

Choosing appropriate learning technologies

If you plan to use learning technologies with your learners, it's important to choose wisely and well. There is no point in using technology for its own sake. Technology needs to be integrated into teaching and learning in a *principled* way.

Technology needs to bring something to the language learning experience, not just in individual lessons (whether online or in the physical classroom), but throughout the course. With so many tools and technologies available, many of them for free, teachers can feel overwhelmed by choice. Here are four key areas to consider, to help you decide whether a certain technology or tool is useful or not.

- 1 **Availability and appropriacy:** What technologies are already available to you and your learners (e.g. mobile phones; internet access at school and at home, etc.)? What technologies are appropriate for the context and age of your learners? For example, if you'd like your learners to use their mobile devices to support their language learning, expensive data plans may make their use for homework or self-study unrealistic; the use of mobile phones in the classroom may be restricted in your school; parents may be resistant to the use of mobiles with younger learners because they do not see them as serious study tools; the content of a learning app you'd like your learners to use may not be culturally appropriate. What is *available* is not necessarily *appropriate*, so this is the first area to consider.
- 2 **Value for learning:** How does your chosen technology or tool support and enhance your students' learning? How does it support learning outcomes? Learning outcomes may relate to language skills (e.g. vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and the four skills), but they can also include important non-linguistic skills (e.g. digital literacies, critical thinking, creativity, intercultural communication, etc.). Also, ask yourself what added value the technology or tool

brings to the activity. For example, does it increase your learners' motivation and engagement with the learning materials? If so, will they spend more time working with the materials out of school? Motivation and engagement, which can lead to additional exposure to the language, can improve learning outcomes too.

- 3 **Time and effort:** How long will it take for you and your learners to learn how to use a certain tool or technology effectively? How much effort is involved? Some tools are easy to set up and use (e.g. quiz apps), but others can take much more time and planning (e.g. a **blog** or a **VLE**). However, it's not necessarily a case of the simpler the better. You need to consider how long you and your learners will actually use the tool for, both in and out of class. Let's take a blog as an example of a slightly more complex tool. It may take some time to set up a class blog, and it may take careful planning and time for your learners to use it regularly, but this is a tool that you can use over a period of time (e.g. a term or semester), and with appropriate tasks, your learners can produce a significant amount of writing and multimedia. In this particular case, the time and effort involved in setting up the tool, teaching your learners how to use it, and designing appropriate tasks, can be worth it.
- 4 **Digital skills:** What digital literacy skills do you and your learners need to be able to use the technology or tool effectively? These skills may be technological (e.g. how to create a blog post or a Word document; how to add an image or a **hyperlink** to a document), but they can also be skills related to the appropriate use of technologies in social contexts (see 6). For example, your learners may know how to add an online image to a blog post, but do they know that they need to respect copyright, and that they can use Creative Commons licensed images (see 35)? Do they know about various types of plagiarism, how to avoid it, and how to attribute their online sources correctly (see 36)?