

# A Brief Catalogue and Review of Key Online Video Resources and Platforms

## オンラインビデオ教材とプラットフォームの目録と評価

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### ABSTRACT

*Today, there are countless online tools to improve English proficiency and fluency. The proliferation of these resources has grown exponentially in the last 25 years or so and they have undoubtedly become leading instruments in current ELT practice. However, this tremendous expansion has also led to difficulty in discerning which tools may best serve ELT goals. This article will attempt to catalogue and evaluate the utility, of a small handful of sites that include: YouTube; TED and TED-Ed; BBC Learning English; CNN Student News; Netflix and Hulu; English Central and Speechyard; and VoiceTube. While this is not an exhaustive list of online video platforms, these sites are key players in relation to ELT and were therefore chosen for this report. A review and critique of these sites is provided based on their value in regards to two specific study methods: Extensive Watching (EW) and a more focused and blended watch-study-watch-repeat method. Furthermore, considerations are made about how these resources can benefit ELF classrooms and how well they fulfill the tenets of good ELF practices.*

**KEYWORDS:** ELF, Extensive watching, Online video resources, Study methods with video, L1 & L2 captioning

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the world of English Language Teaching (ELT) today, there are numerous tools for, both educators and students alike, to utilise in the pursuit of improved English proficiency and fluency. One such tool, which has only become available in the last quarter century or so, is online video resources. As the content on, and functionality of the Internet has grown exponentially over the last two and a half decades, it has undoubtedly become one of the leading instruments in an ever-growing study inventory. However, it is precisely this tremendous expansion of the Internet and online platforms that has also led to difficulty in discerning which tools may best

serve ELT goals. This article will by no means attempt to catalogue all Information Technology (IT) video resources and evaluate their utility, but will instead focus on a small handful of sites that include: YouTube; Technology, Education, Design (TED) and Technology, Education, Design, Education (TED-Ed); British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Learning English; The Cable News Network (CNN) Student News; Netflix and Hulu; EnglishCentral and Speechyard; and VoiceTube. These sites were critiqued based on their value in regards to two specific study methods: Extensive Watching (EW) and a more focused and blended watch-study-watch-repeat method, which the author has found effective in past teaching experiences. Furthermore, a consideration will be made about how these resources can benefit English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) classrooms and how well they fulfill tenets of the ELF paradigm.

The specifics of these techniques will later be explained in greater detail, but it will be useful at this juncture, to briefly review some of the benefits of using video in the ELT classroom and individual learning practice. Although there is some debate about the comparative pedagogical efficacy of video use in ELT settings, there is a general consensus that students do see marginal benefits in language study by using film as a means of learning (Brook, 2011; Duffy, 2007; Hamilton, 2010; Muniandy & Veloo, 2011). Any contention surrounding the use of the medium generally stems from debates regarding the depth of its effectiveness or in its comparative value to an alternate method. Without getting into that debate, we shall simply look at the marginal benefits, as they are manifested for the student. Conveniently, Nakamura (2007) has listed a variety of advantages of video use in ELT as providing: (a) exposure to genuine and realistic language (demonstrating natural speed and pronunciation); (b) understandings of different cultural features or practices; (c) clear contexts for learners to understand situation-specific English usage; (d) enjoyable settings to lower students' affective filters; (e) identification of common spoken language through subtitles and/or scripts; (f) encouragement of independent and autonomous study outside the classroom; and (g) longer concentration periods with lower levels of study fatigue. There is little research to dispute these claims, however the depth of corollary outcomes in actual language improvement is somewhat contested. That said, most academics concur that student motivation and engagement are positively influenced, when video watching activities are undertaken.

With that in mind, we can now turn our attention to the teaching practices, which make up the conceptual framework and assessment metric by which we will examine and evaluate the various online video platforms and their utility for teachers and students alike.

### 1.1 Extensive Watching

Although this is still a somewhat novel study method, Saunders and Ishimaki (2015 & 2016) have effectively demonstrated that, when considered as a means of broad exposure to contextualised language, the use of video can be quite beneficial in

deepening students' understandings of English. The basic tenet of this method is to voluntarily watch a large volume of video with both Second Language (L2) audio and L2 captions engaged, in order to give learners as much contact with the target language as possible. Deriving its core pedagogical philosophies from Extensive Reading, EW espouses a method that requires students to have a large breadth of content from which to choose from. In this way, students have a profound amount of autonomy to choose the media they consume and study. Saunders and Ishimaki (2016) contend that this heightened level of control has an acute positive effect on learner motivations and maintains the potential to be very useful for students, who employ this method.

With this technique in mind, the review of online video tools found in this report, were gauged by the availability of accurate L2 subtitles, as well as the breadth of the content available for view. The metrics of evaluation will be further detailed in a later section, but since a large spectrum of choice is integral to this method, the sites and online resources needed to satisfy the criteria of having both, a large selection of titles, as well as accurate L2 captions.

## 1.2 A Blended Study Method

An alternate method for using videos in ELT involves watching (a scene from) a single title several times and studying a specific section of dialogue until the students' understanding, pronunciation, intonation and fluency are at a relatively high level of proficiency. Although there is no single method for implementing this and different educators have slightly nuanced versions of this technique, the general pattern here is some variation of watching the video several times with differing combinations of First Language (L1) or L2 captions engaged, and having learners do a variety of tasks between viewings.

A method that has worked very well for the author's classes in the past is the following: First, have students watch the whole title with L2 audio and L1 captions engaged. Next, focus on a single scene which can be anywhere from 2 to 10 minutes long. Have the pupils watch the scene with L2 audio and L2 captions on and ask them to take note of any vocabulary or grammar they are unfamiliar with. With these notes, they can study the new words and phrases, before watching the specific scene again, still with L2 subtitles engaged. After that, play the scene again, but this time without captions and pausing after each sentence so students can repeat the dialogue and mimic the actors. Finally, play the scene once through with students shadowing the entire dialogue in order to improve fluency and intonation. An optional and often enjoyable step for higher-level students can be to have the students then act out the scene as a small skit in the class.

Needless to say, the criteria for evaluation of online video material for this method are rather different than that of the EW approach. Since at different times in the exercise, both L1 and L2 captions are required, points were awarded for sites that provided accurate captions in both languages. Furthermore, as there is little

priority for a large breadth of choice, this was not considered in the grading. That said, points were given, if a resource had extra activities or speaking functionality to help facilitate the tasks demanded of the students.

### 1.3 ELF Considerations

It likely goes without saying that many of the practices in the Blended Study Method described above, are derived from more traditional English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) techniques and do not necessarily include nuanced philosophies of ELF approaches. That is not to say that they are mutually exclusive from ELF-informed pedagogical practices, or cannot be adapted to films and video material that encourage understanding English, which falls outside of native-speaker norms. However, the priority placed on repetition of dialogue and attempts at mimicking intonation and fluency, would likely incur a bias toward native speaker Englishes from what is known as the “inner-circle” countries. That said, it would require a determined effort upon the instructor and/or students to specifically focus on video materials that aim to facilitate an ELF-aware curriculum, where students are exposed to the varied philosophies and tenets of the ELF paradigm.

With that in mind, the online video platforms were also judged by the ways in which they can be easily tailored to meet ELF-inspired teaching practices. By example, sites that readily enable student exposure to different kinds of English -especially forms that do not adhere to native speaker norms and/or exemplify dialects or accents, which fall outside the inner-circle country standards- were given a favourable consideration in this regard. Furthermore, resources that did not focus exclusively on EFL or ESL teaching standards were deemed to have utility for ELF classrooms and instruction.

## 2. CRITERIA OF EVALUATION

In order to devise a uniform means of rating the various platforms and video resources, a grading scheme was developed based on a simple binary, “yes/no” criterion in 10 different categories, with some nuanced explanations described below: (1) availability of L1 subtitles; (2) availability of L2 subtitles; (3) breadth of content; (4) availability of levelled or graded content; (5) availability of searchable and referenced target vocabulary and/or grammar; (6) availability of additional exercises and practice; (7) speaking practice functionality; (8) ELF considerations; (9) free or paid service; and (10) class management and monitoring functions.

Since the availability of subtitles is important for all of the methods described above, separate scores were given for each of L1 and L2 availability and accuracy. If the subtitles in either language were deemed to have significant inaccuracies, the point was not awarded for the platform.

The amount of content is particularly important for the EW methodology, as the user should be able to choose from a large variety of videos to suit her/his

individual interests or preferences. Although this is somewhat difficult to gauge, and could be deemed rather arbitrary, a given resource was awarded the point, if there was a great breadth of topics, levels and dialogue context to choose from.

The levelled content and searchable target language aspects were generally not available for sites that were not dedicated language learning platforms. Although, some of the sites were deliberately aimed at younger students or viewers, who may not have profound academic vocabularies, if there was not a clear grading scheme in place, or there was no means to search for specific grammar and/or vocabulary, then the site would not receive the points in these respective categories.

This is also true of the additional practice exercises and speaking functionality criterion. However some sites like TED-Ed do provide comprehension questions at the end of videos, to gauge viewer engagement and understanding. It must be said, that this does not always test specific language abilities, such as spelling or speaking. Yet, if the resource had any exercises whatsoever, the point was given for additional activities. Speaking activities on the other hand were treated as a specific and independent criteria.

The ELF criteria was generally judged by whether or not a platform had videos that demonstrated different forms of English that do not conform to native speaker norms. It must be stated, that this by no means encompasses all of the philosophical tenets of the ELF framework. However, the availability of media with a wide variety of Englishes was deemed to satisfy a World Englishes oriented understanding, which can be considered as one approach within ELF pedagogy. Since this paper is meant more as a cursory guide to online video resources, the ELF criteria was awarded here, if World Englishes were readily present on the site. However, a more in depth investigation is certainly needed in this area and this is not an exhaustive analysis of appropriate online resources for ELF-specific purposes. Furthermore, since the author could not conceivably watch all the content available on each site, this point was only awarded if non-core country English videos were relatively easy to find in the first few pages of each site or through a simple search.

In the free or paid category the preference was given to free sites. If a platform was a totally free platform then the site earned this point. As student costs in most countries are already extremely high, any site with paid content areas would not benefit in this field.

Finally, if a site had additional teacher support functions, such as class management, or the ability to tailor videos to fit the students, then the platform would get a point in the “class management and monitoring functions” section. To elaborate on this point, some platforms have grading functions for the language used in the videos, which are an obvious advantage for teachers. Furthermore, sites that are specifically designed with ELT in mind, such as EnglishCentral, have built-in student and class specific functions that could be of great benefit to the educator. For example, although exclusive to paid subscribers only, teachers can get access to student lists and are able to monitor student participation, and the volumes of media

watched, as well as assign specific titles for viewing. In addition, teachers are able to see how well their pupils performed on given tasks, such as speaking activities and/or comprehension questions at the end of each video. Granted, the available functions varied from site to site, but if at least one educator-oriented component was available, then the point was awarded in this category.

Once the scores were calculated for each site, they were then broken down into four categories with the following respective denominators: Overall utility (x/10); Extensive Watching utility (x/7); Blended Method (BM) utility (x/8); and ELF utility (x/9). For clarity, the Overall score included all of the grading categories; EW excluded categories (1), (6), and (7) above; The Blended approach removed numbers (3) and (8); and finally ELF only disregarded the volume criterion (3) from the list at the beginning of this section.

Finally a quick reference guide of how all the sites were graded is available at the end of Section 3 (see Table 1).

### 3. CATALOGUE AND REVIEW OF ONLINE RESOURCES

#### 3.1 YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com>)

**Overall Score: 3/10; EW Score 3/7; BM Score 1/8; ELF Score 2/9**

In terms of content, YouTube is certainly the largest of all the resources. The statistics regarding the site are mind-boggling and it is difficult to get an exact number of videos as observers claim that anywhere between 300-500 hours of content are uploaded every minute! Thus, it certainly met the volume of content requirement, however, it fell short in many of the other categories. Since YouTube is not explicitly designed with the purposes of language study in mind, levelling, target language searching, extra activities, and speaking practice functions simply do not exist.

Additionally, when it comes to subtitling, the YouTube platform is somewhat unreliable and fairly inconsistent. L1 subtitles are not available for most videos, unless the content provider has hard coded them into the video or independently provided translations that can be toggled on or off. Although not ubiquitously available on all videos (the uploader must toggle the functionality at the time of upload), there are many videos that have limited L2 subtitling capability. However, since this subtitling usually employs Google's automatic speech recognition (ASR) technology, there are many times when the algorithm misunderstands a speaker or misinterprets a phrase as it is spoken in the video. This shortcoming is especially exasperated, in videos that have non-native (particularly non-American) speakers. Therefore, according to the grading criteria for this catalogue, YouTube performs quite poorly, however as the technology associated with the automated-captioning functionality improves, the platform may do better in the near future.

#### 3.2 TED (<http://www.ted.com>) and TED-Ed (<https://ed.ted.com>)

**Overall Score: 6/10; EW Score 5/7; BM Score 5/8; ELF Score 7/9**

Many readers will by now be familiar with the TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) site and its spin-off: TED-Ed (Education). For those that are not, the platform offers a multitude of videos in the form of short (averaging about 10 minutes each) talks on a variety of subjects. The speakers come from all parts of the globe and in fact, more often than not, their manner of speaking falls outside of the native speaker norms, thus this is a great tool for ELF instructors, wishing to expose their students to alternative accents and speaking styles. Although TED talks are hosted on the YouTube platform, the curators of the site provide reliable subtitles for viewers to toggle on or off, if they please. These are usually available in a number of translated languages, however it may take some time for newer content to be translated or even for English captions to be coded into the video. That said, all videos have English transcriptions available elsewhere on the page so the site received the grade in both captioning categories. One drawback to the main TED site is that the content is often rather difficult and would only be appropriate for high-level learners.

However, the spin-off site TED-Ed is directed at native speaker junior high and high school students. Although there is no means to search by target language or grammar, the videos are well categorised by content and comprehension tests are available at the end of each video –a functionality that is not available on the parent site. Finally, TED-Ed offers the ability to tailor videos and quizzes for each class and this is a welcome feature for any educator.

### 3.3 BBC Language Learning (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english>)

**Overall Score: 6/10; EW Score 4/7; BM Score 5/8; ELF Score 5/9**

This platform is a very useful free service with a large number of videos to choose from. The site is specifically designed to help students of English improve their comprehension and abilities via a large selection of videos and radio content produced by the BBC.

Content is well organised and can be searched by target language, however the subtitling and ELF considerations are areas, where the resource falls a little short. There are no L1 subtitles to speak of and for L2 captions; users must rely on transcripts instead of simultaneous captioning within the given media. However, the L2 subtitles point was awarded since the transcripts are available directly under the embedded videos for students to follow along. Since the service is aimed at improving students' understanding of British English, there is very little, if any, content that does not conform to native speaker norms. Finally, extra activities are available, but there are no speaking technology or class management features to use.

### 3.4 CNN Student News (<http://edition.cnn.com/studentnews>)

**Overall Score: 3/10; EW Score 3/7; BM Score 2/8; ELF Score 2/9**

Another free service is CNN Student News, where current events are presented in a manner that is thought to appeal to younger viewers. Much like the BBC Language Learning site, the content is derived from a parent news site: CNN. However, since

this site is not made with the explicit goal of improving student understanding at a language level, it is lacking in many of the categories that gauge pedagogical utility.

The site has L2 captions available, but nothing to toggle L1 subtitles. There is a fairly large amount of content but most of it is focused on news or sporting events. With an almost exclusive focus on American English, there are no considerations made for a variety of speaking norms and there are no extra features that can facilitate more directed learning or class management for teachers.

### 3.5 Netflix (<http://www.netflix.com>) and Hulu (<http://www.hulu.com>)

**Overall Score: 4/10; EW Score 3/7; BM Score 2/8; ELF Score 3/9**

These two paid international services have become very popular in recent years and offer clients the chance to choose from a broad range of television shows, films, and documentaries. Subtitling options are usually available in several languages, however this is often region-dependant. Although the content is vast and there are titles that satisfy the ELF requirement, since this platform is primarily an entertainment service, the levelling, searchability by language, activities, speaking and class management functions are not built into these systems.

That is not to say that the resources are not without their utility. With some determined navigation and directed study, it is possible to seek out titles that are appropriate for a given group of students who want to focus on longer videos that highlight specific contexts and situations. This is particularly true when utilised for EW assignments that ask students to view several titles over a given period of time and/or for the Blended method, if educators want to focus on a particular film. Yet, since the platforms are not designed with language study in mind, the sites fared poorly in this review.

### 3.6 EnglishCentral (<https://www.englishcentral.com>) and Speechyard (<http://speechyard.com>)

**Overall Score: 7/10; EW Score 5/7; BM Score 6/8; ELF Score 6/9**

These two paid platforms are very similar and combine many functions to satisfy a large number of the evaluation criteria. The sites offer a vast collection of short videos for users to watch and learn from. Students can use these resources for both the EW and blended approaches and their viewing can be easily tailored to either of these methods. The three areas where the sites failed to gain points were L1 subtitles, paid content, and ELF content. Furthermore, although Speechyard is very similar to English Central, the former does not have a teacher-specific interface for educators to manage classes and monitor student progress.

That said, the two sites use very clever technology that gives students a wide variety of controls and options to direct their viewing in order to maximise their learning experience. Both platforms allow users to search content by either level or target language, and have interactive exercises to improve vocabulary comprehension and spelling practice. They even have brilliant speaking and pronunciation functions that provide an interactive learning environment. However, it must be mentioned that

the content and pronunciation on both sites is specifically geared toward EFL and ESL principles and does not make any accommodation for ELF ideals of prioritising communication above emulating native speaker norms.

### 3.7 VoiceTube (<https://www.voicetube.com>)

**Overall Score: 9/10; EW Score 6/7; BM Score 7/8; ELF Score 8/9**

Finally, the relatively new platform VoiceTube is very similar to English Central and Speechyard, in terms of its content and functionality. There are L2 subtitles; a large volume of levelled titles, which are searchable by grammar and language; extra exercises and speaking practice functionality. However, like Speechyard, VoiceTube does not have a class management interface. VoiceTube fared slightly better than English Central and Speechyard because, at the time of this writing, it is entirely free (although this might change) and there are many videos available with (a select group of) L1 subtitles. Lastly, since VoiceTube amalgamates and categorises its content from several online sources (many of the ones listed in this report) there are also titles from TED and other sources which regularly feature videos with non-native English speakers. Thus, it scored higher than its competitors' websites as it readily satisfies the EFL content requirement and can be accessed with no cost to the user (for now, at any rate).

Table 1

*Summary of grades for all sites*

| Evaluation Content                  | YouTube | TED & TED-ed | BBC | CNN | Netflix & Hulu | EnglishCentral & Speechyard | VoiceTube |
|-------------------------------------|---------|--------------|-----|-----|----------------|-----------------------------|-----------|
| L1 Subtitles                        |         | ○            | ○   |     | ○              |                             | ○         |
| L2 Subtitles                        |         | ○            |     | ○   | ○              | ○                           | ○         |
| Breadth of Content (EW)             | ○       | ○            | ○   | ○   | ○              | ○                           | ○         |
| Graded or Levelled Content          |         |              | ○   |     |                | ○                           | ○         |
| Searchable by Grammar or Vocabulary |         |              | ○   |     |                | ○                           | ○         |
| Extra Activities                    |         | ○            | ○   |     |                | ○                           | ○         |
| Speaking Practice Function          |         |              |     |     |                | ○                           | ○         |
| ELF Content                         | ○       | ○            |     |     | ○              |                             | ○         |
| Paid/Free                           | ○       | ○            | ○   | ○   |                |                             | ○*        |
| Additional Class Functions          |         | ○            |     |     |                | ○                           | ○         |

Note: \*indicates that the service was free at the time of writing.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND CLOSING COMMENTS

This report is by no means exhaustive and certainly misses many other online video platforms available today. The grading scheme is admittedly myopic in its scope and simplicity, and if the author is entirely honest, the evaluation criteria is somewhat arbitrary. However, it is the intention of the author that this essay can serve as a more general, yet hopefully useful guide to some of the more prominent Internet video resources at the disposal of students and educators alike. The grading scheme and catalogue should be sufficient for readers to quickly get a general idea of how the featured sites work and in what ways they can be of benefit in ELT study. Every student and teacher will certainly have slightly varied ways of employing these tools. Some may elect to focus on the EW approach and others might prefer the blended method. Others still, may want to emphasise ELF principles in their pursuits or utilise a combination of these techniques. However with this undoubtedly limited guide as a reference, navigating and selecting resources should ideally be made somewhat more manageable in an ever-changing landscape of teaching tools and devices.

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