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Online Resources for the EFL Classroom

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Apps and web-based Tools for the EFL Classroom

“Technology is best when it brings people together.”

Matt Mullenweg, Social Media Entrepreneur

In past contributions I have advocated for the integration of social media outlets (specifically Instagram, TikTok, Twitter and WhatsApp) in the EFL classroom. However, considering the number of educational apps and web-based tools currently available, principled decision making is as important as ever. This article aims to provide a brief overview of some of the available resources and make sense of what is free and what is not. All in all, it is my hope that this piece can inform teachers about different apps and web-based solutions that may be used in an ELT context and aid those who are willing to engage learners in meaningful language acquisition through edtech and are seeking for more insights on this matter.

Introduction

Making sense of the current profusion of education technology (henceforth edtech) often available as mobile apps or as web-based resources (sometimes accessible simultaneously in both formats) is quite overwhelming. While today there seems to be an edtech solution for every aspect of the EFL classroom (tools for classroom management, resources to develop language skills, solutions to foster collaborative work, apps to gamify language acquisition...) it is truly important to understand what is out there in order to make informed decisions when selecting edtech for our teaching context. This article presents the

reader with a set of principles on how to integrate edtech in the classroom and later provides a brief reference list of apps and web-based tools that may be used with the EFL classroom. The list was initially sketched out to help the pre-service English teachers we train at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Porto navigate these muddy waters. While the initial goals were to aid future educators in understanding which tools may be often used in an ELT context, it is now obvious that sharing this list with in-service teachers can aid one in having an insightful overview of the many possibilities available and ultimately, combined with the suggestions set out, make a more principled use of these tools. The way the reference list works in this context allows the reader to quickly identify which tools are free and which are not, an important variable considering that it is often impossible to sustain using certain resources over a period of time due to the costs that they entail. Within the list, it is also possible to click on a specific tool and visit its homepage.

Free, Freemium or Paid?

The companies behind edtech often navigate between different business models that shift from providing free, freemium or paid resources. While a free tool is often supported by ads, a paid tool runs ad-free. The novelty here is the freemium model. Through the combination of the words "free" and "premium," the freemium model offers the user basic features at no cost and charges a premium for additional or advanced features. For instance, both Voki and ELSA Speak run on this model. The difference here is that Voki provides limited features when using their avatars, enticing the user to pay for a subscription to make full use of the

visually stunning extras. It is often upsetting when we notice we are not allowed to save our avatar because we have used an advanced feature. ELSA Speak on the other hand runs on a different variation because it provides a 7-day free trial to test the app and forces the user to pay if he or she wishes to continue using it. When selecting edtech designed around a freemium model, these variables need to be accounted for given that public schools are not prepared to provide funding for these solutions, and it is quite uncomfortable to ask students to use resources that will later ask them to sign up for a paid subscription. While the next section will provide insights on how to select a tool, accounting for the cost variable is key when running an EFL classroom.

Making a Principled Use of Edtech

From identifying your needs, to researching available edtech solutions, there are several principles to follow to ensure that you make the right decision for your teaching context. The following list builds on my own experience and may be used as a checklist for successful edtech integration in an ELT context:

- 1. Pedagogical principles:** when selecting edtech solutions, it is important to consider how the technology will support your teaching and enhance student learning (Dr. Ruben Puentedura's SAMR model is a good model to keep under consideration). Look for solutions that align with your pedagogical principles and support your teaching goals.
- 2. Accessibility principles:** Consider the accessibility of the edtech solution for all students, particularly SEN students. Look for solutions that are designed to be inclusive and accessible to all learners.

Promoting equity in the 21st century classroom is paramount when teaching the leaders of tomorrow.

- 3. Data privacy and security principles:** Protecting student data is critical. Ensure that the edtech solution you select complies with data privacy laws and follows best practices for data security. Also consider any additional requirement made by the administrators of your school.
- 4. Interoperability principles:** Ensure that the edtech solution can integrate with your existing technology infrastructure (maybe your school already uses Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams or Moodle), to avoid duplication of effort and streamline workflows.
- 5. Usability principles:** The edtech solution should be easy to use for both teachers and students. Look for solutions that have a simple user interface and require minimal training to use. An overly complicated sign-up system and interface will ultimately work as a deterrent and impede learning.
- 6. Cost-effectiveness principles:** Consider the cost of the edtech solution. We have already explored the free, freemium and paid business model. If you work in a context where there is no budget for these tools, try to find an alternative solution that is free but will not compromise the previous principles.
- 7. Continuous improvement principles:** Technology evolves rapidly, so look for edtech solutions that are continuously improving and updating their features to meet changing needs and emerging trends. Perhaps the more these tools change, the more similar they become, but that is a topic for a different article.

By following these principles, you can select edtech solutions that align with your teaching principles, support student learning, protect student data, integrate with your existing technology, are user-friendly, cost-effective, and continuously improving.

EdtechSolutions for my Teaching Context

When exploring edtech, it is often easier to explore databases or curated lists than to conduct a broad Google search. These digital resources are usually created by educators for educators. The following lists are examples:

- [Online Tools for Teaching & Learning](#)
- [Practical Ed Tech](#)
- [TeachThought](#)

However, there are also ample opportunities to access online reviews, case studies and testimonials or learn more in events such as those promoted by APPI (the APPI Seminars and the APPI Conference are great examples).

The following table provides a brief reference list of apps and web-based tools for ELT that you may use in your teaching context. A word of caution! Given the speed in which these resources change, it is highly likely that some links may eventually stop working. Some resources may be bought by competitors, while others may go out of business. Regardless, when the time comes, I will revisit this article, update it, and ask the APPI eJournal team to publish a revised version of this contribution.

Model	Focus	Designation	Model	Focus	Designation	
Freemium	Formative Assessment	EdPuzzle	Free	Karaoke / Fun	Lingoclip	
		Formative			Sounter	
		Kahoot!			Lyringo	
		Mentimeter		Collaborative boards / Portfolios	Jamboard	
		Pear deck			Wakelet	
		Plickers			Microsoft Whiteboard	
		Quizizz	Trello			
		Quizlet	weebly			
		Socrative	Padlet			
		Free	Survey & Formative assessment	Google Forms	Freemium	Mind maps
Microsoft Forms	Coggle					
TypeForm	Mindomo					
Freemium	Survey	Survey Monkey	Free	Word clouds		
	Content Creation	Canva				WordArt
		Easelly			Wordle	
		Genial.ly			Wordsift	
		Infogram			Wordclouds	
		Piktochart			Tagxedo	
		Venngage	MonkeyLearn			

Editor's Note

It is not possible to include every hyperlink in this table; we will provide a like to an MSWord copy where you will find active hyperlinks.

CLICK HERE



Miscellaneous					
Free	General Speaking, Pronunciation, Listening, etc.	Flip	Freemium	Classroom management, Gamification, etc.	Class Dojo
		YouGlish			Nearpod
		toPhonetics			Deck Toys
		Inogolo			Kialo
		Audacity			Wordwall
		Radio Garden			Bamboozle
	Augmented worksheets	Liveworksheets			Voki
Test-English		Pixton			
Wizer.me		Story Jumper			
Freemium					

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Final Thoughts

While there is a growing corpus of academic literature on edtech, as educators, we should always remember that depending on the group, the teaching context, the level... the right resource can provide students with personalised learning experiences, interactive and engaging content, and immediate feedback, which can enhance the learning process. Edtech can easily provide learning materials to augment (or replace) those featured in a coursebook, making it easier for teachers to teach unplugged and students to explore and engage with the English language meaningfully. Additionally, edtech can offer flexibility to introduce contemporary educational frameworks such as the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) which provides a more inclusive approach to teaching and learning. Overall, the use of edtech in ELT can improve student engagement, motivation, and outcomes, while also providing teachers with tools to teach more efficiently. By the end of the day, it is my hope that this article inspires teachers to enrich and extend teaching practices, foster a blended approach to language teaching (and learning) and truly engage the 21st century learner to boldly go where no classroom has gone before.





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