



An Internet Revolution: Teaching and Learning Languages Online

If you or your children have an interest in learning a foreign language or building your English-speaking skills, then an online language classroom could be just the right thing for you.

Languages learning has never been as easy as it is today. The online realm has multiplied the options for those seeking to learn another language. Most websites that have been developed specifically for learning a foreign language (predominantly English) are geared towards children, although there are a range of websites that are not age specific and have been growing their outreach towards adults, too.

Often classes are taught on an online platform where the tutor and pupil meet in a video chat session for 25-45 minutes at a time. Some of these websites use their own inbuilt video capability for language learning which runs directly via their website, whereas others will utilise their site for promoting lessons and services but actually use Skype to deliver them. Most of these classes are set in a one-to-one environment where the tutor can give their pupil the necessary attention needed to build and develop their use of the new language. The single student to teacher ratio also allows for the material to be individually tailored to fit the needs of each unique learner. Because of its online nature, communication between parents and teachers can be straightforward and discussion around the best way to improve the student's language learning can even be easier than in a traditional school setting.

The companies that deliver these curricula have been around for many years, but it is in the past few years that their growth has been truly explosive. Many of these

programmes were originally developed for the children of the growing Chinese middle class, as parents aspired to better equip them for their futures. Even though English is a major subject in Chinese schools, parents often seek to supplement their children's learning by enrolling them in online classes to connect with native English speakers, widen their vocabulary, sharpen their appreciation for the correct use of grammar and develop their own oral proficiency.

Now it is not only the burgeoning Chinese market that fuels the growth of these websites, but other markets such as Korea, too. The growth of web-based language classes around the world has developed as we move more of our lives online, and also due to the proliferation of learning of all varieties via the Internet. Although English remains the most taught language online, there are websites dedicated to a multitude of other languages and aimed at more markets than just China. Each of these websites claim to offer a different approach to learning a foreign language but they have one key element in common: making language learning fun and obtainable.

Online language learning can be of great benefit to both parties. As the student, it is possible for you to learn a language in an environment that is tailored specifically to you and your needs. This means that you, as an individual learner, can be stretched and supported accordingly. As the teacher, it gives you flexibility and options. Many use the income from their online language teaching to supplement their salary from their main job or business, sometimes but not always in education. But many teachers like the flexibility that these platforms afford them

The single student to teacher ratio allows for the material to be individually tailored to fit the needs of each unique learner.

and teach as their main source of income, balancing classroom time around raising children or caring for relatives. One of the key benefits, in my opinion, is that it is also very engaging for both parties as it allows each one to become more familiar with the cultural differences, important dates and historical elements in their country and culture. In these turbulent times, the ability to see things from another's perspective is a genuine asset.

Experiences of the pupil

“My daughter was a little nervous for her first class because online education was new for her, also for me. I explained that the teachers are foreigners who cannot speak Chinese, but I would help her if she has any problems. I also told her: “you can choose to continue with the program or not.” After the trial class, she found the American teacher was different from the Chinese one and the class was fun, so we booked for three grades” (Fiona, the parent of a child taking classes with VIPKID).

Experiences of the teacher

There are many traditional classroom teachers across the world that have begun teaching on an online platform, either to earn a little extra money or for a change of pace. Some have found it so convenient that they have left their classrooms and have moved to



teaching online full time. The additional bonus with many of these platforms is that you do not have to be a certified teacher to teach a language. If you have experience working with children or like working with children, you could receive a second income through teaching a language online.

When working on an online platform, teachers are able to achieve the work-life balance that they might not be able to achieve when working at a conventional, bricks-and-mortar school. They are also in charge of their own schedule, working as much as or as little as they want to and get paid for the hours that they put in. Because the job is online, you are able to work from wherever you want. This, in turn, allows

people great flexibility, ideal for those who aspire to the life of the “digital nomad”.

“Overall, I prefer the online platform versus classroom teaching. I enjoy being able to work one to one to meet the needs of my students and tailor lessons more to their needs and abilities. Despite the distance, I’m able to form meaningful student-teacher relationships with the children I teach because when I am their teacher for that half hour, they are my only concern. One of my students booked a short notice class with me so he wouldn’t have to wait until the end of the week to tell me about his saxophone recital.” (Danielle, an online English teacher).

Various websites that teach languages

VIPKID www.t.vipkid.com.cn

FluentU www.fluentu.com/blog/educator-english

Lingoda www.lingoda.com/en/english

Englishhunt www.englishhuntusa.com

Verbalplanet www.verbalplanet.com

iTutorGroup www.recruit.tutorabc.com

SayABC www.tsayabc.com

Italki www.italki.com/teacher/application

Cambly www.cambly.com/en



Jessie Farley is an American expat based in south London. She is a KS2 leader at a Church of England primary school and also teaches online for VIPKID. For more information on becoming involved as a teacher with VIPKID please visit her referral link www.vipkid.com and type in the code JESSI0025 on the website. Contact Jessie on Twitter [@msjfarley](https://twitter.com/msjfarley) or via email at missjfarley@gmail.com

