



## ICT and Educational Apps for Enhancing Language Teaching and Learning Process

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### Abstract

*With the tremendous changes occurring in the world of technology every aspect of our life changes in split seconds. Naturally, educational process which involves progressive, technology-oriented youth couldn't remain unaffected. Technology continues to get more and more popular especially among young generation; meanwhile, classroom attention spans are getting shorter and shorter.*

*With these rapid changes and consequently new requirements ESL teachers have to hop on board before the train leaves. Keeping the attention of a student while you're teaching may seem difficult at times, but not when you include technology into your curriculum. By working with technology, using some of the educational apps will effectively assist teachers and boost the learning process adding a new dimension to teaching. Besides, it'll offer students a break from the traditional classroom, while still reinforcing the skills they are learning.*

*The use of technology for language learning has been employed at Yerevan State University for quite a while successfully using various educational apps broadening world vision of Armenian students, enhancing their motivation and making them more aware of events going on worldwide while learning new skills by non-traditional but still effective ways of learning.*

With the development of modern technology, it has become obvious that it is highly unlikely to imagine any sphere of our life without immediate impact of technological devices. Likewise, education couldn't stay aside without being influenced by technological advancements. In the beginning, there were some concerns regarding the positivity of such a role due to overwhelming and sometimes unreliable and even misleading influx of internet information. However, gradually practitioners got convinced that positive sides greatly outnumbered the negative ones when smartly monitored by the teacher, and currently, we can clearly see that educational system has been positively transformed and developed due to integration of technology. This transformation helps to reflect the changing nature of technological use in today's globalized world and leaves no doubt that the role of technology in education nowadays is essential and actually enhances teaching and learning process, spurs student motivation and sets incentives for a more creative and efficient work.

In this article we make an attempt to focus on the role of technology for language teaching and learning, examining some of the educational apps that can enhance this process. This leads to significant improvement in teacher and student confidence with ICT [1] and today's students having grown up in our digitalized world can't even imagine their life without numerous gadgets. Although there is still unequal access to technology throughout the world [2], evidently, it increases day by day, and almost every school, educational and social institution has an access to the internet, and most of the students possess either smartphone, laptop or other digital gadget.

Actually, not neglecting the role of traditional time-tested methods of teaching languages, technology-mediated language learning approaches have proven to be highly successful and fruitful when technology is smartly integrated into the overall learning process and where it is used as a cross-curricular tool [3]. Besides, never should teachers apply "one size fits all" tactic since each situation requires unique approach to language learning depending on the level of students' competence, field of study and requirements. According to Rasool "Each situation demands a specific approach to language learning, and these circumstances dictate not only when technologies are introduced to young learners, but how they are implemented. It is also apparent that whilst technology has the power to utterly transform learning, there are occasions when it can actually serve to reinforce linguistic, social and cultural hegemonies, rather than challenging them" [4].

Practitioners frequently comment on how ICTs facilitate collaboration whilst also offering the potential for personalized, scaffolded learning [5].

ICT<sub>1</sub> indeed, offers endless opportunities to enhance language learning, making it more interactive and close to real-life setting. Numerous educational apps have been developed that can be used on Windows, Android or IOS platforms. These apps come in different formats and serve different purposes.

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Some apps come in ready-to-use formats where learners simply follow the instructions and select the right option. Those range from simple matching and ordering task applications to multi-level apps comprising various types of assignments directed to development of all language skills. Such apps like UNLOCK and NEWSMART can be distinguished for their effectiveness and flexibility. The former is a new series from Cambridge University Press, which uses thought-provoking videos from Discovery Education™ combining them with carefully scaffolded units providing a fresh approach to critical thinking skills. UNLOCK assists learners to improve their academic skills and language through online workbook that will lead to success in their studies. NEWSMART is an app that uses daily, up-to-date content from the Wall Street Journal to teach language particularly for those interested in business English and develop their reading and listening skills. Using such apps students have access to an incredible amount of English language material online.

As it was mentioned above, these two apps are among those that present ready-made lessons for multiple-level learners, but the content cannot be modified to fit the curriculum of a certain course which is important especially for ESP teaching. However, there are also apps that can be modified and customized by the teacher according to specific needs of students, curriculum requirements, etc. The most popular app that offers intriguing and fascinating ready-to-use video lessons that can be easily customized to serve a particular classroom is TED-ED platform with its growing library of captivating and thought-provoking videos. Teachers can either use them the way they appear in app or create their own lessons uploading videos from YouTube and complementing them with several types of tasks. Any creative thinker, visionary and teacher can make a contribution to foster the spread of ideas. It also provides teachers with a vast range of fascinating materials that can be adjusted to their set goals.

Among such a great variety of educational apps that can be adapted for language learning there are programs which offer certain formats for creating a lesson from a scratch. Hot Potatoes program, which is effectively employed at Yerevan State University, has proven to be quite useful and practical. Developed by the Research and Development team at the University of Victoria by TESL department, it became available as free software in 2009 gaining popularity among such English language software programs like MOODLE. The program suggests online and offline exercises in 6 different applications: JClose, JCross, JMatch, JMIX, JQuiz, and recently added The Masher. Through the use of the latter it is possible to join all the Hot Potato apps into one unit. Designed especially for foreign language learning it offers exercises like multiple-choice, short-answer, jumbled-sentence, crossword puzzles, matching/ ordering and gap-filling exercises.

By simply adding required content-based data and compiling exercises through this user-friendly application, teachers set tasks which automatically develop the webpages for students, ready to be uploaded to their server.

#### 1) JQuiz

This application creates multiple choice answer quizzes. Here it is possible to have a written text, with a time limited reading test, with four answers choices. The teacher may provide the feedback guiding the learners towards the right answer. It can also provide short answer, hybrid or multi-select quizzes. The student enters the answer in the text-field receiving the feedback from the computer. Here also four possible correct answers included by the teacher are available. The computer highlights the correct part of the answer.

#### 2) JMIX

The second application includes jumbled-sentence exercises. The teacher may suggest as many different correct answers as he wishes. The students may use the hint button which will provide them with the next correct word or a segment of a sentence if needed.

#### 3) JCross

With the help of this app the teachers can easily create crossword puzzles of any size to consolidate vocabulary. The clues can be entered either in word-form or in the form of pictures and the option of hint button is also available.

#### 4) JMatch

The app can further generate both ordering and matching exercises. The list of fixed items (pictures, or words or phrases) appears on the left and the student is required to match them with the jumbled items to the right.



##### 5) JCloze

The application creates gap-filling exercises. In this part, one true answer for each gap is accepted.

##### 6) The Masher.

Probably the most useful feature of the program is the Masher application which can integrate all Hot Potatoes exercises into one whole unit. It can also be used to upload web pages not created by means of Hot Potatoes to the [www.hotpotatoes.net](http://www.hotpotatoes.net) server. Additionally, color pattern and navigation buttons, the size and the font can be arranged and altered according to your preference to display on the screen. Furthermore, titles and instructions are displayed throughout whole testing.

Hot Potatoes ensures rapid and immediate feedback to every single question. The program is not limited to one particular language and can function similarly for other languages. A further benefit is that any creative language instructor is able to post a Hot Potatoes file and bring out the tests or send them to students and obtain the final results on the web in a safe and reliable way. Using the latest versions of Hot Potatoes allows the user to post quizzes to any online module created for this purpose like a class weblog.

The teachers may create and post the exam online, receive students' files and return the results at their convenience. Most importantly, by using Hot Potatoes apps it is also possible to include audio-visual materials on the website which is particularly desirable for the development of educational contents and leads to increased student motivation.

It should be noted that there doesn't exist any ideal app that can be used in every situation and can improve all language skills. Hot potatoes can perfectly serve to develop grammar and vocabulary, improve reading comprehension, but it doesn't offer enough student interaction and communication. The apps like UNLOCK and TED-Ed are serious tools to improve listening and speaking, develop student critical thinking skills, simultaneously making them more aware of the issues going on in the world. Those interested in Business English can successfully take the advantage of NEWSMART app. At YSU we never focus on any single application, but try to integrate all of them alongside main content-based course book combining all this with Power Point presentations, case study activities, student research project works, and other Web 2 tools such as blogs, forums and wikis. Such an approach encourages both teachers and students to become increasingly inventive allowing students to write or speak for a wider scope of people, expanding from classroom to international audiences, providing an opportunity to communicate in a real-life setting, thus, contributing to improvement of their language competence and cultural awareness. Only integrating the new along with the old can we receive fruitful results, keep up with the 21th century demands and hold student motivation at its peak by making them compatible to succeed and advance in this competitive, constantly technologically-updated globalized society.

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