



Technology-Enhanced Language Learning and Integration

Exploring blended approaches to learning in community-based English classes for adult migrants in Ireland

Project Team

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Contents

Executive Summary	5
1 About the project	6
Background to this research	6
Research aims	7
2 The context for this research	8
Migration and linguistic diversity in Ireland	8
Learning the language of the host community	8
Community-based language support	9
Technology-enhanced language learning with adult migrants	10
Digital learning during the COVID-19 pandemic	11
3 Research methodology	12
Research design	12
Initial survey	13
Workshop series for tutors	13
Data analysis	15
Research limitations	15
4 Survey of learners and tutors	16
Learner survey – findings	16
Tutor survey – findings	17
5 TELL workshop series	20
Introductions to the workshops	20
Themes from the workshop data	21
Digital apprehension	21
Digital engagement	23
Adjusting to new realities	26
6 Learning from this research	28
Perspectives on online English language learning during the pandemic	28
Technology-enhanced language learning in the post-pandemic environment	29
Digital resource pack for Fáilte Isteach tutors	30
7 Future directions	31
Concluding remarks	31
Recommendations for practice	31
References	33

Executive Summary

This research project was developed in partnership with the Third Age 'Fáilte Isteach' initiative which enables volunteer tutors, particularly older people, to welcome migrants and promote integration through informal English conversation classes in local communities across Ireland. The project considered the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on community-based language support for adult migrants by investigating the experience of online learning in Fáilte Isteach classes. It also explored how this experience might enable blended approaches to learning in these informal language classes in the post-pandemic environment. This mixed-methods research involved a survey of Fáilte Isteach learners and tutors to understand their online learning experience during the pandemic. Informed by the findings of the survey, a six-week series of training workshops was then provided for Fáilte Isteach tutors in which they could engage with accessible digital tools, discuss the role of technology in their classes, and create technology-enhanced language learning resources for use with their own learners.

Analysis of the data from the survey and the workshop series revealed challenges associated with online learning during the pandemic, particularly in relation to learners' access to technology, learners' and tutors' digital skills, and the lack of social interaction in remote learning. However, both learners and tutors expressed interest in some combination of face-to-face classes and digital learning. Findings from the workshop series indicated tutors' capacity for digital engagement and their creativity in developing technology-enhanced resources which could support learners' English language acquisition in either face-to-face or online learning contexts, and which could also enable out-of-class learning. These tutor-created activities are included in the digital resource pack for Fáilte Isteach tutors produced as part of this project.

Based on this research, the following recommendations have been made to enhance community-based English language support for adult migrants in Ireland:

- 1.** Maintain the provision of an online learning option for adult migrants who would not otherwise be able to attend face-to-face Fáilte Isteach classes.
- 2.** Encourage blended approaches to learning which 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 in Ireland.
- 4.** Enable the sharing of tutor-created resources, through digital collections of activities, both within local Fáilte Isteach groups and on a national level.
- 5.** Explore how technology can be used to facilitate peer support among tutors and to raise tutors' awareness of trauma-informed approaches to language learning.
- 6.** Ensure that the work of Fáilte Isteach is appropriately resourced to respond to changing patterns of migration and communication in post-pandemic Ireland.
- 7.** Nationally, provide greater access to English language training and digital skills development for adult migrants, in both formal and informal learning environments.

About the Project

Background to this research

This research project, funded by the Irish Research Council's New Foundations programme, was developed in partnership with 'Fáilte Isteach', an initiative of Third Age, a national voluntary organisation supporting active social engagement among older people in Ireland. True to the Irish meaning of its name, the Fáilte Isteach initiative enables volunteer tutors, particularly older people, to welcome migrants through informal English conversation classes in local communities across Ireland. In this way, Fáilte Isteach not only enables adult migrants to develop their English language skills, it also promotes intercultural understanding and a mutually enriching 'two-way' process of integration within communities.

The research was conducted as Ireland began to emerge from two years of social restriction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the many consequences of the pandemic was a move towards digital learning, including in language education for adult migrants. As research focusing on this educational sector is limited in Ireland, particularly in relation to informal contexts of learning, this project considered the impact of the pandemic on the community-based language support for adult migrants provided by Fáilte Isteach. It also sought to explore how the experience of online learning during the pandemic might enable blended approaches to learning in Fáilte Isteach classes. To this end, it looked at how face-to-face learning could be combined with the use of digital tools (by which we mean any digital applications or online resources) to support adult migrants' acquisition of English and their integration in Ireland.

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Research aims

The aims of this research project were therefore twofold. Firstly, it set out to investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted community-based English language support for adult migrants delivered through the Fáilte Isteach initiative. Secondly, it aimed to provide research-informed training which would enable Fáilte Isteach tutors to engage with technology-enhanced language learning, i.e., any use of technology to support adult migrant learners in their English conversation classes. This training had a practical focus on the development of activities using digital tools to support learning. It was hoped that tutors could then use these technology-enhanced activities with their Fáilte Isteach classes.

The research aims were:

- To investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the informal English language support provided by the Fáilte Isteach initiative through engaged research with adult migrant learners and volunteer tutors.
- To provide training on the use of digital tools to support language learning and integration and to enable the creation of technology-enhanced learning resources through a series of action-oriented workshops for Fáilte Isteach tutors.

Research purpose

Through an anonymous online survey of Fáilte Isteach tutors and adult migrant learners, this research first investigated the experience of online learning during the pandemic. Drawing on the findings of this survey and international research, the project then developed a six-week series of training workshops for Fáilte Isteach tutors which explored approaches to technology-enhanced language learning and integration (TELLI) in their English conversation classes. Participants in the weekly TELLi workshops engaged with accessible digital tools, discussed the role of technology in their classes, and created technology-enhanced language learning resources for use with their learners. The recordings and transcripts of the workshop sessions and two subsequent focus groups, collaborative artefacts created in the workshops (e.g., online whiteboards and slides), participants' reflective journals, and short surveys completed as part of the workshop series were analysed.

This mixed-methods research project thus responded to the following research questions:

1. What are the perspectives of adult migrant learners and volunteer tutors in relation to online English language learning during the pandemic?
2. Can technology play a role in supporting language learning in community-based English classes after the pandemic; if so, how?

During the TELLi workshop series, participating tutors were enabled to use digital tools to develop language learning resources which could support the acquisition of English among adult migrants and promote intercultural understanding and social inclusion. Among the key outputs of the research project was a practical resource pack for all Fáilte Isteach tutors, comprising activities developed by the workshop participants and information on accessible digital tools, to support their work with adult migrants in post-pandemic Ireland.

The Context for this Research

Migration and linguistic diversity in Ireland

Over the last three decades, Ireland has become a linguistically and culturally diverse country. The 2016 census found that approximately 17% of the population was born outside Ireland, including migrants from 180 countries. In addition, over 13% of the population reported speaking a language other than Irish or English (the official languages of the state), with the use of 72 languages listed in the 2016 census (CSO, 2017; O'Connor, 2018). Looking at migration patterns in Ireland, the rate of immigration peaked in the mid-2000s, fell during the global economic crisis from 2008, and then rose again with a return to net inward migration in 2015 (CSO, 2022a). International mobility was curtailed due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 but, by spring 2022, immigration had reached its highest rate since 2007 (CSO, 2022a). Preliminary results emerging from the 2022 census indicate net inward migration of over 190,000 since 2016 (CSO, 2022b).

Among Ireland's diverse migrant population there are many people who have experienced forced displacement. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 led to the activation of a European Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55 EC) to provide protection for displaced Ukrainians in EU member states. In the first six months following the introduction of this directive, Ireland accepted over 50,000 Ukrainians (CSO, 2022c). The number of people seeking asylum in Ireland has also doubled within the last year, with approximately 15,000 applicants recorded within the international protection system by August 2022 (Gallagher, 2022). In addition, state-sponsored refugee resettlement through the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP), which was launched in 2015 and has resulted in the admission of over 3,000 people, predominantly Syrians (Department of Justice, 2020), has resumed after pandemic-related delays.

Learning the language of the host community

Learning the language of the host community has been identified as a key factor in the integration of adult migrants, both internationally (Gazzola, 2017; Al Ajlan, 2021) and in Ireland (Gusciute, Arnold & Quinn, 2016; Mishan, 2019; McGinnity et al., 2020). Research has shown that proficiency in English, the 'de facto' dominant language in Irish society, can result in greater access to employment (Barrett, McGinnity & Quinn, 2017) and further education (UNHCR Ireland, 2013); it can also enhance migrants' opportunities for social engagement (Carson, 2008). It is worth noting that language is not the only factor impacting integration, research within the Irish context has shown the impact of race on migrant employment (Joseph, 2020) and a range of factors associated with forced displacement, including trauma, may further affect refugees and asylum seekers (IOM, 2021). Nevertheless, support with developing English language proficiency can help migrants in Ireland who come from language backgrounds other than English to overcome linguistic barriers to social inclusion.

English language training for adult migrants in Ireland is provided through the state-run further education sector and delivered by regional Education and Training Boards (ETBs) (Benson 2019; Mishan, 2019). However, the level, duration, and intensity of these courses in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) varies. A national review of this formal ESOL provision found the average length of courses to be 80 hours per year, with classes typically two to four hours per week; considerably less than international norms (Kett, 2018). Migration status is a factor in determining access to ESOL support, with differentiation between courses for refugees resettled through state-run programmes and those for asylum seekers and other migrants. For instance, refugees admitted under the IRPP are entitled to ESOL provision of up to 20 hours per week for the first year after they have been resettled in local communities around Ireland (Arnold & Quinn, 2016).

Irrespective of their migration status, most adult learners attending these formal ESOL courses are at an early stage of English language development, their previous educational experience tends to be no higher than the completion of secondary education, and some learners have limited literacy in their native language (Kett, 2018; Ćatibušić, Gallagher & Karazi, 2019a; 2019b; IOM, 2021). Research has shown that access to these courses may be affected by issues relating to gender, disability, caring responsibilities, and transport (Ćatibušić, Gallagher & Karazi, 2021). Availability of places is another challenge, as the ESOL courses offered by ETBs are often oversubscribed (Benson, 2019).

Community-based language support

Beyond the formal ESOL courses provided by adult education services in Ireland, many migrants attend informal English language classes organised within their local communities. Fáilte Isteach is the largest initiative providing these informal classes and currently has 170 groups across 26 counties, with over 1500 volunteer tutors supporting the integration of 4500 migrant learners (Fáilte Isteach, 2022). Established in 2006 by Third Age, a national voluntary organisation for older people, Fáilte Isteach involves volunteers, many of whom are retired, and adult migrant learners engaging in English conversation classes which are generally held in local venues such as libraries and community centres. These classes, in which volunteers work with small groups of learners, have been found to play an important role in supporting English language learning and integration among migrants in Ireland (Loxley & Lyons, 2013).

Ireland has a reputation for strong community connection (Gallagher & Fitzpatrick, 2018), so community-based classes may help migrants to access local networks as well as supporting language learning (Mishan, 2019). These informal conversation classes may also provide opportunities for intercultural dialogue and foster a two-way integration process (Chick, 2019). Their focus on oral communication may enhance learners' awareness of the distinctive phonological features of varieties of English spoken in Ireland, thus increasing their familiarity with Irish accents which can be challenging to understand (Migge & Chiosáin, 2012; O'Connor, Ciribuco & Naughton, 2017). In addition, the emphasis in these classes on authentic interaction and meaningful target language use may foster learner autonomy (Little, Dam & Legenhausen, 2017) and support ongoing language learning.



International research has shown the value of informal language classes led by volunteers as they typically have a flexible learning agenda through which learners can engage with topics of relevance to them (Borthwick, 2018; Etherington, 2019). This learner-centred approach has been found to support older, lower proficiency, and pre-literate learners who may find formal instruction intimidating (Chapman & Williams, 2015). Volunteer tutors and their learners are generally based in the same local area, which may help migrants to develop social connections and friendships, thus enabling integration (Etherington, 2019). Teaching approaches may also be more inclusive and community-oriented than in a formal classroom setting. For instance, language learning through cooking may attract migrant women (Tremayne, 2019), while activities such as gardening may be therapeutic for learners who have experienced trauma as well as offering opportunities for target language use (Chapman & Williams, 2015). By activating their existing skills through the new language, migrants have reported feeling more confident in communication and more motivated to take part in community activities (Chapman & Williams, 2015). Engaging in language learning activities which are meaningful to learners, and which enable them to develop their individual skills has also been found to promote wellbeing and to support post-traumatic growth (Palanac, 2020).

However, challenges have been identified regarding informal language classes. Studies have shown that access to funding and resources is often limited and lack of training for volunteer tutors is another problem, especially as tutors tend to be older people resident in the community or local university students rather than trained teachers (Chapman & Williams, 2015; Connolly & O'Shea, 2015; Borthwick, 2018; Etherington, 2019). Despite these challenges, volunteer-led language classes have proven an important supplement to formal instruction. In Ireland, considering the limitations of ESOL provision, the Fáilte Isteach initiative therefore makes a vital contribution to the linguistic integration of adult migrants and the development of intercultural understanding within local communities.

Technology-enhanced language learning with adult migrants

The use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support language learning among adult migrants has increased over recent years in both formal and informal educational contexts. Technology-enhanced language learning with adult migrants takes a wide variety of forms, from distance learning to blended approaches in which digital tools are used in combination with face-to-face learning (OECD, 2020; 2021). Online language classes for adult migrants have been found to be beneficial as they may be more accessible to women with caring responsibilities and migrants in remote areas (Spotti & Kurvers, 2015). Moreover, they can facilitate flexible learning, without the constraints of set class times, and encourage further self-study (Al-Sabbagh et al., 2018; Drolia et al., 2022). The use of digital resources can also foster language learning across diverse modes of communication and enhance migrants' access to multilingual supports (Wood, 2022). Digital tools have been designed to support integration, including language learning apps which use the local environment as an authentic resource for learning activities that migrant learners can access on their mobile phones (Jones et al., 2017).

However, challenges have been identified regarding access to appropriate devices and digital resources (Capstick 2020) and the lack of interpersonal connection in online learning with adult migrants. Critics point out the social nature of language learning, warning that online interaction cannot replace face-to-face communication and may reduce migrants' social connection (Demmans Epp, 2017; Gaved & Peasgood, 2017; Drolia et al., 2022). To combine the advantages of in-person teaching with the use of accessible digital tools, blended learning has therefore been promoted (Castaño-Muñoz, Colucci, & Smidt, 2018; Wood, 2022). Hybrid language classes, in which online learning can be adopted occasionally in addition to face-to-face classes, have also proven useful (Lewandowski, 2021).

Digital learning during the COVID-19 pandemic

The outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic proved a catalyst for increased engagement with technology across all sectors of education, as widespread ‘lockdowns’ forced a move to online learning. Language education for adult migrants was no exception, with various approaches taken across Europe to maintain the provision of instruction; these included transitioning to online courses, one-to-one online support, and hybrid classes for learners at lower levels of host-country language proficiency (OECD, 2021). In Ireland, both formal and informal English language support for adult migrants had to move online during the pandemic, with limited opportunities for face-to-face learning. While evidence has emerged that online classes may increase access to language education for some learners, e.g., migrant women, overall retention rates and learning performance during the pandemic are issues which remain under-explored (OECD, 2020; 2021). The lack of physical presence in the online classroom has, however, been identified as a significant challenge, particularly in relation to the provision of social and emotional support for newly arrived migrant and refugee learners (Busic, Hansson, & Sullivan, 2020; Primdahl et al., 2021).

The need for additional training in approaches to technology-enhanced language learning and the provision of appropriate digital resources is also apparent within both formal and informal learning contexts (Salem & Bond, 2021; Xu & Buckingham, 2021; Rahim, 2022). However, some positive initiatives have emerged. Salem and Bond (2021) highlight how, in a community-based language support context in the USA, individual assistance from student volunteers regarding the use of webinar software (Zoom), social media tools, and online language learning resources enabled older tutors to transition to online classes.

Support for learners’ engagement with digital tools is also necessary. The provision of digital training for learners has been found effective among adult migrants in the UK, with a study by Rahim (2022) showing how learners, from the earliest stages of English language proficiency development upwards, reported progress and increased confidence in digital engagement after a short training programme. While research conducted in New Zealand has revealed how teachers played an active role in supporting older migrant learners’ development of the digital skills required to engage in online language learning during the pandemic (Xu & Buckingham, 2021). By working in small groups and providing detailed instructions with multilingual support, teachers in this study enabled third-age learners who had little digital experience to successfully engage in online classes (via Zoom) and to access internet resources for language learning (Xu & Buckingham, 2021).

In the Irish context, McGinnity et al. (2020) have identified the potential of technology to support English language learning among adult migrants. To advance research on these issues in Ireland, this project considered the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the English conversation classes provided by Fáilte Isteach. By investigating the experience of Fáilte Isteach learners and tutors during the pandemic, it further explored how technology could be used to enhance language learning and support integration, looking at the potential role of blended learning after the return to face-to-face classes.



Research Methodology

Research design

From the outset, this project was shaped by the principles of engaged research (IUA, 2016; 2022), by collaborating with Fáilte Isteach on the generation of its research questions and the development of its methodological framework. The research was action-oriented by design, reflecting its objectives: to co-construct knowledge about the challenges and changes faced by adult migrant learners and volunteer tutors during the pandemic and, in partnership with participants, to produce outputs of practical value to enhance the work of Fáilte Isteach. As a community-based research project, it used multiple methods to gather the perspectives of both learners and tutors. It also nurtured a community of learning through a series of workshops for tutors which resulted in the development of tutor-created learning resources. Given its collaborative and pragmatic focus, it was therefore appropriate for this research to adopt a mixed-methods approach, drawing on a range of quantitative and, particularly, qualitative data sources (Dörnyei, 2007; Creswell, 2014).

The project was delivered in two stages: (i) an anonymous online survey of Fáilte Isteach tutors and learners 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. The overall research findings and practical outputs of the project were then shared with the partner organisation through a national webinar and the production of a digital resource pack for all Fáilte Isteach tutors.

Before this research began, ethical approval was obtained from the School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences, Trinity College Dublin. Aware of the potential vulnerability of some of the adult learners attending Fáilte Isteach classes, particularly refugees and people seeking international protection, learner participation was sought solely for the anonymous survey. The two stages of data collection, the survey and the workshop series, are outlined in this chapter.

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Initial survey

The first stage of data collection involved an anonymous online survey (on the Qualtrics survey platform), developed in collaboration with Fáilte Isteach's National Project Manager. There were two versions of this survey, one for learners (multilingual) and one for tutors (in English). Information about the survey, including weblinks for both learner and tutor versions, was circulated by the National Project Manager through the network of Fáilte Isteach local coordinators. This enabled local coordinators to share the survey with volunteer tutors and adult migrant learners in their Fáilte Isteach groups. Convenience sampling meant that any tutor or learner who received the survey links via their local Fáilte Isteach group could participate. The survey investigated the experience of online English classes among Fáilte Isteach learners and tutors during the pandemic, their use of digital tools, and their preferred modes of learning. The data collected from the learner survey was 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, 94 from tutors and 44 from learners. It should be noted that survey, which was circulated between January and March 2022, was affected by the impact of the pandemic on Fáilte Isteach classes. The majority of classes were still operating online when the survey was launched, due to the prevalence of COVID-19 through the winter of 2021-2022, and some Fáilte Isteach groups did not resume classes until face-to-face learning was feasible. In addition, local Fáilte Isteach coordinators faced considerable pressures during the survey period, particularly with the sudden rise in the demand for classes following the arrival in Ireland of thousands of displaced Ukrainians from late February 2022. However, despite the limited number of participants, the survey provided valuable insights into learners' and tutors' experiences regarding online English language learning during the pandemic. The survey findings could thus inform the second stage of the project, the development of workshops for Fáilte Isteach tutors exploring technology-enhanced learning in the post-pandemic environment.

Workshop series for tutors

Drawing on the findings of the survey, as well as international research into technology-enhanced approaches to language learning with adult migrants, a series of six online workshops was developed for Fáilte Isteach tutors. These workshops on technology-enhanced language learning and integration (TELLI) were organised in collaboration with Fáilte Isteach's National Project Manager and the research team, which comprised the Principal Investigator, the Project Partner and Academic Collaborator, and the Research Assistant. The team brought their expertise in language teaching and digital learning, as well as their extensive experience of research and engagement with refugee and migrant communities, to the development and delivery of the workshop series. The aim of the TELLI workshops was to create a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), which would facilitate the sharing of knowledge and enable tutors to develop technology-enhanced language learning resources for their own Fáilte Isteach classes.

Information about participation in the TELLI workshops was circulated by Fáilte Isteach's National Project Manager among local coordinators, who shared it with their groups. Tutors who were interested in participating then contacted the Principal Investigator who provided them with an informed consent form. Given the interactive nature of the workshop series, the target number of participants for this stage of the project was 15 to ensure that tutors could play an active role in the live online sessions. While 16 tutors initially consented to take part in the workshops, two withdrew at the beginning of the series, resulting in 14 participants.

The TELLI workshop sessions were held on Tuesday evenings in April and May 2022. These online sessions were 90 minutes long and were recorded on Zoom; tutors often stayed for an additional (unrecorded) 30 minutes for further questions. In addition, participating tutors had access to the workshop resources via the project's virtual learning environment (VLE) which was hosted on the Moodle platform. Each week, introductory resources and videos were presented on Moodle, along with selected 'digital tools' and 'ESOL tools' (websites and apps of relevance to supporting English language learning among adult migrants) in connection with the week's topic. A weekly reflective journal was also provided to facilitate online interaction and to support the tutors' process of resource development. In the earlier weeks of the workshops, a discussion board was included as well but, later, the focus moved to the journal as this was preferred by the participants. Recordings of the workshop sessions were made available for participants to review, and additional material, such as a compilation of resources covered in the workshops, was also provided on Moodle.

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

The first five workshops focused on topics of relevance to participating Fáilte Isteach tutors, based on the findings of the initial survey and a pre-workshop needs analysis completed by participants, and further informed by the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (CAST, 2022). Each workshop session was structured to enable as much hands-on engagement as possible with accessible and freely available digital tools which could support technology-enhanced language learning. Breakout rooms were used for small group discussion, which prompted peer interaction and additional questions. The final session was devoted to the tutors' presentation of the technology-enhanced learning resources they had created during the workshop series. These resources were also submitted via the reflective journal on the project's Moodle site. The atmosphere throughout the workshop sessions was relaxed, with frequent opportunities for the sharing of opinions and plenty of humour. This helped to establish trust and to create a small but vibrant learning community across the series.

Following the six workshops, participating tutors were invited to attend focus groups 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 the focus groups which were organised as two 45-minute sessions to suit tutors' schedules and were recorded on Zoom. The recordings of the six workshop sessions and the two focus groups were then fully transcribed to enable the analysis of this data. Anonymous online surveys were also developed so that participating tutors could share their views on the workshops at the midway point, to allow for the further negotiation of workshop content and delivery, and at the end of the series for final evaluation.

Table 2: Project data summary

Stage	Date	Participants	Data Collected (Tools Used)	Data Type
1. Initial Survey	January to March 2022	Learners & Tutors	Online survey – learner/tutor versions (Qualtrics)	Quantitative & Qualitative
2. TELLI Workshop Series	April to June 2022	Tutors	Online workshop sessions (Zoom): • Transcripts of recorded sessions • Visual/written artefacts, e.g., chat comments, whiteboard contributions, collaborative slides created in breakout rooms	Qualitative
			Weekly journals (Moodle)	Qualitative
			Post-workshop online focus groups (Zoom)	Qualitative
			Workshop surveys (Moodle): • Needs analysis • Mid-series evaluation • Final evaluation	Quantitative & Qualitative

Data analysis

The quantitative data from both versions of the initial survey of Fáilte Isteach tutors and learners were analysed using descriptive statistics, as appropriate to the sample size. A similar approach was applied to data obtained from the quantitative items included in the three short surveys for workshop participants.

Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2022) was used to analyse the qualitative data collected throughout the project. This included tutors' responses to qualitative items in the initial survey, as well as the various sources of qualitative data collected during the workshop series: transcripts of the recordings of the workshop sessions and focus groups, chat comments, other artefacts (whiteboards and Google slides) which tutors created during the workshop sessions, weekly journal entries posted on Moodle, and qualitative responses to the workshop surveys. Following Braun and Clarke (2019; 2022), the process of analysis involved: familiarisation with the data through repeated engagement, coding of the diverse sources of qualitative data, generation of initial themes, review and development of these initial themes, final definition of core themes, and further reflection on these themes in reporting the data analysis. This enabled flexible engagement with a diverse dataset and an inductive approach to analysis which was appropriate in the context of this action-oriented research.

Research limitations

It is important to remember that this research was a small-scale project which was conducted within a limited timeframe during a period of significant flux in relation to changing public health regulations and migration patterns in Ireland. As previously noted, the continued impact of the pandemic on Fáilte Isteach classes during the survey period, along with the sudden rise in demand for classes, due to the arrival of displaced people from Ukraine, may have affected participation. Also, the fact that the survey was online, as this was the most feasible mode of delivery at that time, meant that learners and tutors required digital skills to participate. Furthermore, to ensure that the online workshops were as interactive as possible, only a limited number of tutors could take part. Participating in the workshop series also involved a considerable time commitment which not all tutors may have been able to make on top of their voluntary work with Fáilte Isteach. Finally, ensuring greater gender balance among participants in this study would have been beneficial although it must be recognised that most Fáilte Isteach tutors are female.

With additional time and resources, it would have been useful to investigate in more depth learners' experience of the use of digital tools in the context of Fáilte Isteach classes, particularly following the return to face-to-face learning. It would also have been worth exploring issues relating to the impact of trauma on language learning and integration, given the complex needs of many recently arrived learners in Fáilte Isteach classes. Nevertheless, this project has highlighted some important issues regarding how volunteer tutors and adult migrant learners experienced online learning and what role, if any, technology may play in community-based classes in the post-pandemic environment. This is evident in the findings from the survey and the TELL1 workshop series which are presented in the following chapters.

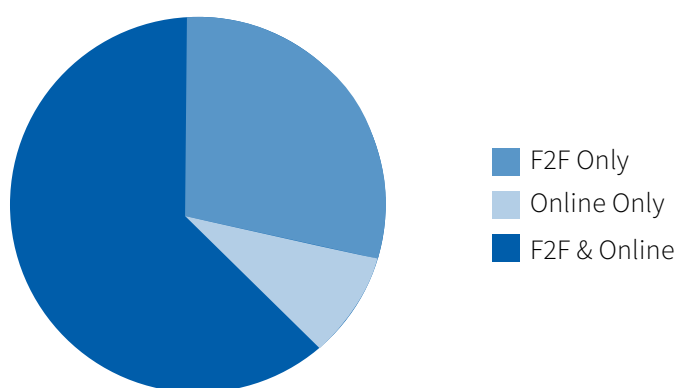
Survey of Learners and Tutors

Learner survey – findings

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% of them were female. These learners came from 20 different language backgrounds, and most (59%) had lived in Ireland for at least three years. Only 23% reported that they used English ‘a lot’ every day, with the following contexts for English language use recorded most frequently: shopping or using public services, communicating with friends or neighbours, and at work. Many of the participating learners (41%) had attended Fáilte Isteach classes for less than a year and almost half of them (47%) described their English language proficiency as ‘Intermediate’ (according to their Fáilte Isteach class level). At the time of the survey, most (70%) were still attending online classes only, and 82% of them had attended online Fáilte Isteach classes during the pandemic.

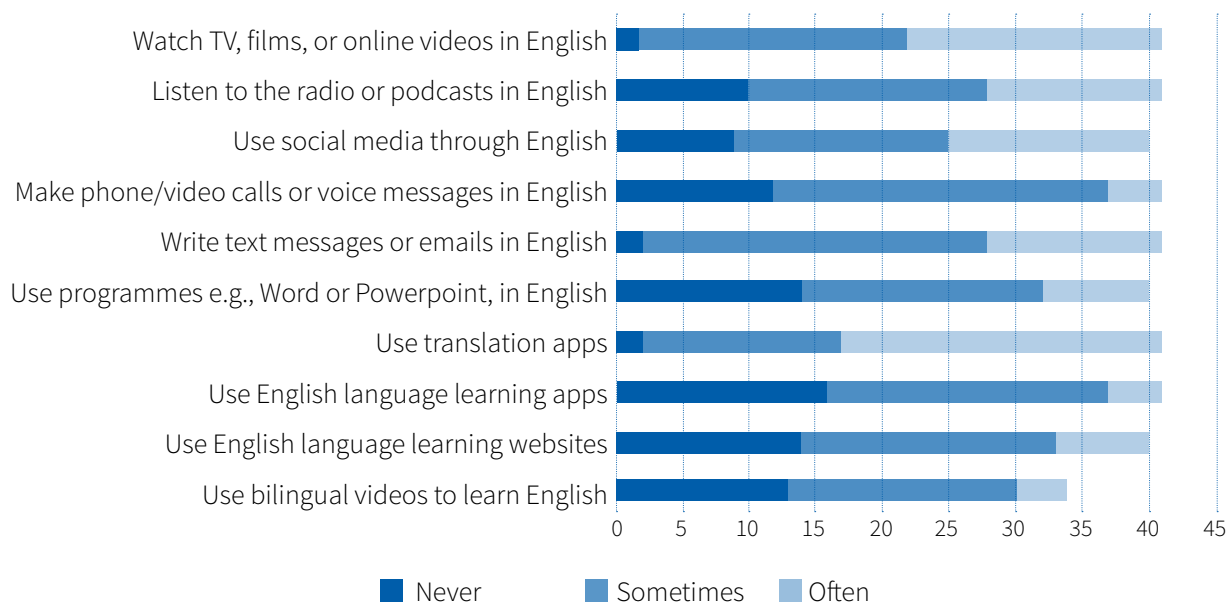
The 36 learners who had attended online classes were then asked about their learning experience. Most of them (71%) said that they attended their online Fáilte Isteach classes weekly and that they used computers or mobile phones to access these classes. Poor internet connection was the most frequently reported challenge encountered by these learners in the online learning environment. Other prominent issues included access to devices, concentration online, and speaking in the online classes. Regarding the mode of learning they found most useful, the majority (63%) of the 35 learners who expressed a preference chose a combination of face-to-face (F2F) and online learning.

Figure 1: Most useful mode of learning (n = 35)



All learners who took the survey were asked about their engagement in activities involving the use of technology which could support their English language learning. The activities they reported doing most frequently included: using translation apps, watching TV, films or online videos, using social media, and texting or writing emails in English.

Figure 2: Activities and frequency of engagement



When asked if they thought that using technology could help them to learn English, all 41 learners who responded to this question answered ‘yes’. They explained this view by highlighting the range of multimedia resources available in English, the benefits of digital tools for developing listening, pronunciation, and vocabulary skills, the accessibility of online learning, and how it saved transport costs and time. However, learners also expressed the view that face-to-face classes are better for social interaction.

Learners’ Views

‘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.’

‘Flexibility to learn remotely in my own time and pace.’

Tutor survey findings

There were 94 valid responses to the survey for tutors, 67% of whom were aged 60 years or over and 73% of whom were 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 held online classes during the pandemic described their experience in some detail. Their online classes were generally held once or twice per week with most tutors reporting that they had two to four learners per class although some had one-to-one classes. Their learners’ English language proficiency varied but most were at Beginner or Intermediate level. The digital tools which tutors used most frequently in their online classes were Zoom and WhatsApp. Analysis of tutors’ perspectives on the challenges and benefits of online Fáilte Isteach classes generated the themes presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Tutors’ perspectives on online classes

<p>Technical and environmental challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to internet/devices • Lack of familiarity with digital tools • Space and privacy 	<p>Continuity during the pandemic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling ongoing language learning • Social connection despite isolation
<p>Reduced engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less interpersonal interaction • Explaining concepts online • Motivation and attendance 	<p>Flexibility and innovation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saving time and expense • Range of digital resources • Learning new digital skills

Tutors highlighted the technical and environmental challenges in the online learning context, including learners’ lack of devices (e.g., computers) and other barriers to participation such as limited privacy in communal ‘Direct Provision’ centres for people seeking international protection. Tutors also mentioned their own, as well as their learners’, unfamiliarity with using digital tools. Many pointed to the difficulties of engaging in online learning, sustaining interaction, and ensuring comprehension, and how this impacted their learners’ motivation and attendance. The benefits of online learning were also acknowledged, regarding its capacity to support the continuation of English language learning and some degree of social connection during lengthy periods of ‘lockdown’. Wider benefits were also noted in relation to the flexible timing of online classes and how they could increase accessibility by eliminating costs relating to travel and childcare. Tutors mentioned the range of digital resources available and how these could be used creatively to respond to learners’ individual learning needs or promote intercultural awareness. They also remarked on the new digital skills they and their learners had acquired through the online classes.

All participating tutors were asked about 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 outlined in greater depth the advantages of using digital tools in their Fáilte Isteach classes. Themes identified in their perspectives on the value of digital tools are summarised in Figure 4.

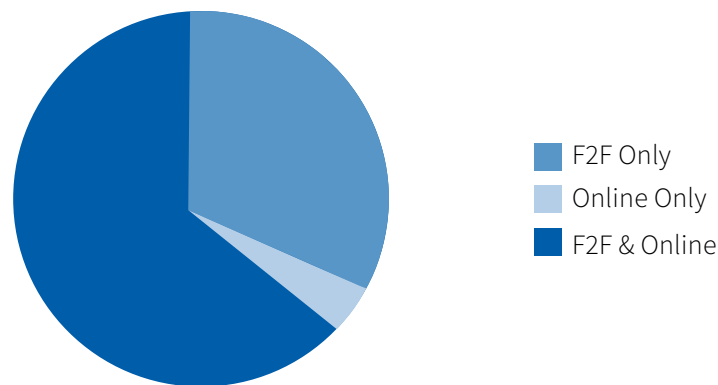
Figure 4: Possible use of technology to support language learning and integration

<p>Access and inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online option for learners who cannot attend in-person • Support for out-of-class learning, ‘complement’ face-to-face classes • Developing digital skills to access work/education 	<p>Supporting learner engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety of tools for different learning needs and levels • Multimodal learning – video and audio resources • Enhancing motivation, e.g., through interactive games
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These themes related to how technology could enhance adult migrants’ access to language learning and their opportunities for integration (e.g., digital skills for employment and education). They also highlighted how the use of digital tools could be used to support learner engagement and respond to different learning needs, preferences, and proficiency levels.

While most tutors felt that face-to-face classes are better for social integration, they acknowledged the role of digital tools in life and learning today. Regarding the mode of learning in Fáilte Isteach classes, the majority (67%) of the 81 tutors who expressed a preference felt a combination of face-to-face (F2F) and online learning would be most useful.

Figure 5: Most useful mode of delivery (n = 81)



Participating tutors highlighted the types of digital tools they had used in their Fáilte Isteach classes, primarily webinar software, messaging apps, and English language teaching websites. They also noted how digital tools could be used across face-to-face classes, online classes, and in out-of-class learning, and indicated types of tools they would like to learn more about, e.g., video and audio resources and interactive games. 63 tutors commented further on their interest in exploring technology-enhanced learning, particularly in relation to:

- Accessing digital tools and using them effectively.
- Enabling learners to use digital tools outside class.
- Developing competence in the use of specific tools, e.g., Zoom functions.
- Identifying appropriate tools for specific language skills or proficiency levels.
- Opportunities for further training.

Tutors' Views

'Online or digital support... would be a valuable tool to aid learning.'

'Most people now use technology so it makes sense to integrate it into our activities.'

The survey findings were disseminated to Fáilte Isteach tutors, via the local coordinators, in early April 2022 along with information about participation in the training workshops. Findings from the analysis of the workshop data are presented in the next chapter.

TELLI Workshop Series

Introduction to the workshops

A key aim of this project was to provide training on the use of digital tools for language learning and integration and to enable the creation of technology-enhanced learning resources through a series of action-oriented workshops for Fáilte Isteach tutors. This was achieved through the TELLI workshop series which ran for six weeks from 26th April to 31st May 2022 with 14 participants, ten women and four men. Prior to the start of the workshop series, participants were provided with access to the project's virtual learning environment (VLE), which was hosted on Moodle, and a link to an anonymous needs analysis survey which all participants completed. Most participants reported that they had more than one year's experience of tutoring with Fáilte Isteach and that they worked with learners with varying levels of English language proficiency, from Beginner to Advanced. At the start of the workshop series, six tutors were still delivering online classes only, with a further two involved in both online and face-to-face classes. The TELLI workshops thus came at a time of transition from online to in-person delivery. According to Fáilte Isteach's National Project Manager, by the end of April 2022, most groups had resumed face-to-face delivery with a smaller number taking a blended approach.

In the needs analysis survey, tutors indicated their experience with digital tools, most frequently mentioning their use of the webinar programme, Zoom. Some also reported using English language teaching websites, messaging apps, and translation tools in their classes. Tutors shared further information about their diverse tutoring contexts during the workshop sessions and via their reflective journal entries which they posted each week on Moodle. Their experience ranged from working with small groups of learners in face-to-face and/or online classes to delivering one-to-one online classes. Some tutors had worked with refugees and asylum seekers, e.g., through online classes with learners in 'Direct Provision' centres and face-to-face classes for learners who had recently arrived from Ukraine.

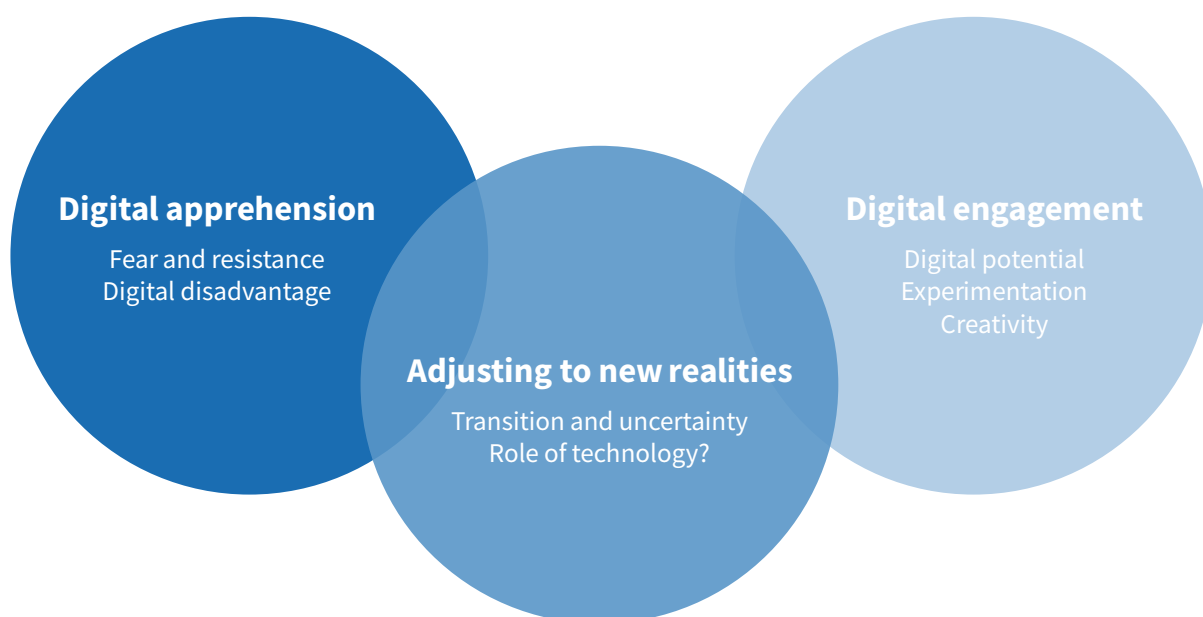
A key aim of this project was to provide training on the use of digital tools for language learning and integration and to enable the creation of technology-enhanced learning resources through a series of action-oriented workshops for Fáilte Isteach tutors.



Themes from the workshop data

The reflexive thematic analysis of the qualitative data collected throughout the TELLI workshop series generated three overarching themes: (i) digital apprehension, (ii) digital engagement, and (iii) adjusting to new realities. Findings in relation to each of these themes and their respective sub-themes, illustrated in Figure 6, will be presented in the following sections. As mentioned previously, an important objective of the workshops was to create a learning community and, as a result, the online workshop sessions and focus groups were very much collaborative discussions. In presenting these findings from the workshop series, tutors' perspectives will therefore be reported in an anonymous manner that reflects this shared context, rather than in an individually coded form.

Figure 6: Themes identified in the workshop data



Digital apprehension

The perspectives of tutors towards online learning during the pandemic and their thoughts on the future delivery of Fáilte Isteach classes indicated a certain degree of apprehension towards the use of digital tools. This apprehension was manifest on two levels, one related to tutors' fears regarding their own use of technology. The other linked more directly to their experience of online tutoring during the pandemic and the disadvantages they identified with regard to digital learning.

Fear and resistance

During the TELLI workshop series, tutors shared their personal insecurities in relation to using technology. In the initial needs analysis, some noted their 'limited computer skills' and one expressed their fear that the workshops might be 'over my head'. Later in the series, tutors reflected on how they had been 'afraid' of using a smartphone and how they felt 'nervous' and embarrassed about things going wrong when engaging with new technology in their online classes. Fear in relation to online security and scepticism regarding apparently free digital tools was also evident. Age was perceived as a factor contributing to resistance towards unfamiliar technology, as identified by one participant in the focus groups:

'The older timers would say to you, you know, IT over my dead body.'

Digital disadvantage

Tutors were also very aware of the potential for disadvantage inherent in any move towards digital learning. They highlighted some of the challenges they had encountered in their online classes during the pandemic, including problems with internet connection, especially in rural areas, and limitations regarding their access to the software (Zoom) used to host classes.

Learners' access to technology was another source of apprehension among tutors. The potential for digital exclusion was pointed out, as tutors were aware that not all adult migrant learners have the IT skills required to engage in digital learning. They also 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. Tutors noted how the smaller screen size on phones could limit learner engagement, as one tutor reflected in a journal entry:

'It was difficult for some learners as WiFi in the Direct Provision centres was not very good, some participants only had a smart phone so visual was difficult for some.'

The provision of resources for online learning was also mentioned, with tutors expressing mixed views on the existing digital versions of Fáilte Isteach textbooks. While tutors were broadly positive about the creation of their own digital resources, it was pointed out that resource development could be time consuming.

Above all, the perceived lack of a social aspect to online learning was highlighted by tutors. They talked about 'missing that human interaction' and how it was 'hard to build up a rapport' with learners in the online classroom, agreeing that the face-to-face learning experience is preferable. As a tutor said in one of the workshops:

'It's not the same dynamic online as it was in face-to-face.'

This absence of interpersonal connection may have contributed to unpredictable attendance and generally smaller numbers of learners engaging in online learning, another issue mentioned by tutors in the workshops. Tutors also pointed out how online classes seemed particularly challenging for learners in Beginner level classes and how learners' concentration and motivation levels appeared to be lower online.



Digital engagement

Coinciding and contrasting with digital apprehension, another theme identified across the workshop data concerned tutors' engagement with technology-enhanced language learning. This related to participants' experience of online tutoring, their capacity for experimentation with digital tools during the TELLi workshop series, and their own creation of technology-enhanced resources for use with learners in their Fáilte Isteach classes.

Digital potential

Based on their tutoring experience during the pandemic, participants highlighted some of the advantages of online learning both in their discussions during the workshop sessions and focus groups, and in their journal reflections. Tutors identified key benefits of online learning as its flexibility and convenience, which meant they could arrange classes at times that best suited themselves and their learners, e.g., making classes more accessible for women with small children. Group discussions in the workshops highlighted some of these advantages, including, as one tutor reported, how they could offer options beyond the weekly two-hour sessions in a specific physical venue which would be typical of most Fáilte Isteach classes:

'The benefits are kind of reaching more people, and flexibility around times and also, then the options for additional classes.'

Another benefit mentioned was that no travel or additional expenses were involved in online classes. Some participants who had engaged in online tutoring described the experience as better than they had anticipated and provided examples of positive online learning experiences in their journal entries. Opportunities for fostering learner autonomy were evident in these reflections; one tutor noted how their online classes enabled their learners to take more control of their own learning, another pointed out how technology-enhanced resources could be used in tandem with face-to-face classes to support 'self-directed' learning. Drawing on their online experience, tutors thus identified the use of digital tools as a potential support for learning in the post-pandemic environment.

Experimentation

The theme of digital engagement also connected to how tutors engaged with the workshops and their capacity for experimenting with digital tools. In the pre-workshop needs analysis survey and the first weekly journal, tutors expressed their individual goals regarding participation in this project. These included exploring the use of digital tools to 'complement' face-to-face classes, to support out-of-class learning, and to develop 'fun' interactive activities through a blended approach to learning. In response to these aspirations and the findings of the initial survey, a range of accessible digital tools (including Zoom functions, Google apps, tools for creating and/or using videos, polls, quizzes, collaborative activities, and multilingual resources) were demonstrated in the workshop sessions, with numerous opportunities for hands-on engagement. Tutors took an active role in this process of experimentation. Some tools were trialled with mixed success, for instance, the use of QR codes for interactive applications proved quite challenging. Tutors' capacity to critique and evaluate tools became increasingly evident, e.g., comparing whiteboard and chat functions on Zoom. These critical discussions were important because they validated tutors' own autonomy in their decisions regarding their use of (any) digital tools and revealed how their choices were guided by their learners' needs. The notion of risk-taking was also apparent throughout the workshop series, with tutors recognising how the pandemic had forced them into new territory and prompted innovation, as one commented:

'I think it's all about moving beyond your comfort zone. And then hopefully finding it's not quite so uncomfortable as you thought.'

Tutors mentioned 'learning rapidly' during the TELLi workshop series and being 'excited' about trying out the digital tools covered. The course of experimentation was not necessarily smooth; one tutor described this process as a combination of 'play' and 'struggling', while others indicated that they felt their progress during the workshops was not always linear. Learning from one another was a prominent feature of the workshops and this enabled participants to foster a community of learning. As one tutor noted in a journal entry:

'We are very much on our own and it is interesting to exchange notes and ideas on how other tutors facilitate classes.'

There were many examples of peer support throughout the series, through the sharing of ideas, useful links, and contacts. Learning from peers' resource ideas was also regarded as valuable, while encouragement from the researchers, through the provision of individual feedback on their journal reflections and through the trialling of tools in the workshop sessions, was identified as an aid to engagement. This support enabled tutors to overcome their own fears regarding the use of digital resources, as one tutor reflected in their focus group:

'I was almost giving up, what about the fourth week I thought, I'll never learn this. And then [Researcher] you give me some encouragement.'

The importance of ongoing learning and practice with digital tools was also highlighted. Tutors expressed a desire to review the material covered in the workshops, which one referred to as a 'beginning', in their exploration of technology-enhanced language learning with their Fáilte Isteach classes. Overall, tutors viewed the workshop series as a 'unique facility' which was of 'huge benefit' to them in their work with Fáilte Isteach. This was apparent in tutors' feedback on the workshops, for example, this comment:

'Thank you so much for all the ideas. It has given me a lot to think about how we can improve our service. A fantastic course.'

Creativity

Tutors' digital engagement was particularly apparent in their process of resource creation which resulted in a range of innovative activities, guided by their learners' needs and interests, which they could use in their own (face-to-face or online) Fáilte Isteach classes. The completed resource ideas 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, an audio and video enhanced presentation, a collaborative digital illustration of verb forms, digitally generated word games, and a journey planning activity using public transport websites and apps. These completed activities were then compiled as part of a digital resource pack for all Fáilte Isteach tutors.

The digital tools chosen by tutors in the creation of these resource ideas were freely available tools such as quiz creators (e.g., Google Forms, Kahoot! Quizlet and other puzzle generators), online video clips (YouTube), digital photos, PowerPoint, Zoom functions, and authentic online material from public service websites. In terms of language focus, there was an emphasis on the development of vocabulary on everyday topics (e.g., food, health, transport, dealing with public services, the local environment etc.), on listening comprehension, and on promoting conversation. Some activities also provided opportunities for a focus on grammatical accuracy (e.g., verb tenses or the use of modals).



Regarding listening skills, tutors mentioned the value of technology for developing learners' familiarity with Irish accents (e.g., through using online videos and tutors' own audio recordings). While the focus was typically on 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 created opportunities for intercultural understanding and integration support in the resources they designed, from the 'culturally affirming' sharing of recipes to learning about life in Ireland.

In the final workshop and the subsequent focus groups, tutors highlighted the potential of their interactive resources to enhance learner engagement in an enjoyable way which was 'not threatening', particularly for people who have come from situations of forced displacement. One tutor who trialled their video-based quiz as an out-of-class activity following an online class, shared feedback from a learner who said they found the quiz 'amazing' and 'super fun' and even offered some further technical suggestions. Autonomous learning was also supported by enabling choice and agency in these technology-enhanced activities. A tutor who tried out their photo-based activity with their face-to-face class described how one Egyptian learner not only explained the photo they had taken of a fig purchased in a Polish shop in Ireland but took further initiative by creating their own aesthetically curated video of a dish they had made with their chosen item.

Tutors who had trialled their resources with learners expressed their satisfaction with the outcomes of these activities, and how they exceeded their expectations:

'It worked better than what I thought, and really I picked something simple, because I'm at such a stage myself, you know.'

'I felt that it was really bringing in an element of fun and visual, and also, gave a possibility for further conversations in the future, also further quizzes. And I'm going to try and see if she might do some things for herself, if I can do it, she can do it. And I was delighted that I was able to use it with her and she enjoyed it, so I felt it was an overall great success.'

These successful outcomes indicate that a blended approach to learning, using accessible digital tools, can build confidence among both tutors and learners, enable learner involvement in creating these activities, and increase learner enjoyment and engagement.



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 COVID-19 pandemic and other global events which have impacted migration into Ireland. The sense of transition and uncertainty associated with such turbulent times was tangible among tutors involved in the workshop series. Looking ahead, they also raised issues in relation to the possible role of technology in responding to challenges faced by learners and tutors in Fáilte Isteach classes.

Transition and uncertainty

Tutors referred to changing dynamics in their Fáilte Isteach classes during the return to face-to-face learning. This was further affected by the arrival of rising numbers of people seeking refuge in Ireland, both Ukrainians and people from other countries, which resulted in an increased demand for English conversation classes.

Participants in the workshops were confronting these issues directly, for instance, one tutor shared their experience of developing classes in response to the arrival of over 300 Ukrainians in a small town in Ireland. Tutors highlighted the need for greater awareness of trauma when working with people who have arrived from situations of conflict, and they mentioned how Fáilte Isteach has provided online training on trauma-informed practice. Tutors were also aware of 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. A tutor in one of the focus groups expressed their concern for people arriving in Ireland from, e.g., Afghanistan and Syria:

'I think already we're looking at a two-tiered system that is precarious.'

The resumption of face-to-face classes after months of pandemic-related restrictions therefore came at a time of immense flux and uncertainty. Tutors mentioned unpredictable attendance as they returned to face-to-face classes, one focus group participant noted how:

'Sometimes it can be a little bit overwhelming if there's a big crowd and you feel you're not doing them justice.'

Issues relating to the specific needs of certain groups of learners were also highlighted, for example, supports for older learners, particularly older refugees who may be 'intimidated by the language and culture' and older migrant workers, including skilled tradespeople who had been 'abandoned' by previous employers.

Role of technology in the post-pandemic environment?

Throughout the workshop series, tutors raised the question of how best to use digital tools in a predominantly face-to-face learning environment, with some proposing approaches such as building a digital collection of resources which could be used within their Fáilte Isteach group. In one of the focus groups, a tutor elaborated on how this could include online versions of paper resources, quizzes, and an archive of useful video clips, pointing out the infinite, multimedia potential of:

'This limitless library of resources... your imagination is the only limit on the possibilities'

However, tutors agreed that the success of such a project would depend on both tutors' and learners' access to adequate IT resources. Participants also advocated providing guidance in relation to the use of a core set of accessible, easy to use digital tools and emphasised the need to allay fears, particularly among older tutors, about technology-enhanced learning. The post-pandemic dilemma was articulated clearly by this tutor in the focus group discussion:

'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 reality that COVID-19 has not gone away, even if the pandemic-related restrictions have been lifted, and the risk of future outbreaks impacting classes, particularly in the winter months, was noted. They recognised the value of an online option for older or medically vulnerable learners and tutors, also pointing out that the maintenance of some online classes could help reach others who may not be able to attend in-person, particularly women with small children. One tutor with an all-female face-to-face group reflected on this issue in their journal:

‘They all have young children and sometimes miss class because of childcare commitments... If I became better skilled using technology I could possibly meet students at a more convenient time for them.’

The use of technology to facilitate peer support was also raised, with one participant recommending weekly Zoom meetings for tutors along with informal messaging, e.g., on WhatsApp, as these opportunities for communication were proving beneficial within their Fáilte Isteach group. This linked to issues around the role of the tutor which were evident across the workshop series. Participants pointed out that voluntary tutors are not the same as formally trained teachers; they should not have to be an ‘expert in English grammar’ or a ‘counsellor’, rather, they should be ‘inspirers of conversation’. Enabling peer interaction through online communication could therefore be a valuable additional support for tutors. Collaboration among tutors to build technology-enhanced resource collections for their Fáilte Isteach groups was also recommended. Finally, the need for wider community support for adult migrants was emphasised by tutors, with suggestions as to how this could further enable the work of Fáilte Isteach. In this regard, building on existing links with public libraries, which could include access to and development of their range of technological resources to support language learning, was discussed as a possible future direction.



Learning from this Research

Perspectives on online English 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 Fáilte Isteach classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. They highlight the challenges of online learning within the context of informal language classes in which volunteer tutors and adult migrant learners may not have the technological resources or digital skills required for engagement. Key technical challenges associated with these online classes, as reported in both the survey and the workshops, related to poor internet connection and learners' lack of access to appropriate devices. Further issues relating to the learning environment also arose, e.g., for learners trying to access online classes from 'Direct Provision' centres. This indicates the potential for digital disadvantage among migrant learners who may lack the technological resources and/or digital literacy to engage in online learning (Capstick, 2020; OECD, 2020; 2021). In addition, the deficit of interpersonal interaction in the online learning environment and its impact on learner engagement and motivation was highlighted by participants in this project, a concern raised in previous studies of adult migrants' online learning experience (Demmans Epp, 2017; Drolia et al., 2022; Gaved & Peasgood, 2017). Fáilte Isteach tutors in both the survey and the workshop series also felt that it was more difficult to build supportive relationships with their learners in the online classroom, as has been found in other online learning contexts involving migrants and refugees (Busic et al., 2020; Primdahl et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, some benefits of online learning during the pandemic were apparent from this research. Participants, both learners and tutors, appreciated the greater flexibility in the scheduling of online classes and how not having to travel to a physical venue saved time and money. Tutors also mentioned that online classes could thus be more accessible to some migrant learners, e.g., women with small children, and recommended their retention as an option in addition to face-to-face learning.

The possible advantages of online learning for adult migrants who cannot access face-to-face classes (OECD, 2020), and the potential for hybrid classes to maintain continuity of learning (Lewandowski, 2021) have also emerged from international research into language support for adult migrants during the pandemic.

Technology-enhanced language learning in the post-pandemic environment

In the initial survey, while both learners and tutors indicated that in-person Fáilte Isteach classes were better for social interaction, they also expressed a preference for some combination of face-to-face and digital learning. In the survey and the workshop series, tutors recognised the potential benefits of more blended approaches to learning to 'complement' face-to-face classes, a finding which aligns with recent research into the incorporation of digital learning into language education for adult migrants (Castaño-Muñoz et al., 2018; Wood, 2022). A positive outcome of the online learning experience during the pandemic was a growing awareness of the variety of digital tools and multimedia resources which tutors could access to support language learning and integration within their Fáilte Isteach classes. Tutors felt that these resources could help them to respond to individual learning needs in face-to-face classes and could support out-of-class learning. Practical examples of this innovative and learner-centred use of digital tools emerged in the resources that tutors created during the workshop series. These activities demonstrate how, in the Irish context, digital learning may provide further opportunities for English language development both within and beyond face-to-face classes, as advocated by McGinnity et al. (2020).

The TELLI workshops provided tutors with time to experiment, to overcome fears in relation to technology, and to focus on a selection of freely available, easy to access tools which were relevant to their own Fáilte Isteach classes. This process not only enabled tutors to create technology-enhanced learning activities for their learners it also highlighted the value of training for tutors (Salem & Bond, 2021). In addition, the need for the development of digital skills among adult migrants (Rahim, 2022; Xu & Buckingham, 2021) was raised throughout this project, both in relation to language learning and wider social inclusion. During and since the pandemic, digital engagement has become increasingly important in Ireland, e.g., to access employment, education, and information about public services, with the risk that adult migrants who lack adequate language and digital skills could be doubly disadvantaged. Technology-enhanced approaches to language learning and integration, within supportive, community-based Fáilte Isteach classes could, as some of the tutors have demonstrated through the activities they created in the workshops, enable adult migrants to navigate these increasingly digitised systems.

Another feature of the post-pandemic context in Ireland has been the rising demand for Fáilte Isteach classes, particularly due to the arrival of large numbers of displaced people, from Ukraine and other places affected by conflict. One of the issues emerging from the workshops was the need for trauma-informed training for tutors, which Fáilte Isteach has started to provide. The workshop series also covered a range of online resources, including multilingual tools, which may be of use to tutors working with learners who are seeking refuge in Ireland. To support the ongoing work of Fáilte Isteach with adult migrants in post-pandemic Ireland, participants in this project therefore suggested: tutor collaboration on the development of digital resources for their local Fáilte Isteach groups, further online training and support for tutors including in relation to displacement and trauma, some maintenance of online learning for people who cannot otherwise attend classes, and the provision of additional public supports for adult migrants, including access to digital resources.

Digital resource pack for Fáilte Isteach tutors

Through partnership with the Fáilte Isteach initiative, this research investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on community-based English language support for adult migrants in Ireland and provided training for volunteer tutors on the use of digital tools to support language learning and integration. In addition to contributing to knowledge in this field, this project strove for social impact through its practical focus on the development of resources for technology-enhanced language learning. This resulted in the production of a digital resource pack for Fáilte Isteach tutors across Ireland, which was launched, together the publication of this research report, at a national webinar in October 2022.

This digital resource pack which has been made available online to all Fáilte Isteach tutors includes a series of learning activities designed by tutors who participated in the TELLI workshop series. As well as supporting English language learning, these activities have an intercultural dimension which can promote cultural sharing and support integration in Ireland. They can be used with adult migrant learners in either face-to-face or online classes, and to support out-of-class learning. It is also important to note that the process of resource development in the workshops was genuinely participatory. Prior to publication, all activities were reviewed and checked with their creators to ensure that the published version fully reflected their innovative ideas. Participants in the workshop series made a huge effort to develop this set of attractive and engaging activities which will hopefully inspire further resource creation.

The resource pack also contains a collection of digital tools and online resources to support English language learning and integration in Ireland, including a range of multilingual tools, which may enable tutors to support learners in their Fáilte Isteach classes. Tutors who participated in the workshops, also contributed to this collection of resources and found it a valuable guide during the workshop series. We hope this resource pack will prove useful to Fáilte Isteach tutors and provide practical ideas on how accessible forms of technology can be used in creative ways to enhance their invaluable work in supporting adult migrants in communities across Ireland.

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Future Directions

Concluding remarks

The findings of this research highlight some of the challenges of online learning in the context of community-based language classes for adult migrants, based on the experiences of Fáilte Isteach learners and tutors during the pandemic. However, they also point to the potential of more 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 TELL workshop series demonstrated, hands-on training with opportunities for experimentation and discussion can enable volunteer tutors to develop their own resources using accessible digital tools. The resource pack developed for Fáilte Isteach as part of this project is testimony to the innovation and creativity of the tutors who participated in these workshops.

This research also shows that as Irish society becomes more diverse and digitised, the need for technology-enhanced approaches to language learning and integration with adult migrants is likely to increase. The recommendations for practice below reflect the findings of this research, both in relation to the vital work of Fáilte Isteach and, on a wider level, regarding migrant integration in Ireland. Acknowledging that this was a small-scale project, further research into language education for adult migrants in the Irish context is also recommended, particularly studies that focus on the experience of learners.

Recommendations 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 Fáilte Isteach classes.
- 2** Encourage blended approaches to learning which 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 in Ireland.
- 4** Enable the sharing of tutor-created resources, through digital collections of activities, both within local Fáilte Isteach groups and on a national level.
- 5** Explore how technology can be used to facilitate peer support among tutors and to raise tutors' awareness of trauma-informed approaches to language learning.
- 6** Ensure that the work of Fáilte Isteach is appropriately resourced to respond to changing patterns of migration and communication in post-pandemic Ireland.
- 7** Nationally, provide greater access to English language training and digital skills development for adult migrants, in both formal and informal learning environments.



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