

THE USE OF DIGITAL TOOLS IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: THE PROPOSAL OF A DIDACTIC SEQUENCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the integration of technology tools in the teaching of EFL, focusing on the impacts and challenges these tools present in modern education by providing a didactic sequence as an alternative to reflect and explore the potentiality of using online tools. The study begins by tracing the historical evolution of technology in education, noting the pivotal role that the introduction of computers and digital games played in teaching methods. As noted, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift to online learning, forcing educators to adopt digital tools quickly. While this transition posed significant challenges, it also highlighted the need for ongoing integration of these tools into traditional classrooms. Through a descriptive-interpretative framework, the paper examines the advantages and challenges of using online tools in face-to-face lessons. Therefore, this study proposes a didactic sequence using platforms like Padlet, YouTube, and VoiceThread to enhance EFL instruction. Ultimately, this sequence enables teachers to plan lessons by blending traditional and innovative teaching methods, allowing students to interact with multimedia content and develop linguistic and cultural competencies while practicing their English skills, meeting the demands of the 21st century.

Keywords: online tools, technology tools, EFL teaching.

RESUMO

Este artigo explora a integração de ferramentas tecnológicas no ensino de EFL, com foco nos impactos e desafios que essas ferramentas apresentam na educação moderna, fornecendo uma sequência didática como uma alternativa para refletir e explorar o potencial do uso de ferramentas online. O estudo começa traçando a evolução histórica da tecnologia na educação, observando o papel fundamental que a introdução de computadores e jogos digitais desempenhou nos métodos de ensino. Conforme observado, a pandemia da COVID-19 acelerou a mudança para o aprendizado online, forçando os educadores a adotar ferramentas digitais rapidamente. Embora essa transição tenha apresentado desafios significativos, também destacou a necessidade de integração contínua dessas ferramentas em salas de aula tradicionais. Por meio de uma estrutura descritiva-interpretativa, o artigo examina as vantagens e os desafios do uso de ferramentas online em aulas presenciais. Portanto, este estudo propõe uma sequência didática usando plataformas como Padlet, YouTube e VoiceThread para aprimorar o ensino de EFL. Por fim, essa sequência permite que os professores planejem aulas misturando métodos de ensino tradicionais e inovadores, permitindo que os alunos interajam com conteúdo multimídia e desenvolvam competências linguísticas e culturais enquanto praticam suas habilidades em inglês, atendendo às demandas do século XXI.

Palavras-chave: ferramentas online, ferramentas tecnológicas, ensino de EFL.

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THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY AS A TEACHING TOOL

The presence of technologies in today's world has significantly increased. It is almost impossible to imagine a world without technological tools to help human beings accomplish their tasks. However, just in the 1980s, the use of technology as a teaching tool began to gain traction. With the introduction of computers in schools, this period was marked by the quick adoption of computing devices and the emergence of the first educational games, which aimed to integrate learning and entertainment, creating a new pedagogical approach (Papert, 2020).

Although initially limited by cost and lack of infrastructure, schools that could implement these resources began to see improvements in student engagement. Nevertheless, the use of technology was still restricted to traditional teaching models, merely a complementary tool to already established methods. Finally, the school community, in general, had realized that “the chalk and talk teaching method” alone was now insufficient (Lai Wah and Hashim, 2021).

This initial introduction paved the way for the rapid expansion of educational technologies in the following decades as the tools became more accessible and sophisticated. Educational games, for instance, were integrated as support for traditional classes, helping students review content more dynamically.

Over time, “various educational applications have appeared, e.g. applications that focus on learning English such are Duolingo, Lingualeo, Busuu, Easy ten, as well as the popular application Google translator or dictionary Abby Linguo, which almost all smartphone users have.” (Khalitova and Gimaletdinova, 2016). These applications helped students to have more alternatives and autonomy in learning English. Also, because students are now “digital natives” (Palfrey and Gasser, 2008 *apud* Khalitova and Gimaletdinova, 2016), they can easily cope with technological tools in a very intuitive way, using all of these new platforms without a direct instruction in terms of literacy. They simply download the app or log in to the website and explore the tool until they learn how to operate it.

When the COVID pandemic arrived in 2020, the way of teaching English as a foreign language changed one more time. This major event, the pandemic, forced numerous teachers to use online media to keep teaching. This process could have been more challenging and adequate for many educators due to the lack of time to understand the uses of online tools and online media properly. According to Mandasari and Aminatun (2022), online learning was not an alternative solution but a

compulsory one. Indeed, many teachers have inevitably quickly learned how to cope with online tools and online media. However, most did not do it by choice but due to the urgent necessity to keep teaching. Nowadays, after the pandemic, there is still a solid and urgent demand to incorporate online tools into face-to-face lessons, especially considering the inevitable changes the COVID pandemic has made in the teaching scenario. Working with online tools was completely necessary during the lockdown when people needed to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. According to Prabawati (2021), who conducted a qualitative research during the COVID pandemic, "The media help students to understand about the lesson easily and add insight and references, increase students' motivation and interest in the learning, learning is more interesting, fun, relaxed and not boring, prevent and decide the spread of Covid-19 and effective, efficient and saving time." For that reason, there is an urgent need to incorporate online tools into classroom teaching, regardless of the pandemic, once they can help with student learning and motivation.

As technology plays an essential role in enhancing language learning, the effectiveness of any online tool solely depends on the knowledge and expertise of the language teacher managing the tool (Khalitova and Gimaletdinova, 2016). That is why the objective of this study is to propose a didactic sequence to provide teachers with an example of how to plan a project using online tools in the classroom, adjusting and adapting the method to their in-person lessons, taking advantage of the multiple uses of online tools in EFL classroom.

This paper will use a descriptive-interpretative methodological framework to make sense of the available literature on the use of online tools in face-to-face classes and propose a didactic sequence that explores their potential and the use of their dynamic character to engage students. The paper's methodology focuses on observing and describing the phenomenon of using online tools as it occurs while interpreting and proposing a didactic sequence based on the observations collected in the available literature.

CHALLENGES AND IMPACTS OF USING TECHNOLOGY TOOLS IN TEACHING

Integrating technology tools in teaching has transformed contemporary education, offering significant impacts and presenting new challenges. As mentioned by Chhabra (2012), "infusing technology into education is really important as it caters to the needs of contemporary learners. The classroom environment, today, is

completely different from the traditional classroom.” The implementation of these tools in the classroom, however, brings a new perspective in terms of advantages and issues.

Some challenges can be faced while using digital tools and must be considered to prevent students from facing unwanted situations. Lai Wah and Hashim (2021), for instance, when working with pre-service teachers in technology integration have identified issues such as “limited access to technological devices, inability to apply pedagogical knowledge learned in real life teaching experience, and lack of experience in the use of technological tools”.

Indeed, it is reasonable to acknowledge the gap among students in terms of access to digital devices. Not all students have access to reliable internet connection or devices at home, leading to disparities in learning opportunities. This is especially evident in low-income or rural areas. Also, this digital divide can exacerbate educational inequalities, with disadvantaged students being left behind in tech-driven learning environments.

Not only that but since many educators need help in effectively integrating technology into their teaching practices (the motivation of this paper), some teachers may need more training or confidence to use new tools, which might result in underutilization or ineffective use of technology. Continuous professional development and training are fundamental to ensure that teachers are familiar with new tools and know how to properly use them to enhance learning.

Another challenge teachers encounter is the misuse of online resources. While technology can facilitate learning, it can also be a source of distraction. Students may become sidetracked by non-educational content, such as social media, games, or videos, when they are not the purpose of the lesson.

It is well-known that relying on technology often leads to technical problems such as malfunctions or network outages. These disruptions can interfere with lesson plans and create frustrations for both teachers and students. That is why it is fundamental to try to predict and overcome those issues when planning a lesson. Teachers must always have a plan B when relying on technology. Additionally, schools with limited technical support may find it demanding to maintain up-to-date infrastructure and resolve issues promptly.

Also, as more learning activities move online, data privacy and security concerns become more pressing. Educational platforms often collect vast amounts of

data on students and teachers, and there is the risk of this data being misused or compromised. The risk is even greater when talking about underaged students. Schools and educators need to be vigilant about their platforms, ensuring that student data is protected and safe from malicious people and that appropriate privacy measures are in place.

Regardless of the challenges, when it comes to advantages, many studies have shown that using online tools in the classroom enhances both engagement and motivation. According to Chhabra (2012), using diverse technological tools and systems can “make learning more interesting, motivating, stimulating and meaningful to the students.” Through technology, students can show their point of view, portray their personal style, explore themes and topics the way they like, and, primarily, participate actively in the processes of learning.

Also, working with online tools allows students to have literacy on platforms and applications that they might not yet be familiar with. This literacy process empowers students and permits them to navigate in new places, sharing and learning with their peers worldwide. Integrating technology into education can also help students become proficient with tools they will likely use in the workforce. In general, navigating, critically assessing, and using digital tools effectively is an essential skill in today’s society.

Nowadays, the use of technology in teaching offers vast opportunities for improving engagement, personalized learning, and access to resources. The key to maximizing the benefits of technology lies in finding a balance, ensuring equitable access, ongoing teacher training, and fostering responsible student use.

THE USE OF ONLINE TOOLS IN EFL CLASSROOM

This work was illustrated using three online platforms: Padlet, YouTube, and Voicethread. Although these platforms were designed for something other than education, they can be very helpful in engaging students in activities. As reported by Prabawati (2021), online media also helps the educator to teach more effectively and enables the students to learn more readily, specifically to fulfill objectives in a teaching-learning situation.

Firstly, there is Padlet. Padlet is a virtual bulletin board allowing users to create and collaborate on posts through comments, questions, and other resources. It can be used for a variety of purposes, including teaching and learning. Even though it

was not created for teaching, Padlet creators already acknowledge this usage. Once you first sign on Padlet, they ask you whether you are using it for “personal projects,” “as a student,” “as a teacher,” or “for business”. According to Padlet's online homepage, the “boards are for organizing and sharing content.” They allow the user to add pictures, tags, links, and gifs on the boards, making it fun and interactive.

Padlet can be very amusing and engaging to use. Sometimes, students feel bored because they are only doing passive actions, such as listening and reading, and Padlet allows them to write, add pictures, move, and reorganize a board the way they want. Once students enter the board, each can interact with the elements of the Padlet as they like. This personalized experience gives the students a sense of genuine participation in the lesson. Students can create their own aesthetic for the board, making it their accurate own material.

Secondly, there is the online video platform YouTube. YouTube has been used for education for a long time. According to Purva (2012), “The real advantage of using YouTube in teaching English is that it offers authentic examples of everyday English used by everyday people.” On its online homepage, YouTube says its mission is to “give everyone a voice and show them the world. We believe that everyone deserves to have a voice, and that the world is a better place when we listen, share, and build community through our stories.” YouTube allows students to watch a variety of materials, such as songs, video clips, and lessons, and to produce their own videos.

It is well-known that YouTube is a very appealing medium. It has been on the market of online media for a wide-ranging time (since 2005) and it is still a prominent media, with “over 49 billion monthly active users as of March 2024” (Mortensen, 2024). YouTube has become one of the most popular websites globally and is a tool that most students and teachers use. Through YouTube, students can get in touch with authentic material and produce their own. They can record presentations and post them; share their content with classmates and it is also a way to let their parents, teachers, and friends honor their production.

Finally, there is VoiceThread. VoiceThread is a web-based tool that allows users to create interactive presentations and share media. Users can add pictures, videos, and other media, but mainly audio to a presentation. It also permits other users to add comments to the presentation. Like Padlet, VoiceThread was not created exclusively for the purpose of teaching; however, the creators understand

and highlight this functionality on their homepage. According to them, it can be used for “professional development”, “interactive lectures”, “student presentations,” and “conversational practice”.

The podcast is an old media that is on the rise again. Regarding the Brazilian scenario, podcasts like Flow Podcast, Podpah, and Inteligência Ltda are top-rated among youngsters. Through VoiceThread, students can create their own podcasts, practice their English skills by talking about a subject they like, and learn to operate a media they probably do not know. The whole process of creating a podcast, for instance, might be a new engaging experience for students.

PROPOSAL OF A LESSON: A DIDACTIC SEQUENCE

Integrating digital media and online tools in education has transformed traditional classroom practices, creating new opportunities for language learning. In teaching English as a foreign language, using digital resources not only enhances student engagement but also expands their exposure to diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. Teachers can create dynamic lessons that foster communicative competence and cultural awareness by incorporating multimedia resources such as music, videos, and interactive platforms. This paper explores the application of three distinct online media in an English lesson, demonstrating how digital tools can support language acquisition while addressing specific linguistic goals in line with the Brazilian National Common Curricular Base (BNCC).

According to (DOLZ et al., 2004), a didactic sequence is an organized set of activities planned to develop communicative skills around specific textual genres. Therefore, this work will illustrate a didactic sequence where three online media are going to be used for education. In these sequences, students will analyze two texts comparing two songs with the same theme but different cultural repertoires. By examining the texts in question, students can explore a new sociocultural repertoire, learn new vocabulary, and study the grammatical aspects of comparative adjectives. The whole project will be composed of 3 modules where students will be exposed to the content, have time to prepare their final project, and present it to their classmates.

First of all, it is essential to establish the learning goals for these lessons. Following the normative parameters of the Brazilian National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), this class will explore the following skills: (EF08LI13) Recognize

common suffixes and prefixes used in the formation of words in the English language; (EF08LI15) Use, in an intelligible way, the comparative and superlative forms of adjectives to compare qualities and quantities; and (EF08LI18) Build a cultural repertoire through contact with artistic and cultural manifestations linked to the English language (plastic and visual arts, literature, music, cinema, dance, festivities, among others), valuing diversity between cultures.

Following the methodological principles of the Communicative Approach (ZAKIME, 2018), classes should be taught in English to better situate students in the use of the foreign language and allow students to learn the language through an actual communication situation: classroom discussion. On the other hand, as the BNCC states, “placing the English language in its status as a lingua franca implies understanding that certain beliefs – such as that there is a “better English” to teach or a specific “level of proficiency” to be achieved by the student – need to be relativized.” Therefore, students can ask questions in Portuguese, using their mother tongue (L1) as a tool for critical acquisition of a target language (L2).

DIDACTIC SEQUENCE

First module

Firstly, the teacher must plan the sequences by considering all the material needed and even predicting some problems along the way. In every lesson project, there are some materials required. In this case, the classroom must have a computer and a TV or overhead projector to show what is on the computer display. Besides that, the school must have a good internet connection and open wifi connection for the students. For the lesson, the teacher must select 2 pictures (one of the Hollywood sign to portray the State of California, USA, and one of Christ, the redeemer to portray the State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil); prepare paper slips with the first part of the lyrics of ‘California Gurls’ by Katy Perry and ‘Girl From Ipanema’ from Antônio Carlos Jobim. There must also be a whiteboard, whiteboard pencils, and a whiteboard eraser in case the teacher needs to write some examples or answer questions on the board.

Once the materials are ready and functioning, the teacher must receive and welcome students into the classroom. Ask how they feel and give them time to settle into their desks. Show students two pictures on the computer: a picture of the

Hollywood sign representing the state of California and a picture of Christ, the redeemer representing the state of Rio de Janeiro. Ask students what they can see, and the name of those places, and elicit words in English they can use to describe that place. This first part of the lesson will allow the teacher to measure how much students know of words to describe things and places. If the teacher notices that students are having difficulty, this will be an opportunity to tackle this problem further.

In this first moment of the eliciting part, the teacher will explain the task. Beforehand, the teacher must prepare the padlet by dividing it into two spaces. In pairs, students must use a cell phone to enter the padlet the teacher previously prepared. The teacher will display the padlet QR code for the students to come into the padlet. One side of the padlet will be for the students to write words used to describe California and the other side for Rio de Janeiro. They will type adjectives to describe the different pictures. If students can not find words to describe it, they can use their cell phones to search for them and conclude the assignment.

Once this task is completed, review and explore the words the students provided. Ask them what class of word they are and stress the presence of words used to describe nouns (adjectives). The teacher will tell students that they will receive two pieces of paper containing the initial part of two songs. One of the songs is 'Girl From Ipanema' by Brazilian singer and composer Antônio Carlos Jobim sung by Frank Sinatra in English and the other song is 'California Gurls' by the American singer Katy Perry with the special guest appearance of the rapper Snoop Dogg. Elicit what students previously knew about the songs. Some students might have never heard of these songs, so exploring their first impressions of the lyrics is important.

Now, the teacher must use the YouTube video platform to play the videos of the songs. Students must follow the lyrics with their papers. Once the teacher has played both parts, they must ask students about the main differences between the texts and how the authors describe their home states. Students, in the same pairs, must use the *scanning* technique to find a class of words in the songs: adjectives. Ask students to read and circle the words used in the text to describe things (adjectives). When students are finished, read and check the words identified with them.

The educator should draw students' attention to a word in the song California Gurls: greener. Elicit this word class and ask why *greener* was used instead of *green*. Use this excuse to explain the rules for using comparative adjectives in English by

adding the suffix *-er* or using the words *more* or *less*. Write some examples on the board with the students' help.

Ask students to do an activity where they compare their home state or city with another English-speaking state or city. Students can use books or electronic devices to find information about other places. At the end of the task, check students' answers. Talk to students about how they felt and what they were able to learn through the class. Finally, set a homework activity using the online platform Voicethread. Tell students they will prepare a podcast about their hometown eliciting its features and what they like the most about it.

Second module

Students will have one week to prepare and show the plot of their podcast and another week to record and produce it. During this second week, it is important to guide students through two significant issues that might appear: the lack of linguistic knowledge and/or technological literacy. In this scenario, it is fundamental for the teacher to be familiar with the online tool in question (Voicethread) and provide students with some sort of example regarding the podcast.

In the second module of the didactic sequence, the teacher is going to set a time to talk to the groups that are producing the podcast and tackle the questions and issues they might have. Be prepared to repeat the instructions, help students with grammar, vocabulary, and content; and, mostly, be ready to help them navigate and explore the features of VoiceThread. It is mandatory to help them in this second week so they feel confident and can make significant progress independently. In the end, after two weeks of the first class, they will send the link to the presentation to the teachers' email address.

Third module

The final class is the most important moment for the students and the teacher. Most of all, it is time to contemplate the work done. Regarding the student's perspective, it is a moment to show their peers what they have accomplished and share it. According to Lopis-Rossi (2008), this project step involves feelings such as being emotional and proud of themselves.

On the other hand, this project module is where the teacher can assess the outcome of using online tools in the classroom and their students' performance. Here

is where the final work will be evaluated in terms of how much students were able to produce linguistically, how they handled working in groups, and how their literacy skills enhanced during the project. Ideally, at the end of these lessons, students will be able to speak more confidently since they had time and opportunities to practice; students will be more acquainted with online tools and more willing to search and study for themselves; and, of course, students will be more engaged in learning and sharing their findings through their perspective, letting their peers see their authentic work.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights technology's significant role in contemporary education, particularly in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). As explored throughout this work, integrating digital tools has transformed the classroom environment, moving beyond traditional teaching methods and engaging students in more dynamic and interactive ways. Technologies like Padlet, YouTube, and VoiceThread offer educators valuable resources to enhance student learning by fostering creativity, collaboration, and communication.

The didactic sequence proposed in this work demonstrates the potential of online tools to enrich the teaching and learning experience by encouraging teachers to use these platforms to explore and present cultural and linguistic content. This approach helps develop students' language skills and digital literacy, preparing them for the demands of the modern world.

Ultimately, the use of technology as a teaching tool holds great promise for enhancing language education. By blending traditional methods with innovative digital practices, educators can create engaging, interactive, and student-centered learning environments that reflect the demands of the 21st century. This work, therefore, underscores the importance of embracing technology in the classroom and adapting teaching practices to meet the evolving needs of today's learners.

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