Using technology as part of our English language teaching practice seems to have become a norm, as something that many students expect to see in their courses. Educational technology companies and leading publishers have been investing in developing their own Learning Management System (LMS) or online practice platform to accommodate this rising need and demand.

You may not be sure if you want to start implementing these tools into your teaching, or you may be interested in getting started but wondering whether it is worthwhile. Here, we will discuss what these online platforms can offer, and how you can get started with ease with your students, to help you make an informed decision and take the next step forward.

**What the online practice or LMS can offer**

**Best andragogical practice**

Andragogy is ‘the science of understanding (theory) and supporting (practice) lifelong and lifewide education of adults’ (Knowles, 1980:430). Burns (1995:233) suggests that teaching adults should involve more student-centred, experience-based, problem-oriented and collaborative content in their lessons. Andragogy teaches us to consider students’ goal oriented nature and accept the fact that they bring in a strong perception of what and how they would like to learn.

Taking one of our online platforms, Oxford Learn as an example, teachers can utilise the functionality of the LMS to achieve the best practice of andragogy. Oxford Learn allows teachers to set assignments with different deadlines. A Planner is available for students to see what work they have been assigned to and when they have to submit it by. Students can be independent in their learning and use this planner to set themselves goals to achieve.

Communicative tools on Oxford Learn (Messages, Chat, and Discussions) allow teachers to nurture students’ 21st century skills with the 4 Cs (P21, [http://www.p21.org/about-us/p21-framework](http://www.p21.org/about-us/p21-framework), no date). You can communicate with your students outside the classroom using the Messages tool. You can also set up topical Discussions to encourage critical thinking, and for collaborative work, to discuss their experiences and opinions on different topics and scenarios. The Chat function allows you to create live chat sessions to get your students thinking creatively whilst practising their informal language skills. These possibilities can generate a collaborative virtual environment, and encourage a student-centred, experience-based culture to achieve better andragogical practice.

**Blended Learning – a new learning solution**

Along with achieving good andragogical practice, technology can offer learners a new learning solution –
Using online practice or learning management systems with adult learners - Ivy Rudd

blended learning. The use of technology provides an extended and integrated learning solution, and allows a connection between what happens within and beyond the classroom. It extends the contact time between students and teachers, and maximises students’ exposure to the language. This can also give your students flexibility in terms of time and location of using the online practice, which is something adults, who are often busy with work and family commitments, would much appreciate.

Blended learning also offers you flexibility in your lesson design and planning. Many options become available to you. For instance, using Oxford Learn, you can simply assign relevant work on the online practice which offers consolidation activities for what students have learnt in class. You can create a communicative environment by creating a discussion board on the topics that students were learning in class to give students the opportunity of extended discussion outside the classroom. You can use the Dropbox function to upload your own content for further projects and assignments that you may find complement what you taught in class. You can even use the Group function to differentiate your students’ learning experience and content. This can also serve as a flipped classroom opportunity to have your students do some preparation (such as watching a video, reading a text and writing a post on the discussion board) on the platform before coming to the lessons for further discussions, collaborative work or consolidation practices. There are many possibilities for you to be creative and to maximise student’s learning experience.

How to get started

Hopefully by now you will have a better understanding on what these online platforms can offer you and your students, and you may be interested in taking the next step to start implementing it in your teaching.

You may wonder how you can introduce the online platform to your students and lessons. There are a few things you should consider. First, you need to consider the basic equipment setting, i.e. the physical preparation. You should ensure that you and your students have the access to the platform with the right equipment and devices. Checking what devices you have at school and students have at home (PC, Mac or Tablets), comparing them to the required system requirements on the platform, and updating any programmes if needed will help ensure that.

Second, you would need to think about the skills preparation. Have you become familiar with the system yourself? What kind of training do you think you need to acquire before you can be confident enough to demonstrate and guide your students to use the platform? Many companies offer webinars or face-to-face training sessions to help equip teachers to become a confident user. For instance, our Oxford Learn platform is supported by our customer support team who can arrange individual webinars for you with a trainer. You can contact us by emailing at eltsupport@oup.com for further assistance.

Finally, it is important for you to prepare your students’ mentality, to get them ready to embrace this change of learning habit and environment setting. Motivation is one element that would drive your students to use the online platform for a longer period of time to allow them to see the changes and benefits they gain from the experience. One possible way is by setting SMART goals (Haughey, https://www.projectsmart.co.uk/smart-goals.php, no date) for your adult learners to
Using online practice or learning management systems with adult learners - Ivy Rudd

Using some of your class time to discuss with your learners some achievable class goals and personal goals then setup the timeframe together. You can use the platform functions such as the Planner and Messages on Oxford Learn to remind students these goals consistently along the way. Reflecting on their progress in class can help keep them motivated and create linkage between the activities they do on the online practice and the classroom.

Heading towards integration, flexibility, individuality and autonomy

To help prepare your adult learners to keep up with modern working and living practices influenced by technology, it is suggested to integrate technology within your teaching to develop them as an autonomous learner and get used to the idea of using technology in their lives (Kern, 2013). By being on this journey of integrating an online practice or LMS with your classroom teaching, you and your students will together gain valuable experience which encourages flexibility, and flourishes individuality and autonomy in your language learning and teaching.

To find out more about Oxford Learn, you can read about it on our website, or contact our customer support team on elsupport@oup.com for further questions. If you are interested in learning how to use the Oxford Learn platform, feel free to join us in our upcoming webinars about Oxford Learn. Details can be found here.

Ivy Rudd is the Online Platforms Trainer at Oxford University Press. Ivy has a background in English Language Teaching and is a CELTA- and Master of Applied Linguistics-qualified teacher. She has taught in Australia, Japan, Greece and the UK and has gained English assessment experience over the years. As part of the Customer Support team, with her expertise in learning technologies, Ivy provides training on online platforms to all levels of users including teachers and staff of educational institutions.

References


