

Mobile apps for ELLs: Supporting language learning with engaging digital tools

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Abstract

In our contemporary society, the ability to speak a foreign language is becoming more valued than ever before by prospective employers and, consequently, this ability offers greater opportunities and possibilities for students, both academically and professionally. Therefore, in response to this trend, language teachers are motivated to employ the most recent language teaching methodologies, resources and materials with their students, such as the use of ICT, Information and Communication Technologies, namely mobile learning, MALL. In this article, the authors will explore three mobile learning apps or digital tools that enhance language learning in engaging, interactive environments. The authors' focus will be on showing samples of interactive activities developed in their classes, as well as on sharing exemplars of work done by students.

Keywords: mobile learning; mobile assisted language learning; digital tools.

Resumen

En nuestra sociedad actual, la capacidad de hablar una lengua extranjera se ha convertido en un valor agregado para empleadores. En consecuencia, esto ofrece un mayor número de prospectos y posibilidades, tanto académica como profesionalmente. En respuesta a esta tendencia, los profesores de idiomas están motivados a utilizar las más recientes metodologías, recursos y materiales con sus alumnos como el uso de TIC, Tecnologías de la Información y Comunicación, particularmente, el aprendizaje móvil y el Aprendizaje de Lenguas Asistido por Dispositivos Móviles. El presente artículo explorará tres aplicaciones de aprendizaje móviles y herramientas digitales que mejoran la enseñanza de idiomas en entornos atractivos e interactivos. Los autores se enfocarán en mostrar ejemplos de trabajos interactivos desarrollados en sus clases, así como en compartir ejemplos de trabajos realizados por los alumnos.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje móvil; aprendizaje de lenguas asistido por dispositivos móviles; herramientas digitales.

RECENTLY, THERE HAS been an increased interest in enhancing students' language capabilities through the integration of digital tools, specifically, applications for mobile devices, thus providing a natural segue to more dynamic, technology enhanced learning "spaces" (Freire, 1970; 2000). In this article, we will address how mobile devices and apps can support language learning, how teachers can implement specific mLearning activities, guiding the students in this process, and, finally, they will share three digital tools used in their English language classrooms. As well, practical examples are included illustrating the integration of mobile apps in a variety of language classrooms and across all levels of proficiency.

Mediating English Language Learning with MALL

Mobile Learning or mLearning is a flourishing subdivision of e-learning (Chinnery, 2006) and has been defined as any formal or informal learning mediated via handheld devices, available anytime, anywhere (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2007). With mLearning, information and resources are always accessible, therefore, this pedagogical trend empowers learners by providing them with choices: when, where and how they want to learn (Crompton, Olszewski & Bielefeldt, 2015). When applied to language learning, mobile learning is often referred to as mobile assisted language learning (MALL) and involves any portable media that enhances language learning, such as tablets, MP3 players and even cell phones (Chinnery, 2006).

Current research has reported that mobile learning can be extrinsically motivating, as well as promote cooperation and collaborative work. Our students, Generation Z, are connected through social media 24/7 and [carry mobile devices everywhere they go](#). Therefore, teachers need to meet them in their connected, collaborative world to make their learning more meaningful and relevant (Jackson, 2015; Kukulska-Hulme, Norris & Donohue, 2015, p.7; Sharples, 2013). This active participation in language learning and teaching implies learners take more responsibility for their own learning, and that teachers support and enable this learning.

In this article, we will present three digital tools that can be used in an mLearning setting, provide details on how to create engaging activities with these apps and how to use them in the English language classroom. We will also share exemplars of work done by their students and offer suggestions, tips and recommendations based on their experience with these tools in class.

Hands-on apps in the English classroom

Three apps we would like to suggest you try in your classrooms are:

- Kahoot

- Edpuzzle
- Audioboom

These digital tools provide students with the opportunity to work on a variety of language skills independently, and also interactively, as you will see in the description provided for each tool. Every app is suitable for any level of proficiency in English and can easily be adapted to meet individual learning differences and styles.

Kahoot

What is it?

Kahoot (<http://kahoot.it/>) is a game-based, interactive tool that can be used in any school subject to approach any topic. Each Kahoot game consists of a collection of questions (a quiz) on specific topics. Quizzes can be created by both teachers and students; there is no limit to the number of players for each game. Players answer the questions in real-time by simply using a code provided by the creator of the quiz. Kahoot allows you to create many types of question (multiple choice, true or false, sentence completion, etc.) and to add pictures, as well. While playing a Kahoot game, players will be able to see their scores and their place in the general scoreboard after each question, which can be very motivating.

How to create a quiz on Kahoot?

To create a Kahoot game you should first access <http://create.kahoot.it>. On the top left corner, you will see a purple button saying *New K!* After clicking on that button, you will be asked to give your quiz a name and, once you click on *Go!* a new screen will appear for you to create the questions. The whole process of creating a quiz is quite easy because Kahoot made it very user-friendly. You simply create each question, provide two to four possible answers and identify the correct one. A picture can be added to each one of the questions as a mere decoration or it can provide students with a clue to answer the questions. Once you create all the questions, you can save your quiz and give it an engaging cover picture.

Whenever you want to play a Kahoot game with your students, you just have to open your Kahoot game and click on *Play*. By doing so, the system will generate a code for your game, which you project on the board. Your students can then go to <http://kahoot.it/> on their mobile devices (or computers) and type in the code as well as their names or nicknames. The names of each player will appear on the board and, once all players are in, the teacher can launch the game. You need to use the projector and the board throughout the whole game, as this is the only way your students will be able to read the questions and possible answers. On their devices students only see the colours that

correspond to each possible answer. Whenever a question is answered, your students will be able to see their place in the scoreboard and how many points they have.

Kahoot is suitable for all age groups, from elementary to university level students. It is an effective tool to support different learning styles and it works well in motivating students to learn and study.

How to use Kahoot in classrooms?

As teachers of English as a Second/Foreign Language, we use Kahoot quizzes mostly for review purposes, i.e, to test students' knowledge before a test or exam, creating quizzes that cover and reinforce concepts that will be tested in the actual exam. We also use Kahoot to review vocabulary items as well as grammar topics.

Included in the section-table below, are some of the ways we use Kahoot in our classes as well as some examples of the quizzes we prepared to review concepts. These quizzes have been carried out with higher education students at both the beginner and intermediate levels. The comments include how we used each quiz and suggest how they could be adapted according to the type of students you might have.

Kahoot activities used in the classroom

Level: Beginner (A1–CEFR)

Topic and skill focus: Vocabulary–Science

Screenshot and link

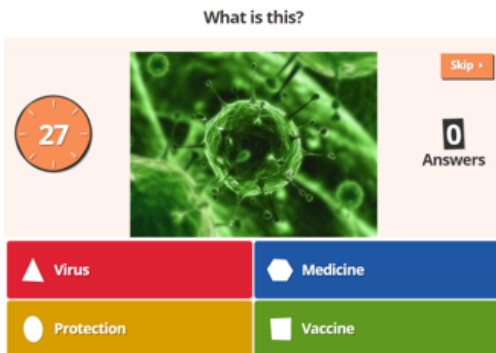
Kahoot Quiz Page

The screenshot shows a Kahoot quiz interface with the following questions and answers:

- Question 1:** "1. What is this?" (Image: A person in a lab coat).
 Answers: Stop assistant (red), Photographer (blue), Pharmacist (yellow), Travel Agent (green) ✓
- Question 2:** "2. What is this?" (Image: Microscopic view of a cell).
 Answers: Virus ✓ (red), Medicine (blue), Protection (yellow), Vaccine (green)
- Question 3:** "3. What is this?" (Image: A human brain).
 Answers: Brain ✓ (red), Shoulder (blue), Hand (yellow), Foot (green)
- Question 4:** "4. What are these?" (Image: Four small bottles).
 Answers: Hand lotion (red), Shampoo (blue), Perfumes (yellow), Chemicals ✓ (green)

Link to quiz: <https://play.kahoot.it/#/k/c4453e8b-0695-4072-8243-dc22eb0e5434>

Quiz projection on board



Student's screen



Comments

This is an example of a Kahoot quiz played with a group of higher education students in a Foundations Programme (a preparation year before beginning their degree), which focused mainly on vocabulary review.

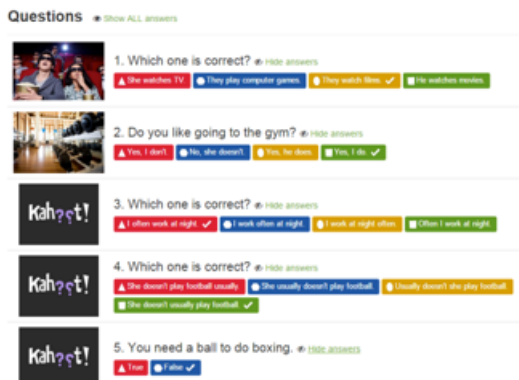
The questions are very simple and the pictures played a fundamental role in this quiz. As the students' level of English was very low, the use of visual aids provided them with confidence, and motivation to win this game.

Level: Beginner level (A2–CEFR)

Topic and skill focus: Grammar–Present Simple; Adverbs of Frequency (review for unit test)

Screenshots

Kahoot Quiz Page



Screenshot of results for question 1

STUDENT	CORRECT		INCORRECT		Which one is correct?
	ANSWERS	ANSWERS	ANSWERS	SCORE	
Student A	11	1	8869	They watch films.	
Student B	10	2	8034	They watch films.	
Student C	9	3	8284	They watch films.	
Student D	9	3	6983	They watch films.	
Student E	9	3	6883	They watch films.	
Student F	7	5	5366	They play computer	
Student G	6	6	5167	He watches movies	
Student H	6	5	5117	They play computer	
Student I	6	6	5067	They watch films.	
Student J	6	6	5034	They watch films.	

Comments

This quiz was used as review for a unit test. Students, at this level, were only able to answer short basic questions, consequently, these are the types of questions we included in the quiz. The second picture displays students' results on the quiz as well as the scoreboard showing who won. Students were also able to see which questions were more difficult for them by looking at their mistakes in the results (the screenshot only shows results for question 1). This data provided them with information on the areas in which they need to improve and what they should study for the unit test.

Level: IELTS prep course (B1–CEFR) **Topic and skill focus:** Vocabulary (Academic words)

Screenshot

Kahoot Quiz Page

The screenshot shows a Kahoot! quiz interface with five questions. Each question has a 30-second timer and 4 choices. The questions are:

3. An **ADVANTAGE** is a bad quality or drawback. *100 answers*
 True False ✓
4. A **SKILL** is... *100 answers*
 A certificate A degree A combination An ability ✓
5. Choose the word for the following definition: "a result of hard work" *100 answers*
 Education Influence Achievement ✓ Description
6. **PROVISIONAL** means... *100 answers*
 Temporary ✓ Permanent Central Definite
7. Write the word for "the knowledge that you get from attending a school, college, or university" *100 answers*
 Course ✓ Notes Library Education ✓

Comments

The quiz shown in the screenshot was used to invite the students to play a game on their bi-weekly list of academic vocabulary, which they needed to learn for their IELTS exam.

The language used in the questions is more complex and so are the types of questions.

EdPuzzle

What is it?

With EdPuzzle, educators can turn any video into an interactive and engaging lesson. You simply choose a video from online sites such as YouTube, Khan Academy, or National Geographic, or upload a personal video, and then customize it using the tools provided on the EdPuzzle website. Videos are quickly and easily edited and cropped; voice-overs can be added and breaks included where students answer questions, creating an effective and engaging teaching tool. These videos can be embedded as quizzes in sites such as Moodle or Blackboard, or can be assigned to specific classes, or individual students.

Student progress is easily tracked as assigned videos are graded by EdPuzzle. Individual progress can also be monitored through the data provided on how each student answers the questions. Once students have created their own EdPuzzle student-account, they can easily access any video assigned to them in their classroom or at home, thus offering the possibility of flipping the classroom.

How to create an activity on EdPuzzle?

To create an interactive video through EdPuzzle, begin by signing up for an account on the homepage, <https://edpuzzle.com/>. A short video on the site's homepage explains how to use EdPuzzle by modelling just what an Edpuzzle video looks like for students. New users are then guided through a series of pop-up windows showing them how to create their first EdPuzzle video. Included below are a few ideas to get you started.

Begin by downloading or searching for an appropriate video on your topic. On the left-hand side of the home page, there is direct access to many of the more educational online sites, such as TED Ed, Khan Academy, and Learn Zillion. Once you have chosen your video, you are then offered the choice to *Use* or *Save* the video. *Save* stores the video in the *My Content* section for future editing. *Use* takes you to the section where editing begins. The editing process is visually outlined, step-by-step on a bar with icons on the top section of this page: crop (a small red, scissor), audio-track (a black-grey microphone), audio notes (a black-grey speaker), and quizzes (a grey-black question mark). Each step in the editing process has a video, *Show Me How*, explaining how to use that particular editing tool. This thoughtful web designer considered every detail in making EdPuzzle user friendly.

Once you are satisfied with your video, click *Done* at the upper right hand corner of the page. Your video is ready to be shared with your students or, as with all Web 2.0

tools, other users. To share with your students, click *Assign*. Your video is automatically saved to *My Content* for future use. If you have already created classes, you have the option to assign the video to specific classes, prevent skipping and assign a due date. All of these can be done later by clicking on *Later*. If at a later date you wish to edit, adapt or delete your video you can do this under *My Classes*.

Students can easily access their video assignments through the [EdPuzzle app on the iPad](#) or on the [website](#). Once they enter their assigned class code, videos automatically appear grouped according to classes. Students can access videos from several class teachers. Teachers, however, must create and edit their videos online using the [website](#) on a computer.

Teachers can access a multitude of videos created by EdPuzzle users through the Search tab. You can connect with other educators through [Facebook](#) and [EdPuzzle's YouTube Channel](#).

How to use Edpuzzle in classrooms?

EdPuzzle is appropriate for all age groups, from primary students to adult, second language learners. An educator need only choose the appropriate video for their lesson. Students need only a digital device, such as an iPad, the app and an EdPuzzle student-account to access engaging videos, which effectively integrate reading, writing and listening skills.

As teachers of English as a Second Language, we use EdPuzzle for a variety of purposes, as it supports students' individual learning styles. Students are motivated and engaged to learn, consequently, they assume responsibility for their learning. Students also appreciate the flexibility and autonomy provided by EdPuzzle as they are able to work independently. Teachers appreciate EdPuzzle's ease of use and the systems' data analysis, tracking and quiz correction component.

EdPuzzle videos used with students

Level: Intermediate: Band 6 IELTS

Topic and skill focus: IELTS Prep–
Listening/ Speaking

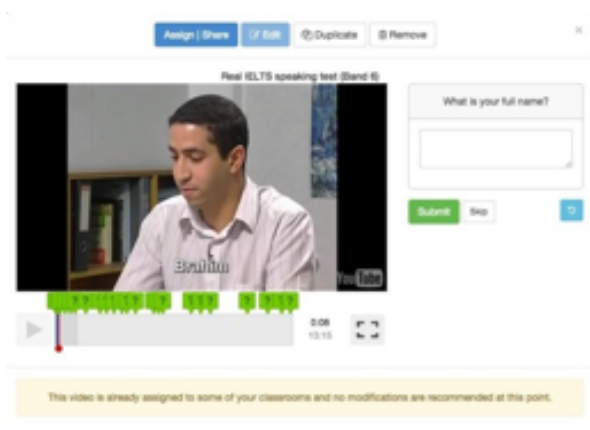
Space intentionally left blank.

Screenshots

Initial Editing Screen



Teacher's Screen/Completed Quiz



Student's Screen



Comments

This video is an example of a practice, speaking IELTS exam. The first screen shot includes the editing tools in the bar at the top. Our objectives were to provide students with independent listening [practice using an IELTS speaking exam](#). They were asked to

reflect on the speaker's performance and answer questions about the video.

Level: Beginner (A1 - CEFR)

Topic and skill focus: Listening

Screenshots

Teacher's Screen/Completed Quiz

Phanel's "Happy" in ASL, by Deaf Film Camp at CMT

What is happiness for you?

Submit Stop

01:28 / 03:12

This video is already assigned to some of your classrooms and no modifications are recommended at this point.

CNN Meet the UAE's first female fighter pilot

Who is Marwan?

First Emirati Air Traffic Controller

First Female Emirati Air Force Pilot

First Emirati pilot

Submit Stop

0:17 / 04:11

This video is already assigned to some of your classrooms and no modifications are recommended at this point.

Student's Screen

CNN Meet the UAE's first female fighter pilot

When did Marwan decide to become a pilot?

After finishing high school

After finishing college

After finishing elementary school

Submit Answer

0:00 / 04:11

Comments

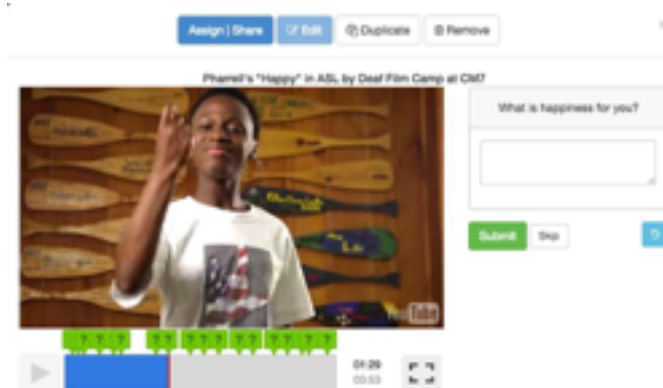
This quiz was assigned as an independent listening activity, using a culturally sensitive, yet relevant and interesting topic, Meet the UAE's First Female Fighter Pilot. Students were highly engaged, answering specific questions as they listened to the interview. Our objectives were to reinforce listening skills using authentic, culturally appropriate materials, as well as to provide a means for students to work independently.

Level: Beginner level (A2–CEFR)

Topic and skill focus: Listening/Vocabulary

Screenshots

Teacher's Screen/Completed Quiz



Student's Screen



Comments

This [music video](#) was used to reinforce and teach vocabulary in a familiar and fun way. Our objective was to rehearse and reinforce creative communication and language skills, which ‘bridge’ home and school, (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008).

Tips

- Quizzes with multiple-choice questions are automatically graded by EdPuzzle and marks provided for individual students. Fill-in-the-gap questions must be graded by the teacher.
- If YouTube videos are blocked at your site, the videos may be downloaded into your computer and uploaded into EdPuzzle to get around this obstacle.

audioBoom

What is it?

[audioBoom](#) is a voice-based, audio podcast and social sharing platform that allows you to record, listen to and publish unlimited podcasts or audio files. You can also follow podcasts from a variety of sports and media broadcasters, such as the BBC, NFL, or the Premier League, as well as purchase audiobooks, available through the online store on the audioBoom website.

This platform allows users to share and embed their content in other websites and mobile applications like Facebook, Google+, Twitter and in email, making it much more dynamic, interconnected and fun. Like many of the web-based tools, audioBoom started as a website that soon after their initial success, evolved into an application for iOS and Android devices.

How to create a Boo?

The first step is to [download the app](#), then sign up by filling in your details; or if you are a Twitter user, you can log in to audioBoom by using your Twitter account. When you install the app for the first time, you will have to go through several quick steps that teach you how to manipulate the app. Once these steps are completed, your *Home* menu will pop out when you tap the three lines on the top left side of the page. This is where you will find your recordings, podcasts you follow, downloads, settings, etc.

The tools that enable you to record your own podcast are basic and simple to use. To start a recording, you only need to tap on the *red* button at the top right of the screen. A box will pop-up allowing you to begin your audio recording instantly. Then, you can pause or resume recording, trim the audio by tapping over the scissors and cut out the parts you want to delete, or simply close the recording and delete the draft to start again.

After finishing the recording, you give it a title, enter an optional description, add a photo to illustrate your audio, select the audience category, share your location and finally tap on publish and *voilà!* You have just created a *Boo*. Your recordings will automatically be added to your playlist.

How to use audioBoom in the classroom?

audioBoom is suitable for all age groups, from elementary to university level students. Nevertheless, as far as English as a Foreign/Second Language students are concerned, we recommend the use of this tool with students whose command of English is equivalent to a Level A1 of the ‘Common European Framework of Reference for Languages’ (CEFR) as they need to understand basic phrases and interact with the app to be able to use it.

Listening and speaking are the two main skills developed using this digital tool. We also believe that second language teachers should focus on developing the learners’ [interpersonal communication skills](#), as these are vital life skills needed to integrate and survive in our current society. audioBoom is an ideal platform for developing all core communication skills.

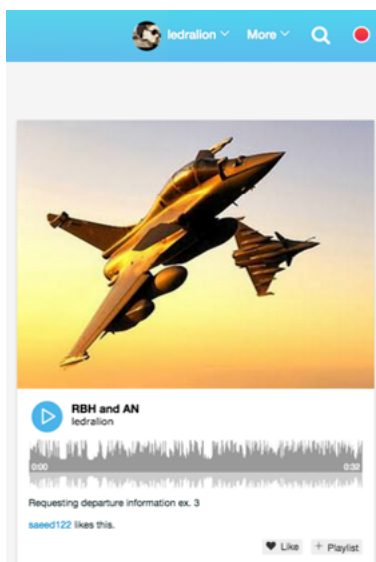
In the section-table below, you will find samples of activities used in our classes for different purposes as well as students’ exemplars.

audioBoom activities used in the classroom

Level: Elementary (A2–CEFR)

Topic and skill focus: Aviation English–
Dialogue practice (Speaking)

Screenshots and links to samples



<https://audioboom.com/boos/2392298-rbh-and-an>

Comments

This is an example of a scripted dialogue recorded by two students from a higher education

group, enrolled in the Second Year of a Foundations Programme. Our objective was to provide students with practice in speaking and using aviation vocabulary.

Simplifying the activity by providing students with technical vocabulary in the form of a written dialogue, imbued the students with the confidence and motivation to rehearse and re-record the dialogue more than once, after listening to their podcasts.

Level: Intermediate (B1 - CEFR)

Topic and skill focus: Aviation English–
Picture description practice (Speaking)

Screenshots and links to samples

LEDRALION

▶ Picture description



ICAO picture description sample.

<https://audioboom.com/boos/1918894-picture-description>

Comments

In this sample, the student described what he saw in a photograph. This task was designed to prepare students for an end-of-term, speaking assessment. Students incorporated all the specialized vocabulary learnt during the term, developed fluency, reflected on their mistakes and were encouraged to use peer feedback.

Level: Upper-Intermediate (B2–CEFR)

Topic and skill focus: Aviation English–
Interactive dialogue (Speaking)

Screenshots and links to samples

LEDRALION

▶ Route Clearance sample



<https://audioboom.com/boos/2421951-route-clearance-sample>

Comments

In this activity, the students were required to retain important information given in a simulated, pilot/ Air Traffic Control (ATC) communication recording. Initially, students listened to a recorded communication from the ATC, wrote down the correct information to get clearance from the ATC and then recorded their reply to the ATC. This task provided practice in fluency, speed and pronunciation.

Final Considerations

We, as educators, have found that the use of mobile apps in second/foreign language learning complements existing classroom activities by providing opportunities for learners to develop language skills using authentic, culturally familiar, digital tools (Jackson, 2015). As seen in the tables with the examples provided, students can incorporate and develop language skills: speaking, reading, and listening, with dynamic, language based activities, rehearsing and creating in a practical and more fun way. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, to develop learner autonomy, and to work independently, which means learning at their own pace, time and setting, as implied in the concept of MALL (Crompton, Olszewski & Bielefeldt, 2015).

When using these tools in the classroom, our students have voiced an appreciation for how these tools contributed to their individual learning and academic success. Moreover, as teachers, we realized how important it is to be able to meet our students in their online World and to adapt our teaching resources and activities to the 21st century classroom.

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Other resources

- YouTube video on how to create an EdPuzzle video: http://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-wRQQ_gfvSomuZJaBLRshQ
- YouTube video on how to create a Kahoot quiz: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFFv6_6was4
- YouTube video on how to create a Boo podcast: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51ybw1lkVDA>