Simple Technology for Language Classrooms

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Reviewed by Emily Coombs

Simple Technology for Language Classrooms is an invaluable resource for both pre-service and in-service educators that promotes the use of various technology applications and platforms to support language learning classrooms. This text was recently published in 2021 and provides educators with current and practical technologies to be used in the everyday classroom, or in e-learning environments, to benefit language learners. This text includes 10 chapters, each written by a different author from the Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana in Salatiga, Indonesia. Each chapter introduces a specific topic, such as writing or creativity, and then describes a simple technology and its affordances for students, specifically English as a foreign language (EFL) students. Following the application description is a sample lesson plan that integrates the application, which includes a step-by-step teaching activity and technology-based task designed to support EFL students. The tasks presented in the lesson plan are aligned with the International Society for Technology
in Education (ISTE) standards for students. Some of the chapters also include a demonstration of how to use the technology.

Chapter 1, “Building a Community of Readers and Writers Through the Use of Blogs” by Hadiyanto, discusses how blogs benefit language learning because students can write creatively for an authentic audience, read their peers’ work, and provide feedback and support to one another. The lesson plan integrates Google’s Blogger into the activity. For the activity, students write their own and read their peers’ blog letter to Aunt Agony.

Chapter 2, “The Use of Voscreen to Help Students Learn English Grammar” by Setiamunadi, discusses the importance of teaching grammar through both text and images. The author suggests using the free application Voscreen, which presents short movie clips with subtitles from various “play mode” categories, including language proficiency levels, language structures, rhythm, and more. The provided lesson plan task integrates Voscreen by requiring students to watch certain movie clips and write the English sentences using the passive form.

The third chapter of the text, “Using Site123 to Encourage Student Creativity” by Mali, focuses on providing opportunities for student creativity in the classroom. Mali introduces Site123, a free website creation platform that includes various templates, layouts, and images. Creating a website allows students to construct their own text and promotes output in the form of writing. The lesson plan implements Site123 as it invites students to create a website promoting three campus events relative to their program.

Following the third chapter is “Narrative Writing with StoryJumper” written by Palupi. This chapter emphasizes the importance of providing opportunities for students to write about their interests for an authentic audience, similar to Hadiyanto’s chapter on blogs. StoryJumper allows the writer to create a digital book and make choices regarding the background, illustrations, characters, sound effects, and more. The provided lesson plan demonstrates how StoryJumper can be used to engage students in authentic writing experiences.

The fifth chapter in this text, “Collaborative Poetry Writing Using Online EDU Tools” by Kurniawan and Florentina, discusses the use of Google Docs to aid in collaborative writing tasks for students. Google Docs and Slides allow students to socially interact and collaborate with one another while engaging in writing opportunities, such as poetry, which is the focus of the lesson in this chapter. Kurniawan and Florentina also mention the application Book Creator, which is similar to StoryJumper in that it allows the user to create digital books.

Chapter 6, “A Virtual EFL Integrated Skills Classroom in a Facebook Private Group” written by Santoso, discusses how Facebook can be an effective and motivational tool for e-learning, as it allows for social interaction and interpersonal communications. The lesson plan demonstrates how Facebook
private groups can be used to provide students with an efficient and useful resource for e-learning.

The next chapter, “Using VR Photos for Communicative Tasks” by Kisnanto, encourages the use of virtual reality (VR) to immerse learners in interactive and authentic environments that promote language learning. While VR can seem like an expensive and intimidating technology, Kisnanto explains how the creation of VR photos, which are essentially 360-degree panoramic photos taken on a smartphone or using Google Street View, can be beneficial for language learning in the classroom. Creating VR photos allows students to create meaningful and authentic pictures that can provide opportunities for comprehensible output and social interaction.

The eighth chapter of the text, “Asynchronous Online Speaking Classes on Flipgrid” by Sinanu, explains how asynchronous learning often lacks connectedness and opportunities for verbal discourse. Flipgrid is a free online platform designed for asynchronous learning and communication that allows users to engage in video discussions. Students can video-record themselves talking, evaluate their speech delivery and non-verbal communication, provide and receive feedback, and interact with their peers. Sinanu provides the reader with step-by-step directions to create a Flipgrid. The lesson plan demonstrates how Flipgrid can be used for students to deliver speeches asynchronously, and alludes to the many other ways Flipgrid could be used to promote communication in a distance learning classroom.

Chapter 9, “Teaching Critical Thinking Skills Using Reflective Memes” by Sumakul, points to the importance of creating opportunities for students to practice critical thinking skills in the classroom. The simple technology that is depicted in this chapter is internet memes. The provided lesson in this chapter emphasizes how creating memes can be used as a reflection activity for students, which allows them to practice critical thinking skills, such as decision-making and reasoning.

The final chapter in this text, “Designing Engaging Clickable Teaching Documents” by Timotius and Kurniawan, explains how technologies such as PowerPoint, Google Slides, Word, and Google Docs can be used to create digital documents with embedded materials and links to benefit online learners. Clickable documents include all the necessary resources in one space and can be easily shared with others, which makes it almost effortless for teachers to shift to online teaching. The lesson plan exhibits how clickable documents can enhance e-learning and provide students with the necessary materials and sources. Following the lesson plan are detailed instructions for converting materials into clickable documents.

After reading this book, it becomes clear that it has many strengths. One strength of the book is that it includes a sample lesson plan at the end of each
chapter. These lesson plans allow the reader to see one of the many ways that the technology could be intentionally used to enhance and support learning without making it technocentric. Another strength of this book is that it covers a wide variety of free technologies, from digital storytelling to video discussions, which could be used as supplemental tools for EFL students. Additionally, while this book was designed to support language learners and EFL classrooms specifically, the technological resources in this book could be beneficial for any classroom and all students, as language is prevalent in every subject.

While this book has many strengths, there are also some limitations. One limitation of this text is that all the lesson plans are designed for upper high school and university students. While these lessons could probably be adapted for elementary and middle school students, it would be beneficial to include some lesson plans geared toward those grades. Another limitation of this book is that it is largely geared toward reading and writing; however, reading and writing are not the only subjects that may prove difficult for EFL students. Additional applications and platforms that are content-specific for math and science would be beneficial, as language is extremely relevant and important in these subjects for accessing the content.

Overall, Simple Technology for Language Classrooms is an excellent resource for both pre-service and in-service teachers. This text presents a multitude of technologies that could be intentionally used to support language learning in the classroom. This text would be a beneficial read for all teachers, as language and content learning go hand in hand. Every classroom is a language learning classroom and would benefit from the addition of these simple technologies.

About the Reviewer

Emily Coombs is a graduate student at Washington State University. She is currently completing coursework to earn a Master of Education degree in Language, Literacy, and Technology. She is also currently a second-grade teacher.