# Strengths and Challenges of Digital Tools in EAP Remote Learning Settings

**Shereen Seoudi**

*Ryerson University, Canada*

**Alanna Carter**

*McMaster University, Canada*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*The recent and significant increase in online and virtual learning has had major impacts on all learning environments, including EAP classrooms and programs. As more courses are offered in virtual and online formats, students can participate in EAP courses across time zones and locations. Digital tools are essential to these learning environments in order to share materials and host lessons. Digital tools can be difficult to incorporate in courses and lessons due to instructor and student lack of familiarity with tools and associated costs. However, when implemented with purpose and care and in conjunction with guiding pedagogical frameworks, digital tools can engage and motivate learners, contribute to a sense of community, support varied learning needs and preferences, and ensure EAP programs remain relevant in an increasingly digital world.*

## INTRODUCTION

Remote and online learning is here to stay, including in language learning contexts. These environments offer unique opportunities for language learners to interact with and practice language in diverse ways. Although these environments look and function differently from the traditional language classroom, the basic goal remains: to support students in their language learning journey so that they can successfully use English to achieve academic, professional, and personal goals. Although challenges in the adoption and learning process can occur, through intentional and careful inclusion of digital technologies and tools, remote and online language learning environments and technology can be engaging, meaningful,

and, most importantly, useful for learners (Yamauchi, 2009). The authors of this chapter will draw on relevant literature and research regarding distance and online education, learning models, digital pedagogies, and language learning, making links to their professional experiences as instructors in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs in various post-secondary settings. Discussion will centre on the challenges and opportunities that the incorporation of digital technologies can bring to online EAP learning environments, and real life examples from the authors' classroom experiences will be included to demonstrate how the discussed pedagogies and tools support language learning.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

## Learning Models for Online Settings in EAP Contexts

Although technological tools have been used to support language teaching and learning for many years in the context of CALL (computer-assisted language learning) and, more recently, MALL (mobile-assisted language learning) (Levy, 1997; E. Brown, 2001), COVID-19 and the immediate need to transition EAP programs to virtual settings precipitated the increased use of digital tools and pedagogies. EAP classrooms took on varied forms and styles including synchronous, asynchronous, blended, and hybrid. Each form has unique characteristics and can support the learning process in different ways.

### Synchronous Learning

Synchronous learning "takes place when all participants are engaging with the course content at the same time and in the same learning space" (University of Alberta, n.d.). In the context of online or remote learning, this learning space generally exists through the use of videoconferencing and chat tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Blackboard Collaborate. Synchronous learning has the potential to create learning communities and opportunities for socialization, participation, and interaction between instructors and students (Hrastinski, 2008). Synchronous learning often involves 'virtual classrooms' where instructors and students log into a platform at a pre-arranged date and time, possibly reflecting a traditional course schedule. Virtual, synchronous classrooms can be used for facilitating classes; they are also useful for office hours; tutoring; and one-on-one or small group instruction, conversation, or critique (Houston Community College, n.d.). As noted, an important benefit of synchronous learning environments is that learners feel that they are part of a community of peers. In the context of COVID-19 and legislated social isolation in effect across the globe, the importance of this as it relates to mental health and, by extension, successful learning, cannot be overstated.

### Asynchronous Learning

By contrast, asynchronous learning supports relationships between instructors and learners when they cannot meet online at a common time (Hrastinski, 2008). Asynchronous learning environments use tools such as a learning management system (LMS), email, discussion boards, and other collaborative tools for members of the learning community to connect, share, and learn. Also called self-paced learning, asynchronous learning options allow for significant flexibility because learners have control over the speed and flow of content as well as the choice of when, where, and how to complete coursework

## Related Content

### Using Prior Knowledge in Data Mining
Francesca A. Lisi (2009). *Encyclopedia of Data Warehousing and Mining, Second Edition (pp. 2019-2023).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/using-prior-knowledge-data-mining/11096

### On Explanation-Oriented Data Mining
Yiyu Yao (2009). *Encyclopedia of Data Warehousing and Mining, Second Edition (pp. 842-848).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/explanation-oriented-data-mining/10918

### Cluster Analysis in Fitting Mixtures of Curves
Tom Burr (2009). *Encyclopedia of Data Warehousing and Mining, Second Edition (pp. 219-224).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/cluster-analysis-fitting-mixtures-curves/10824

### The Application of Data-Mining to Recommender Systems
J. Ben Schafer (2009). *Encyclopedia of Data Warehousing and Mining, Second Edition (pp. 45-50).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/application-data-mining-recommender-systems/10796

### Bitmap Join Indexes vs. Data Partitioning
Ladjel Bellatreche (2009). *Encyclopedia of Data Warehousing and Mining, Second Edition (pp. 171-177).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/bitmap-join-indexes-data-partitioning/10816