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CUSTOMIZING DIGITAL LEARNING THROUGH CANVA: AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

The integration of digital tools in language classrooms has gained momentum in recent years, yet the practical application of these tools for enhancing learner motivation remains underexplored. This study investigates the use of Canva, a graphic design platform, within Content-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) to boost motivation and engagement among second language (L2) learners in ESL classrooms. The research addresses the problem of low learner engagement in traditional ESL settings and examines how visual and interactive content can enhance learning outcomes. A mixed-methods design was employed, involving quantitative questionnaire data from 30 secondary school students and qualitative interview data from six pre-service teachers in Selangor. The findings reveal that Canva-supported activities—such as infographic creation and multimedia presentations—enhanced students' interest, comprehension, and participation while fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills. However, challenges such as unstable internet access, limited use of premium features, and teachers' unfamiliarity with the platform were noted. The study concludes that Canva holds significant potential as an instructional tool in ESL contexts. It recommends structured training for teachers, improved digital infrastructure, and increased institutional support to ensure effective integration. These findings offer valuable implications for technology-enhanced ESL teaching and contribute to ongoing efforts to innovate classroom practices for better learner outcomes.

Keywords:

Canva, ESL, CBLT, Motivation, Student Engagement

Introduction

Motivation plays a crucial role in educational achievement, as it encourages students to actively engage with learning materials, persevere through academic challenges, and ultimately attain better outcomes (Pratama & Hikmat, 2024). In the context of second language acquisition, however, maintaining motivation can be particularly challenging. Traditional teaching methods often rely on rote memorization and static materials, which may render language learning abstract, monotonous, and disconnected from students' lived experiences (Pratama & Hikmat, 2024). This calls for more innovative, student-centered approaches that make learning both meaningful and relevant.

One such innovation is the use of Canva, a graphic design platform that promotes creativity and active participation by allowing students to create visually engaging and interactive content (Hafiz, Barsihanor & Arifin, 2024). By transforming conventional lessons into vibrant, multimedia-rich experiences, Canva helps bridge the gap between abstract language concepts and real-world application (Fitria, 2022; Nurhidayat, 2021). Visual storytelling, infographics, and collaborative design projects can make learning more contextualized and enjoyable, thereby enhancing both comprehension and retention.

Moreover, the integration of such digital tools has been shown to boost intrinsic motivation—students become more self-driven and interested in the learning process itself rather than being solely motivated by grades or external rewards. This internal drive fosters deeper engagement and contributes to improved academic performance, greater learner autonomy, and a more positive overall attitude toward education (Pratama & Hikmat, 2024). Ultimately, platforms like Canva not only enrich the learning experience but also support the broader pedagogical shift toward interactive, inclusive, and learner-centered education.

Literature Review

Technology has significantly transformed language education, prompting a shift from traditional teacher-centered approaches to more student-centered methodologies (Hutapea, Manullang & Hartati, 2024; Ali et al., 2024; Ali & Azamri, 2023; Ali et al., 2023). Canva, a popular graphic design platform, empowers educators to develop engaging and visually rich learning materials that accommodate various learning styles (Pulungan et al., 2024; Harsabawa, 2023; Fitria, 2022). With its customizable templates and multimedia features, Canva supports differentiated instruction and fosters an inclusive classroom environment. This study investigates Canva's influence on student motivation, engagement, creativity, and student-teacher interaction in ESL classrooms. Prior research indicates that digital tools like Canva can transform conventional classrooms into interactive and collaborative learning spaces (Amri, 2023; Fitria, 2022). By examining these elements, the study seeks to offer practical insights into Canva's application in language education and inform more effective, motivation-enhancing teaching strategies.

In an ideal educational context, the integration of tools like Canva into language instruction would naturally enrich student motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes. Studies have emphasized Canva's potential to personalize instruction and energize classrooms by addressing diverse learner needs (Ngoc & Huyen, 2023). However, in low- to medium-resource ESL settings, educators often encounter practical challenges such as limited digital literacy, time constraints, and insufficient institutional support, resulting in inconsistent implementation (Hutapea, Manullang & Hartati, 2024; Friska & Pramuaniati, 2023). Additional barriers,

including poor internet connectivity and limited access to premium features in Canva's free version, may further impede its effectiveness. These constraints sometimes compel teachers to revert to alternative methods, such as printed materials, to maintain student engagement (Hutapea, Manullang & Hartati, 2024).

Nonetheless, Canva continues to demonstrate promise as an educational tool when used effectively. Research suggests that with appropriate teacher training, robust institutional backing, and improved digital infrastructure, Canva can support the creation of dynamic and engaging learning environments (Fitria, 2022). Therefore, this study aims to evaluate Canva's effectiveness in enhancing L2 learners' motivation in ESL classrooms, identify the specific features that contribute to increased engagement, and explore ESL teachers' perceptions, experiences, and instructional strategies when utilizing Canva within a content-based language teaching framework.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method research design, integrating quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to investigate the implementation of Content-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) alongside the use of Canva in ESL classrooms. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select 30 L2 students from secondary schools in Selangor and six pre-service ESL teachers, ensuring that all participants had relevant experience incorporating Canva into lesson planning. Data were collected using two main instruments: (1) questionnaires featuring both Likert-scale and open-ended items to evaluate students' motivation and the perceived impact of Canva, and (2) open-ended interviews aimed at gaining deeper insights into teachers' perceptions and instructional strategies when using Canva. The questionnaires were distributed through Google Forms, while interviews were conducted either virtually or in person, depending on participant availability. Ethical protocols, including informed consent and data anonymisation, were rigorously followed to ensure participant confidentiality and uphold the integrity of the research process.

Findings

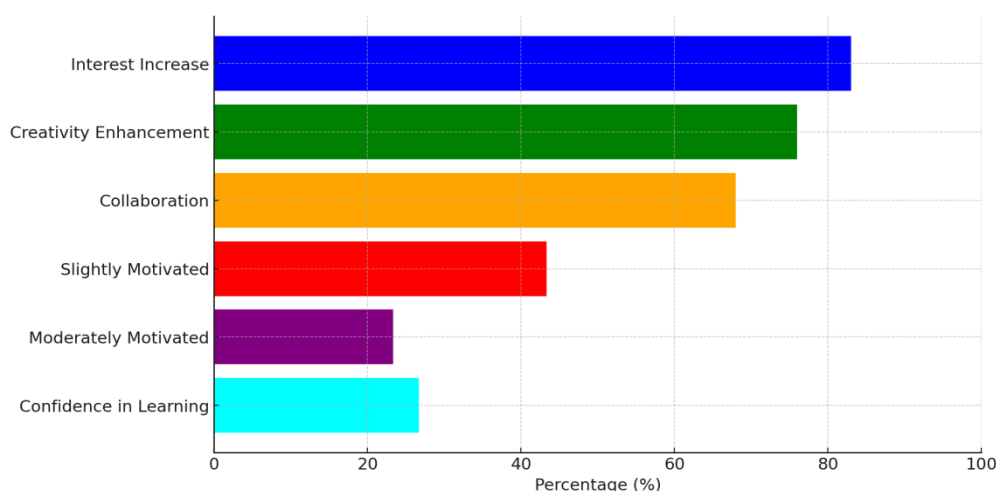*The Effectiveness of Canva in Enhancing L2 Students' Motivation in ESL Classrooms*

Figure 1: The Effects of Canva On Students' Engagement and Motivation

As shown in Figure 1, a substantial proportion of students reported that Canva significantly enhanced their creativity. This finding aligns with previous studies by Fitria (2022), which emphasize that Canva's diverse design tools enable students to personalize their learning materials, fostering creative expression. The ability to customize visual elements allows learners to engage in more meaningful interactions with the content, reinforcing their comprehension and retention of language concepts. Additionally, the integration of design-based learning activities promotes cognitive flexibility, an essential skill in second language acquisition, as learners' experiment with various ways to present and structure information.

Furthermore, Canva's interactive features, such as group projects and shared design workspaces, have been found to facilitate collaborative learning. Research by Hutapea, Manullang and Hartati (2024) suggests that digital tools that allow real-time collaboration enhance teamwork, communication, and peer learning. This aspect of Canva aligns with the socio-constructivist theory, which posits that learning is most effective when it occurs within a social context where students can engage in discourse, negotiate meaning, and co-construct knowledge. By working together on design projects, students are not only improving their linguistic competencies but also developing essential 21st-century skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving.

Despite its positive impact on creativity and collaboration, the study indicates that Canva's role in increasing motivation presents more nuanced findings. The data reveal that 43.3% of students were only slightly motivated, while 23.3% reported moderate motivation levels. This suggests that while Canva can contribute to engagement, motivation in language learning is influenced by multiple factors, including instructional design, student autonomy, and external influences such as classroom environment and assessment methods (Fitria, 2022). Therefore, Canva's effectiveness in fostering motivation may be maximized when integrated with pedagogically sound strategies that provide clear learning objectives, scaffolded instruction, and intrinsic reinforcement.

The lowest percentage recorded in the study pertains to students' confidence in learning (26.7%). While Canva enhances engagement and creativity, this does not necessarily translate to increased self-efficacy in language acquisition. One possible explanation, as highlighted by (Fitria, 2022) is the learning curve associated with mastering the platform. For some students, digital literacy and unfamiliarity with design tools may create initial challenges, leading to hesitation in actively participating in Canva-based tasks. Additionally, the need for explicit teacher guidance and structured learning support is crucial in ensuring that students not only engage with the tool but also develop confidence in their language skills through its use.

In conclusion, the findings underscore Canva's effectiveness in fostering creativity, collaboration, and engagement in ESL classrooms. However, its impact on motivation and confidence levels highlights areas for further pedagogical refinement. To optimize Canva's potential, educators should integrate it with structured lesson designs that provide clear instructional guidance, scaffolded support, and opportunities for self-directed learning. Additionally, targeted professional development for teachers on how to effectively implement Canva in language instruction could further enhance student outcomes, ensuring that the tool serves as a catalyst for both engagement and meaningful language acquisition.
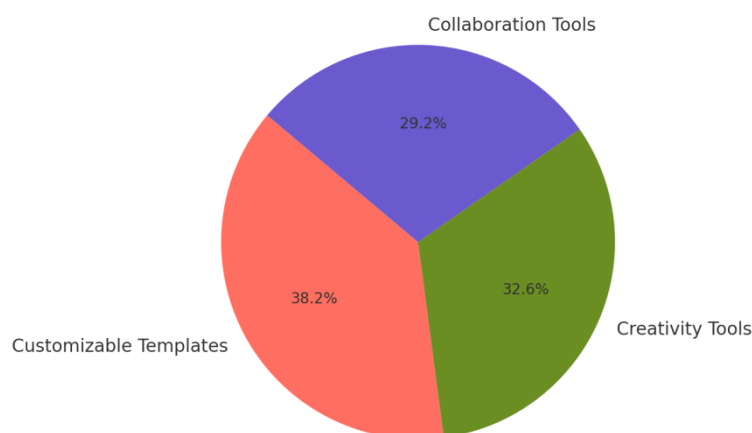
The Most Preferred Specific Features of Canva

Figure 2: Three Most Preferred Specific Features of Canva

Figure 2 shows that students most prefer Canva's Customizable Templates (38.2%), followed by Creativity Tools (32.6%), and Collaboration Tools (29.2%). These features help simplify lesson design, boost creativity, and encourage teamwork—key elements for engaging ESL learners. Customizable Templates minimize cognitive load by providing ready-made layouts, letting students focus on language skills rather than design (Pratama & Hikmat, 2024). They also support a scaffolded learning approach, especially for those with limited design experience. Creativity Tools (drag-and-drop elements, font choices, and multimedia integration) help students personalize content, fostering intrinsic motivation and creative thinking (Hutapea, Manullang & Hartati, 2024). This multimedia aspect supports multimodal learning and accommodates different learning preferences (Ngoc & Huyen, 2023). Collaboration Tools (shared editing and group projects) enable real-time teamwork, improving communication, problem-solving, and peer learning (Ngoc & Huyen, 2023). Though slightly less preferred than the other two features, collaboration remains crucial for constructivist, student-centered learning. Overall, students appreciate Canva's ability to simplify design, encourage creativity, and promote collaboration. Future research should explore how these features affect long-term language proficiency, the role of teacher guidance, and potential digital literacy or access issues. Comparing Canva to other digital tools may also clarify which strategies best enhance ESL teaching and learning.

ESL Teachers' Perceptions, Experiences, and Strategies in Utilizing Canva to Support Content-Based Language Teaching and Student Engagement.

Teacher 1 (Experienced ESL Teacher, 10+ years)
> *"Canva has been a game-changer in my classroom. I use it to design interactive worksheets, infographics, and flashcards that align with my content-based lessons. My students find the visuals engaging, and it helps simplify complex concepts. However, I do see a challenge when students are unfamiliar with digital tools, so I usually provide a short tutorial before incorporating Canva into lessons."*

This teacher perceives Canva as a transformative tool in the ESL classroom, particularly for enhancing content-based learning through visual materials. Their experience highlights that interactive worksheets, infographics, and flashcards are effective in simplifying complex concepts, making learning more accessible. The teacher's strategy of providing a tutorial addresses the digital literacy gap among students, ensuring they can effectively engage with Canva-based materials. This insight aligns with research suggesting that teacher guidance in digital tool usage enhances learning outcomes (Fitria, 2022)

Teacher 2 (Early-Career ESL Teacher, 2 years)
> *"I started using Canva to create content-rich presentations and digital storybooks. The platform's templates save me a lot of time and allow me to focus on delivering quality content. One strategy that works well for me is allowing students to create their own visual summaries after a lesson, reinforcing both content and language skills."*

With a limited teaching background, this teacher appreciates Canva for its ability to streamline content creation, allowing for a focus on lesson delivery rather than material preparation. The preference for Canva's templates underscores its time-saving benefits, which is crucial for early-career educators. This response highlights how Canva empowers students to take ownership of their learning while integrating digital literacy skills (Friska & Pramuaniati, 2023).

Teacher 3 (ESL Teacher,6 years)
> *"In my school, internet access is limited, so I have to download Canva materials in advance. Despite this, I find that using Canva to create worksheets and posters keeps my students more engaged. They respond better to lessons when visuals are incorporated, especially for subjects like science and social studies."*

This response presents a realistic challenge faced by many educators in regions with limited internet connectivity. Despite this, the teacher proactively downloads Canva materials in advance, demonstrating an adaptive approach to technological limitations. The preference for worksheets and posters suggests that even in low-resource settings, Canva remains an effective tool for content visualization, particularly in subjects like science and social studies, where complex ideas benefit from visual representation. Research by Friska and Pramuaniati (2023) supports the claim that visually enhanced materials improve student engagement and comprehension.

Teacher 4 (ESL Teacher, 15+ years)
> *"I use Canva for storytelling activities, where students co-create digital storybooks. The drag-and-drop features make it easy for them to personalize their stories with visuals. This approach not only strengthens their writing skills but also enhances their creativity and confidence in using English."*

This teacher's extensive experience is reflected in the creative integration of Canva into storytelling activities. Their strategy of co-creating digital storybooks aligns with constructivist learning theories, which suggest that students learn best when they actively engage in content creation (Friska & Pramuaniati, 2023). The use of Canva's drag-and-drop features enhances personalization, allowing students to express their ideas creatively. Furthermore, this approach supports literacy development, critical thinking, and language fluency, making it an effective CBLT strategy.

<u>Teacher 5 (ESL Teacher with a Focus on Technology)</u>

"I integrate Canva with project-based learning, where students collaborate to design educational posters and infographics. This method encourages teamwork while reinforcing both language and subject content. One challenge I notice is that some students rely too much on pre-made templates, so I encourage them to explore design elements more actively."

This teacher emphasizes the collaborative potential of Canva in project-based learning (PBL). Their strategy involves students working together to design infographics and educational posters, reinforcing both language skills and subject-specific content. The concern that students rely too much on pre-made templates highlights a pedagogical challenge—students may prioritize visual appeal over content depth. To counter this, the teacher encourages more active exploration of design elements, fostering higher-order thinking skills (Dani, Agustin & Deani, 2023). This aligns with research on active learning strategies, which suggest that students engage more deeply when they interact meaningfully with content rather than passively consuming it.

<u>Teacher 6 (ESL Teacher with a Focus on Technology)</u>

"One effective strategy I emphasize is using Canva for formative assessments—students create concept maps or infographics to demonstrate their understanding of a topic. This approach not only makes assessments more engaging but also provides insights into their learning progress."

This teacher integrates Canva into assessment practices, using it for formative assessments such as concept maps and infographics. This approach shifts assessments from traditional tests to interactive, student-created materials, which not only make learning more engaging but also provide teachers with visual insights into students' understanding. Research suggests that alternative assessments (such as infographics) promote deeper learning by requiring students to synthesize information creatively (Dani, Agustin & Deani, 2023). This teacher's strategy reinforces the idea that Canva can be leveraged beyond content delivery to enhance evaluation and student feedback mechanisms.

The findings from the six teachers' responses highlight the diverse and transformative role of Canva in ESL classrooms, particularly within the framework of Content-Based Language Teaching (CBLT). Canva serves as a powerful visual learning tool that enhances student engagement and facilitates comprehension by reducing cognitive load through structured visuals (Dani, Agustin & Deani, 2023). The platform allows teachers to create interactive and visually appealing materials, making abstract or complex subject matter more accessible to ESL learners. Moreover, Canva's integration into classroom activities promotes student-centered learning, as evidenced by its use in self-directed projects, digital storytelling, and formative assessments. Beyond its benefits in enhancing content delivery, Canva also proves adaptable to diverse teaching contexts, including low-resource environments. Teachers working in schools with limited internet access have demonstrated strategic modifications, such as pre-downloading materials to ensure continued accessibility. Furthermore, Canva's ability to support project-based learning (PBL) and collaborative tasks fosters essential 21st-century skills, including teamwork, problem-solving, and digital literacy. However, some challenges emerge, including students' over-reliance on pre-made templates, which may limit creativity and higher-order thinking skills. To mitigate this, teachers actively encourage

students to explore design elements independently, thus fostering deeper engagement and content mastery. Additionally, Canva's application in alternative assessment methods signifies a shift from traditional testing approaches toward more interactive and meaningful assessments. The use of concept maps, infographics, and visual summaries as formative assessments allows educators to gain insights into students' learning progress while promoting knowledge synthesis and retention. These strategies highlight Canva's potential not only as a tool for delivering content but also as a platform for measuring and enhancing student learning outcomes in a more engaging and effective manner. While Canva's integration into ESL instruction demonstrates numerous advantages, including increased engagement, creativity, and collaborative learning, challenges such as digital literacy gaps, dependency on internet access, and over-reliance on templates indicate the need for teacher training and pedagogical support. Future research should explore the long-term impact of Canva on ESL learning outcomes, particularly in different educational settings and age groups. Additionally, investigating how Canva can be effectively blended with other digital learning tools may provide a more comprehensive framework for technology-enhanced language learning. Ultimately, Canva has the potential to redefine ESL teaching practices by offering a dynamic, interactive, and student-centered learning experience that aligns with modern educational demands and digital literacy advancements.

Conclusion

In conclusion, these findings underscore Canva's effectiveness in simplifying design, fostering creativity, and facilitating collaboration in ESL classrooms, aligning with established theories on cognitive load, multimodal learning, and sociocultural interaction. By offering ready-made templates, diverse creativity tools, and shared editing features, Canva helps minimize extraneous cognitive demands, encourages intrinsic motivation, and supports peer collaboration—all crucial elements in language acquisition. However, the data also highlight areas needing further exploration, such as the long-term impact of Canva-based learning on student language proficiency and the importance of teacher guidance to address digital literacy and ensure equitable access. Comparative studies examining Canva alongside other digital platforms could deepen our understanding of optimal technology-driven strategies in ESL instruction, ultimately contributing to more inclusive, engaging, and effective learning environments.

Acknowledgment

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