

Web 2.0 Tools in Teaching-Learning of Languages in an Inclusive Environment

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Abstract

Web 2.0 tools are web base utilities and technology tools provided by the social media, which focus on the collaborative, user driven content creation and applications leading to a more socially connected web. This idea behind creating web 2.0 tools was to get active contribution of people in creating content on the internet, rather than just accessing and consuming the content available on the web as passive users. Web 2.0 tools can be used by the educators to involve the students and enhance their essential skills like creativity, communication, language comprehension, literacy of media, technological proficiency, awareness towards global initiatives, etc. Few examples of web 2.0 tools include wikis, blogs, vodcasts, podcasts, webinars, e-mail groups, social bookmarking, web forums, instant messaging, virtual learning environment, e-portfolio, web based shared calendar, etc. In addition to these, there are specific web tools which are used for language learning like LinguaSubtitle, Babbel, Lingro, Typeit, Grammar-multi, etc. Also, there are various audio editing tools freely available which can be used for creating content which can be accessed by the differently abled audience. Some of them include Audacity software, Audio expert, Before you know it, UJAM, etc. The present paper is an exploration of various web 2.0 tools which can be used for multiple educational purposes by the teaching-learning community. While exploring these, the paper covers in detail the tools for language comprehension and adaptability, online storage and sharing, etc.

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INTRODUCTION

Language comprehension is the key to learn any subject in order to acquire functional literacy. The Annual Status of Education Report issued by Pratham displays the poor reading skills of students. In most states, Class V students are unable to read Class II textbooks (ASER, 2014).

The impact of this schooling failure is evident each day. One of the ways to deal with this situation can be the intervention of technology to enable children to comprehend languages. It will be contextual to mention here the 'Right to Read India,' which is a national initiative to promote technology-enabled reading and comprehension in government schools. It looks to urgently intervene and provide a scalable solution to India's reading challenge. It was launched in 2013, as a partnership between Dell, American India Foundation and English Helper™ (S. Gupta and P. Viswanath, 2015).

The case of Partur which is a Municipal Council in Jalna district, Maharashtra can be taken as an example where recently technology enabled reading and comprehension platform is introduced under the campaign. In a Zilla Parishad School of this constituency, an audio-visual lab equipped with a solar powered e-Pathshala which is a multipurpose educational computer is used by the teachers especially for teaching English. The digitised version of the English textbook available with the

reading platform is used. At first, the students read aloud with the voice of the reading software, which enables them to pronounce the typical words properly. To facilitate this process, there is a specific syllabification tool in the system. Several comprehension tools like the dictionary and picture dictionary and vernacular list in the mother tongue are used. This technology driven system allows the students to read English aloud, for the students belonging to agricultural communities and having no exposure to English, this is a great achievement.

While talking about technology interventions in education, it is essential to address Web 2.0 tools which are the emerging applications between the creation of knowledge and knowledge sharing in order to accumulate the collective knowledge in a spiral mode. It is contextual that the Web 2.0 tools are concerned with active sharing of knowledge and also with the creation of knowledge; on the other hand, Web 1.0 is related to passive viewing or using of content available on the internet. In addition to this, Web 2.0 tools are free and easily usable.

SOME GENERAL WEB 2.0 TOOLS

Wikis: The wiki systems are the collaborative platforms provided by the social media which encourage users to perform editing very quickly and creation of content online, with minimum technological knowledge. The wikis run in the web browser for making collaborative content creation,

maintaining, and publication in hypertext environments simpler. Wikipedia is the most renowned Encyclopaedia emerged in the recent past from the web 2.0 tools. As there are generally not any user restrictions and no requirement of advanced technical knowledge or technical background for users to contribute contents in wiki systems, they become the powerful tools for online collaboration and information sharing. The contribution of content and collaborative authoring is enabled by wiki systems because collaborators focus on the contents and the collaborative efforts without any distractions generated regarding resolving technical problems. The other useful features in wikis include navigation of content, searching and versioning capabilities. This is why many researchers have realised the potential of wiki systems for adding collaborative dimension in blended learning environments and online learning by using them (Chiu, Wen, and Sheng, 2009; Coutinho and Bottentuit, 2007; Parker and Chao, 2007; Resta and Laferrière, 2007).

Blogs: These are also known as the web logs. A page created on the internet where people are able to write about anything is called a blog. These blogs may take the form of many things, like reviews, commentary, news articles, comedy, political speeches, or may be only plain everyday gossip. The content placed on a blog or the webpage can be anything where coding is possible. At

times, they act as a personal journal which can be accessed online by the blogger and anyone who may come across the site. The blogs include textual material, images, video clips, web links, and other media the blogger wishes to add to the article. The readers can comment on these blogs and reflections by the blogger.

Podcasts: The podcasts are those types of digital media file which are designed to entertain, educate and inform the audience. Various syndication feeds can be made and distributed through the podcasts over the internet. The users can download them on their MP3 players and computers and play them at their convenience.

Vodcasts: A vodcast is a video podcast, a video broadcast over the internet. The vodcasts include basically video clippings. Often the Web television series are distributed in the form of video podcasts. Web TVs or web televisions are using video podcasts as a rapidly growing digital entertainment genre of new media for the effective delivery of the content to the receivers.

Webinars: This is the short form for web-based seminars; it can be a lecture, presentation, workshop or seminar that is transmitted over the Web by the use of *video-conferencing software*. The most important feature of a webinar is its element of interactivity, the ability of giving, receiving and discussing information. This is in contrast with Webcast, where only one way data

transmission is possible and does not allow any interaction between the audience and the presenter.

E-mail groups: This is basically an e-mail address list which is identified by a single name or title, like `mail-list@ncertciет.com`. When any e-mail message is sent to this mailing list name, it is automatically forwarded to all the listed addresses in this mail list. Most of the e-mail clients support mailing lists, which enables them to broadcast group e-mail messages. Also, there are mailing list servers which manage the centralised mailing lists for user groups.

Social bookmarking: A centralised online service that enables the users to add, annotate, edit, recall and share bookmarks of web documents is known as social bookmarking. Since 1996, many bookmark management services have launched online; one of them is Delicious, which was founded in 2003, which has made the terms 'social bookmarking' and 'tagging' popular. Tagging is a very significant feature of social bookmarking systems. It enables users to organise their bookmarks in flexible ways and develop shared vocabularies.

Web forums: These are the message boards or Internet forums, which are online discussion sites where people can do conversations in the form of posted messages. The difference between web forums and chat rooms is that here the messages are often longer than single line of text, and are archived temporarily at the minimum. In addition, on the basis of

the access level of a user or the forum set-up, the posted message might need to be approved by a moderator before becoming visible to everyone or public.

Instant messaging: A type of online chat which offers synchronous or real-time text transmission over the Internet is known as instant messaging (IM). These short messages are bi-directionally transmitted between two parties, when each user chooses to complete a thought and selects "send". Some instant messaging applications can use push technology to provide real-time or synchronous text to the users, which transmits messages character by character, as they are composed. The more advanced forms of instant messaging can include the provision of transferring files, clickable hyperlinks, and voice over IP or video chat.

Virtual learning environment: A web-based platform for the digital aspects of courses of study, found usually within educational institutions is commonly known as a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). The virtual learning environments normally allow the participants to organise cohorts, form groups and perform roles, present resources, do activities and interactions within a course structure; which is provided for the different stages of assessment of the course. It also reports on participation and even has some level of integration with other systems of the institution.

E-portfolio: An electronic portfolio which is also known as an e-portfolio, digital portfolio, or online portfolio is a collection of electronic evidences assembled and managed on the web usually by a user. These electronic evidences may include input text, e-files, images, multimedia, blog entries, and hyperlinks. These electronic portfolios act as demonstrations of the user's abilities and self-expression platforms, both, and, if they are accessible online, then they can be maintained dynamically with the passage of time. The e-portfolios, like traditional portfolios, can facilitate students' reflection on their own learning, leading to more awareness of their learning strategies and needs. An e-portfolio can be treated as a type of learning record that provides actual evidence of achievement. Learning records are closely related to the learning plan, an emerging tool that is being used to manage learning by individuals, teams, communities of interest, and organisations.

Web based shared calendar: The web based Internet calendars are those calendars which can be shared through the Internet. These shared Internet calendars depend upon a global Internet standard which allows the information placed on the calendar to be exchanged regardless of the application that is used to view or create the information. The Internet calendars use the i-calendar format and the .ics extension in their file names for identification.

SPECIFIC WEB 2.0 TOOLS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

LinguaSubtitle: The LinguaSubtitle is a Java-based, user-friendly application for learning languages. It supports multiple languages and generates subtitles for the movies based on the users' vocabulary. It works on GNU General Public License version 3.0 (GPLv3) and is freely accessible.

Babbel: Babbel is a fee-based, e-learning platform and online language learning software available in various languages since January 2008. At present, Babbel is offering fourteen languages which are: Dutch, Danish, English, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Swedish, Spanish and Turkish. According to babbel.com, it has over 2,00,000,00 users from more than 190 countries. There are beginner level and grammar courses, vocabulary lessons, as well as courses teaching tongue-twisters, sayings and songs.

Lingro: Lingro is basically a project which aims at creating an online environment that allows anyone, to read a foreign language website; it is a fast and easy means to translate words they do not understand. It is simple in concept, yet profound in implication, Lingro uses open dictionaries and user-submitted definitions which are licensed under CC BY-SA license to expand its ever-growing database. The site combines many of the largest free dictionaries available on the web and the Lingro

community helps to edit them to make them more complete and comprehensive. Users can also use a Java script tool that highlights every word on the page which they are reading, with links opening up with the definition.

TypeIt: The web tool TypeIt is a language editor designed especially to help the users to type and edit documents in one of the four major Dravidian languages of Southern India, Malayalam. The application includes all the functions of other editing tools and has proven itself to be very easy to use by both beginners and advanced level computer users.

Grammar-multi: Grammar-multi is the most useful application for languages in which words have many forms and for which grammatical agreement and other syntactic connections in a sentence are important and obvious.

SOME WEB 2.0 TOOLS FOR DIFFERENTLY-ABLED CHILDREN

Audacity software: It is a tool which can be used by or for differently-abled. It is a free and open source digital audio editor and recording computer software application that is available for Windows, Mac OS X, Linux and other major operating systems. Recording audio from multiple sources can be done by it, as well as Audacity can be used for post-processing of all types of audio programmes, including podcasts by adding effects such as normalisation, trimming, and fading in and fading

out. The programmes edited and prepared through the use of this tool can be used by the visually impaired children very well.

Before you know it: This software which is designed to help the users to build their vocabulary and practicing pronunciation in a foreign language is 'Before you know it'. It offers a complete learning system for words through a flashcard based system. The flash cards come with pictures and sound. This software also has a deluxe version which adds pronunciation practice and also has mobile support. It is very useful for children with special needs.

UJAM: UJAM is a free web application. It allows its users to create sound tracks without any need for music related skills. Everyone can use it to compose, produce, and publish their own music. The musical product can be shared with friends and colleagues worldwide. Ujam is a great alternative and one of the best solutions to copyright issues when using multimedia in classroom projects. Using UJAM, students can record their own audio and attach it to their project works. The tool is very easy and simple to use.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WEB 2.0 TOOLS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

The above discussed Web 2.0 tools are extremely useful for the language learners; in case of self-learners, these tools can be the best educators. The utility of wikis, blogs, podcasts, vodcasts, webinars, e-mail groups,

social bookmarking, web forums, instant messaging, virtual learning environment, e-portfolio, web based shared calendar, etc. are well accepted in the world which has transformed into a global village, courtesy these tools. The specific language learning tools like LinguaSubtitle, Babbel, Lingro, Typeit, Grammar-multi, etc., are very useful for comprehension of various languages both verbal and written, even pronunciation of foreign languages can be learnt by them. Also, various audio editing tools are freely available. These tools can be used for creating content which can be accessed by the differently-abled audience. Some of them include Audacity software, Audio expert, Before you know it, UJAM, etc. are very useful. Audio books in Daisy format are prepared which can be used by visually impaired children in a very effective way.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In today's world, we have various technology tools to assist us in

various ways. Their use can be made indispensable for wider dissemination of knowledge. When we talk about language learning the major constraint is the availability of trained teachers, especially in remote areas of our country, the right way of pronunciation of English of foreign language words is a big difficulty. The web 2.0 technological tools can play very positive role in this order, content creation; sharing and wider dissemination can be easily done through them. The initiatives like 'Right to Read India' have their own significance in making the people able to read various languages in right way. The web 2.0 tools play an important role in assisting the differently-abled children also, as the development of talking books, text editors and audio editors have made us able to create content usable by them, and also make the differently-abled children the creator of the content which can be used by others.

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