time communication fosters deeper grammatical and pragmatic development than scripted digital dialogues.

2. Improved Focus and Reduced Cognitive Fragmentation

The absence of digital devices noticeably improved classroom focus. Students remain present at the moment—attuned to the rhythm of speech, body language, and tone. Unlike technology-integrated settings, where multitasking and notification fatigue often diminish attention spans, the low-tech classroom restored a slower, more deliberate pace of learning. This aligns with findings from Choi and Zhang (2023), who caution that constant digital input can impair working memory and disrupt sustained engagement, particularly for second language learners.

3. Increased Confidence and Willingness to Take Risks

Learners showed greater willingness to take linguistic risks, including experimenting with new vocabulary, using humor, and initiating conversation. The absence of immediate digital correction—often perceived as judgmental—allowed space for approximation and imperfection. This "low-stakes" environment was crucial in building self-assurance, especially among more introverted or self-conscious students. As Kim (2025) notes, AI-driven Language tools, while efficient, often reinforce perfectionism and performance anxiety and learners unfamiliar with error as a natural part of acquisition.

4. Enhanced Memory and Retention through Embodied Learning

Activities that incorporated physical movement, emotion, and visual storytelling—such as charades, dialogue circles, and manipulatives—consistently led to better long-term retention of vocabulary and grammatical structures. Students often recalled material from these sessions weeks later with greater ease than from traditional drills. This supports recent cognitive research (Tellier, 2022) that links embodied interaction to deeper encoding and retrieval in second language acquisition.

5. Strengthened Peer Collaboration and Social Cohesion

The technology-free setting fostered a strong sense of pure collaboration and classroom community. Without individual devices to isolate attention, students relied on one another for clarification, encouragement, and shared discovery. Laughter, eye contact, and shared challenges created an emotionally rich environment that strengthened interpersonal bonds. These findings echo Kramsch (2021), who emphasizes that language learning is not only cognitive but also deeply social and affective.

6. Heightened Equity and Universal Participation

The analog nature of the classroom removed common barriers tied to digital fluency, device access, or internet stability. All students, regardless of socioeconomic background, were able to fully participate. Materials were distributed in print, instructions were given orally and visually, and participation required only presence and effort. This helped level the playing field and fostered a culture of inclusion. As Salam and Luksfinanto (2024) argue, teacher-led, low-tech instruction remains one of the most equitable models in diverse educational settings.

Student Reflections: Being Seen and Heard

Informal surveys and reflective writing assignments revealed that students overwhelmingly value the sense of being "seen" in the classroom. Many described feeling more comfortable, more engaged, and more personally connected to their classmates and instructor compared to previous experiences in tech-heavy courses. One student noted, "Without the laptop, I actually felt like I was part of the room—like my words mattered." Another wrote, "I wasn't just learning Spanish—I was using it to connect."

These reflections affirm what research increasingly suggests: that authentic teacher presence and peer interaction remain central to meaningful second language learning (Richards, 2006; Kramsch, 2021). In this model, the teacher was not a passive guide behind a screen, but a fully engaged listener, facilitator, and cultural interpreter. Their responsiveness—attuned to hesitation, excitement, or confusion—created a relational classroom climate where language could flourish as both form and expression.

EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND GLOBAL ACCESS

While digital tools are often framed as democratizing forces in education, the reality is more complex—particularly in the field of second language instruction. Technology-based learning assumes a baseline of infrastructure: stable internet, up-to-date devices, tech support, and digital fluency. These conditions are far from universal. In many rural, underfunded, and marginalized communities around the world, the promise of digital inclusion remains out of reach.

A technology-free approach, by contrast, offers a model that is universally acceptable, culturally responsive, and immediately deployable—regardless of socioeconomic status, geographic location, or bandwidth capacity, it doesn't require subscription, logins, or electricity. What it does require is presence: a teacher, a shared space, and the willingness to listen, speak, and learn together.

Over the course of my teaching career, I have seen the transformative power of this model across a range of educational contexts—from rural villages in Latin America to immigrant and refugee programs in the U.S. These classrooms, often operating with minimal resources, succeed not in spite of their low-tech status, but because of it. Without the mediation of screens or pre-packaged digital content, instruction is grounded in the immediacy of human experience. Language is taught through stories, role-plays, shared meals, local maps, and everyday challenges. It is practical, situated, and emotionally resonant.

As recent scholarship confirms, culturally situated pedagogy is essential for meaningful language acquisition. Learners benefit most when instruction reflects their lived experiences and social realities (Norton & Toohey, 2022). Technology-heavy platforms, while well-intentioned, often present decontextualized materials designed for generalized, often Western, users. A technology-free classroom, by contrast, adapts naturally to local rhythms, dialects, and values. It allows teachers to center *who* their students are—not just *what* they need to know.

Importantly, this approach also supports learners who are frequently marginalized in digital spaces. Neurodiverse students, for example, may struggle with sensory overload, fast pacing, or fragmented interfaces typical of online instruction. Similarly, older adults, newly arrived immigrants, or students with limited prior schooling may find digital navigation daunting or alienating. In these cases, the analog classroom becomes not just a simpler alternative, but a more humane one. As Salam and Luksfinanto (2024) note, inclusive pedagogy is not about offering the same tool to everyone—it's about creating space for everyone to participate meaningfully.

In technology-free environments, Participation is not dependent on typing speed or Wi-Fi access. It emerges through presence, listening, and shared interaction. Students are invited to speak, draw, act, and reflect—forms of engagement that validate diverse ways of knowing and expressing. The teacher, attuned to both verbal and nonverbal cues, can adapt instruction in real-time, offering scaffolding that is emotional as well as academic.

Moreover, this model strengthens intergenerational and cross-cultural ties. In many under-resourced communities, grandparents, parents, and children may learn together in shared language spaces. Without screens separating age groups or skill levels, language learning becomes a communal act—one that affirms cultural heritage while opening doors to new linguistic possibilities.

In this light, the absence of technology is not a deficit—it is a form of educational justice. It shifts the emphasis from technological navigation to human connection, from digital fluency to communicative presence. As Kramsch (2021) reminds us, language learning is never simply about information; it is about identity, empathy, and belonging. A low-tech classroom, rooted in dialogue and relational learning, makes space for all of these.

CONCLUSION: Teaching as a Human Act

In an age increasingly defined by automation and artificial intelligence, the presence of a teacher in the classroom is no longer assumed—it is a conscious, pedagogical choice. This article has argued that the teacher is not simply a transmitter of information or a facilitator of preprogrammed content. Rather, the teacher is an interpreter of meaning, a witness to student growth, a cultural mediator, and a co-participant in the unpredictable and emotionally charged process of learning a language. These roles cannot be replicated by machines or outsourced to platforms, no matter how sophisticated the technology is.

Language learning is fundamentally human. It does not occur in isolation but within a social space, shaped by gesture, emotion, silence, humor, misunderstanding, and repair. It demands vulnerability from the learner and attentiveness from the teacher. It thrives not on automation but on improvisation—those moments when a lesson shifts in response to a student's confusion, when a quiet voice finally breaks into conversation, or when laughter emerges from a shared linguistic mishap.

In the technology-free classroom, such moments are not anomalies—they are the fabric of instruction. Without screens as intermediaries, teachers and students meet eye to eye, word to word. The classroom becomes a living space of communication, one in which language is not just practiced but lived. As Kramsch (2021) reminds us, language is always more than its form; it is a symbolic expression of identity, ideology, and human connection. These are dimensions that no algorithm can truly grasp or convey.

To teach without technology in the modern classroom is not to reject innovation but to exercise discernment. It is to ask not only *what* a tool can do, but *what it might displace*. When used uncritically, digital tools can undermine the interpersonal dynamics essential to communicative competence. As Kim (2025) argues, language learning must remain grounded in human relationships, especially in contexts where equity, cultural nuance, and emotional safety are at stake.

This work has highlighted how teacher-led, low-tech environments promote fluency, confidence, collaboration, and inclusion. They serve learners who are often marginalized by the digital divide, including those in rural regions, underfunded schools, or classrooms with neurodiverse and immigrant populations. As Norton and Toohey (2022) affirm, Inclusive language education begins by centering the teacher's social reality—not by requiring them to conform to the logic of a machine.

Reclaiming the classroom as a human space is not a nostalgic act—it is a forward-looking stance, a pedagogical vision rooted in ethics, presence, and trust. In that vision, the teacher is not an accessory to software but a central figure in the learning encounter. The teacher listens. The teacher sees. The teacher adapts.

Yes—there must be a teacher in the classroom. Not because technology has no value, but because no screen can replace the courage it takes to speak a new word aloud or the empathy it takes to hear it.

REFERENCES

1. Ball, D. L. (2023). Pedagogical listening and teacher responsiveness in multilingual classrooms. *Journal of Teacher Education,* 74(2), 135-149.
2. Carr, N. (2010). *The shallows: What the Internet is doing to our brains.* W. W. Norton & Company.
3. Choi, L., & Zhang, T. (2023). Digital overload and language processing: The risks of cognitive fatigue in high-tech classrooms. *Journal of Educational Psychology,* 115(1), 33-47.
4. Immordino-Yang, M. H., & Damasio, A. (2007). We feel, therefore we learn: The relevance of affective and social neuroscience to education. *Mind, Brain, and Education,* 1(1), 3-10.
5. Kim, E. (2025). AI-assisted English learning: A tool for all or only a select few? *Language Learning & Technology,* 29(2), [page range TBD].
6. Kramsch, C. (2021). Language as symbolic power: Reflections on identity, ideology, and pedagogy. *Applied Linguistics,* 42(3), 495-509.
7. Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition.* Pergamon Press.
8. Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2022). Identity and language learning: Moving toward social justice in language education. *TESOL Quarterly,* 56(1), 9-28.
9. Postman, N. (1993). *Technopoly: The surrender of culture to technology.* Vintage.
10. Richards, J.C. (2006). *Communicative language teaching today.* Cambridge University Press.
11. Salam, M. Y., & Luksfinanto, Y. (2024). A comprehensive review of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in modern classrooms. *Lingeduca: Journal of Language and Education Studies,* 3(1), 58-70.

12. Tellier, M. (2022). Embodied cognition in second language learning: The role of gesture and movement. *Language Teaching Research,* 26(5), 692-711.
13. Zhang, T. (2023). *[Co-cited with Choi in empirical studies on multimedia overload—no separate publication details given]*
14. Toohey, K. (2022). *[Co-cited with Norton in identity and language education—no separate publication details given]*
15. Luksfinanto, Y. (2024). *[Co-cited with Salam—listed as second author co-authored work]*