

Collaborative Web Tools for Learning English at the Teritary Level

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ABSTRACT

Today, technology has changed the way the teacher teaches and the way the learner learns. Technology integration into the curriculum not only enhances the learners' progress in terms of creativity but also paves the way for professional development for teachers. This paper examines the use of three web 2.0 tools namely Zoho writer, Google Classroom and Remind. The aim of the author is to explore Zoho writer and Google Classroom as effective collaborative writing and learning tools and Remind as a tool for communication. From the findings it is evident that these tools can be used in the classroom or beyond to improve the writing and learning skills of young learners.

Key words: Web 2.0 tools, Zoho writer/Zoho docs Google Docs/Google Drive, Google Classroom, Remind

Introduction:

The educational system in the future will be decided by the development of technology. Teaching using technology motivates the learners to learn, increases their learning ability and enhances their performance. Integrating technology in the classroom brings about positive changes not only in the learner but also in the professional growth of the teachers.

Technology in the classroom:

Theoretical explanations in the classroom can be explained easily with the aid of technology. For instance to teach complex

texts, power point presentations and audio-visual aids can be effectively used. In these ways students will be able to understand tough concepts by viewing the slides. Moreover, instruction through technology can also improve the comprehending ability of the students.

Like Google Docs/Google Drive, students' progress and achievements regarding class work can be monitored using some web tools like Google classroom and Zoho writer. These online collaborative tools enable the teachers to share learning materials, assign written work, insert videos and links, conduct online tests and also encourage

learners to submit paperless assignments.

Today students are tech-savvy and are often seen fidgeting with their advanced or latest mobile phones, the features of which makes them easily accessible to Facebook, twitter, instagram, whatsapp and many such online tools. These social networking tools can distract their studies but a good teacher who is interested in experimenting with technology to the fullest, can encourage students to spend time online for a constructive purpose. Such teachers can make learning enjoyable.

Internet is indeed a boon for students. Many educational institutions offer courses through virtual classrooms. These virtual classrooms are replacing traditional classrooms where learners can choose to study according to their convenience and time abstaining from their regular classes.

Technology has provided immense benefits to the students today. They can look for any information online. They can access journal and scientific articles online and work collaboratively with their peers on group projects and assignments.

Literature review:

Bhat, Raju & et al. (129) conducted a study to assess the effectiveness of using Google classroom for students to submit their assignments. The results proved to be successful when submission of assignments using E-Learning facility like Google classroom was used.

Hemrungrote, Jakkeaw & Assawaboonmee (n.p.) deployed Google classroom to support
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self-directed learning environments in a university in Thailand for students enrolled in the course 'Introduction to Information Technology'. According to their study, the results were satisfactory and most students who enrolled in the course got more than 65% scores.

Ballew (2017) analyzed the integration of Google Classroom in a school including three different grade levels. Her study aimed to investigate the perceptions of teachers using Google classroom. She found that the participant's response depended upon their levels of experience, grade level experience and subject matter.

Wijaya (2016) study was developed on the model of TAM (Technology Acceptance Model) to see the effects of Google Classroom on STT Musi students. Results showed the positive effects of Google classroom by some students who already use it.

Ashari (2015) examined the merits and demerits of using the Google Classroom in language learning. He used it for designing learning process such as giving assignments, creating assignments and questions in Singapore school for secondary students. The result stated that this study can be beneficial to understand, evaluate and reflect the use of Google Classroom as the virtual classroom used in language class. Further Ashari also suggested the optimal the use of Google Classroom in language learning.

Though literature is not available on Zoho writer or Zoho Docs, Hsu, Ching & Grabowsk have mentioned in their book that

teachers who are interested in engaging students in collaborative writing can use Zoho writer where users can create documents, edit and store them online allowing access to the document from anywhere with an internet access(p 61)

In their book Solomon & Schrum say that Zoho writer has the same features as other word processors. In Zoho writer not only documents can be created but documents can be shared to collaborate with others. Permission can be given to read or only read or write on the document. (p183)

Like Zoho writer, journal articles are not found on the **Remind**.

Remind is a free text messaging app that helps teachers, students, and parents communicate quickly and efficiently. Announcements can be scheduled ahead of time and photos and other files can be attached.

Socio constructivist theory:

Social constructivism recognizes that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and is a shared rather than an individual experience (Vygotsky, 1978). It is a learning theory that states that learners learn best when functioning as a social group that collaboratively constructs a shared culture of artifacts with shared meanings. Constructivism assumes that all knowledge is constructed from the learner's previous knowledge, regardless of how one is taught. Thus, even listening to a lecture involves active attempts to construct new knowledge.

Alzharani & Woollard (2) state that the role of a teacher in a social constructivist classroom is to help students to build their knowledge and to control the existence of students during the learning process in a classroom. A teacher as facilitator should provide rich environments, experiences and activities for learning by incorporating opportunities for collaborative work, problem solving, authentic tasks". Finally, the teacher concentrates on students' learning rather than on teacher performance. In a Google classroom, teacher can create classes, distribute assignments, send feedback, and see everything in one place. In Zoho writer students can work on the same document and edit each other's work. They can collaborate with their teammates in real-time. In the remind app teachers can make class announcements either in a group or individually and can also upload files and videos.

Collaborative learning:

Collaborative learning is of increasing interest to English teachers. The term "collaborative learning" according to Gokhale (n.p) refers to an instruction method in which students at various performance levels work together in small groups toward a common goal. The students are responsible for one another's learning as well as their own. Thus, the success of one student helps other students to be successful. For Dillenberg (1) collaborative learning is a situation in which two or more people learn or attempt to learn something together.

Recently interest has grown concerning the

uses of online communication for language teaching. Recent developments in computer hardware, software, and communication technologies create exciting new opportunities for the educational use of these technologies. Computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) is an emerging branch of the learning sciences concerned with studying how people can learn together with the help of computers. It proposes the development of new software and applications that bring learners together and that can offer creative activities of intellectual exploration and social interaction. (Stahl, Koschmann & Suthers (2006)

Collaborative writing through web 2.0 tools:

Mcloughlin (664) in her paper discusses the web 2.0 tools and social software and the choices and constraints they offer to tertiary teachers and learners. She defines the term web 2.0 as a second generation, or more personalized, communicative form of World Wide Web that emphasizes active participation, connectivity, collaboration and sharing of knowledge and ideas among users. (665). Greenhow, Robelia and Hughes (n.p) examined how web 2.0's unique capabilities and youth's proclivities in using it influence learning and teaching. Two important themes like learner participation and creativity and online identity formation, emerged from their analysis. Examples of social software are blogs, wikis, social networking sites, Google drive, Zoho writer, Google classroom, apps like remind through which information can be shared or

communicated. Used appropriately, these tools according to Mcloughlin and Lee (28) can shift control to the learner, through promoting learner autonomy and engagement in social networks that straddle multiple real and virtual learning spaces independent of physical, geographic.

The use of Zoho writer, Google Classroom and Remind in the classroom:

All the tools discussed in this paper namely Zoho writer, Remind and Google Classroom are presently employed by the author for language learning.

Zoho writer has been used in the study to encourage collaborative writing and make students work in a team. It is being used to teach Business English to students of II semester BBA LLB & B.Com LLB.

Features of Zoho writer/Zoho Docs:

With the help of Zoho writer students working on the document can write without errors as the spell checking icons alerts them to errors in their document. Zoho Writer has three basic stages namely - compose, review, and collaborate where in the first stage the document can be created. Once the document is composed, the review tools let editors or reviewers suggest changes to the document. On the right hand side, the app shows who has suggested these changes with a social network-like comment thread. This lets writers and editors discuss changes to the document in the app itself. Following this, collaboration tools in Zoho Writer allow users to check if other users have seen the document and

who is currently making changes to the document. It also has a reader mode that should appeal to those who just want to read the document.

Application of Zoho to teach writing skills:

Presently, the author is able to use this tool effectively in the Communication Skills Laboratory. Students were initially trained to get acquainted with the tool. They were made to access the tool by creating a common gmail id. Once they logged in, they were able to see the assignments shared by the author. Lessons relating to the course have been uploaded. Weblinks have been inserted to watch the videos on presentation skills (Fig. 1). Reading and Listening practice assignments and writing tasks have also been uploaded in Zoho.

After having encountered some technical difficulties in the beginning, the students now feel comfortable to work in Zoho. They see the revision history, review the changes and carry the corrections suggested by the author and share it with her using the 'share' option which she can access in her gmail. They use the editing options like 'format, insert, view, page layout and tools' to work on the assignment. For example they have learnt to cut, copy and paste, change the font size, use the paragraph options for

line spacing, use tab stop positions, view the document by page view or web view, insert tables and page number and upload a document.

Their documents are automatically saved and they are able to access them anywhere, anytime even in their smart phones.

Future plan:

In the next stage students will be asked to share their assignments among themselves to facilitate peer editing which will help them to identify the problems in their writing and analyze them critically rather than relying on the author to correct their mistakes. For this purpose, the students will be informed how to peer edit their work by following some standard rubrics. Peer assessment of writing and peer assessment using marks, grades, and tests, according to Topping (n.p) have shown 'positive formative effects on student achievement and attitudes. Topping further clarifies that 'these effects are as good as or better than the effects of teacher assessment" (1998).

Students will also be encouraged to use the templates in Zoho writer to write resumes, letters minutes and agenda which is part of their syllabus.

The author intends to use the spreadsheet to enter the assignment marks.

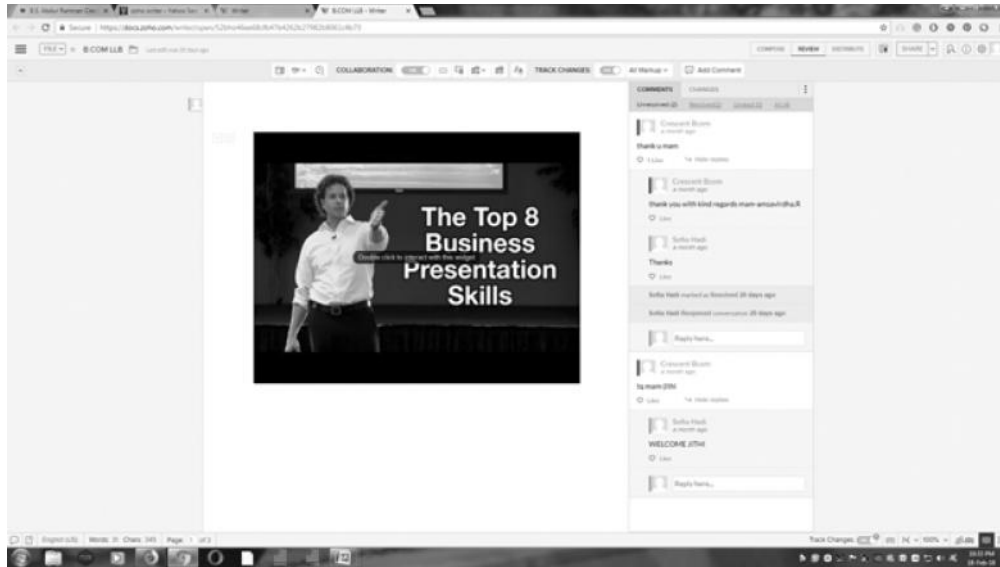


Fig: 1 The screen shot of the Zoho writer with the video inserted. The comments given by the students are also seen.

Google classroom is used currently to teach General English II for second semester BCA students.

Features of Google Classroom:

Google Classroom is a free web service developed by Google for schools that aims to simplify creating, distributing and grading assignments in a paperless way. It streamlines assignments, boosts collaboration, and fosters seamless communication to make teaching more productive and meaningful. Teachers and students can work anywhere, anytime, and on any device. The teachers can co-teach a course with up to 20 other instructors.

Application of Google Classroom in the classroom:

The author created a Google Classroom for her class by logging with her gmailid.

The students were made to join the Google classroom using a code. There are three types of Classroom namely ‘Stream, Students and About in the teacher’s screen’. In the ‘stream’, the assignments sent by the students were viewed. They uploaded their assignments or typed directly and posted them. The comments were given in the ‘Add class comment....’ and posted for the students to view. All the lessons pertaining to the course were uploaded in the Classroom using the ‘About’ feature. The ‘+ Add Class Materials’ is helpful to attach a file, upload document from Google Drive, insert videos from the YouTube and add url links from the web and post(Fig.2). In this way assignments ‘were created’ (the option is available) and shared and assigned with a due date to complete. Similarly announcements regarding change in class time-table and other things related to class

'were created' and shared with the students. The completed assignments were graded and returned to the students with individual comments. The teacher can also view the number of students who have completed and not completed the assignments.

The students see the three types of Classroom namely 'Stream, Classmates and About' when they log in. In the Stream, they can see the announcements and assignments sent and work on them. The editing features in the Classroom similar to Zoho and MS document helps the students to type error - free assignments. Moreover when they post their assignments they are able to see their classmates' answers and also comment. They can also send individual emails to each other. In the 'About' the students see the relevant

information to the class posted by the teacher. In this way Google Classroom serves as collaborative tool.

The section 'Students' displays the names of the students who have joined the class. Here it is possible to invite more students and personally send emails to them. On clicking their names, it is possible to track the number of assignments they have completed with date, late submissions, missing assignments and those returned to them after corrections.

Future plan:

The author intends to explore the collaborative features of Google Classroom to improve the learning skills of the students.

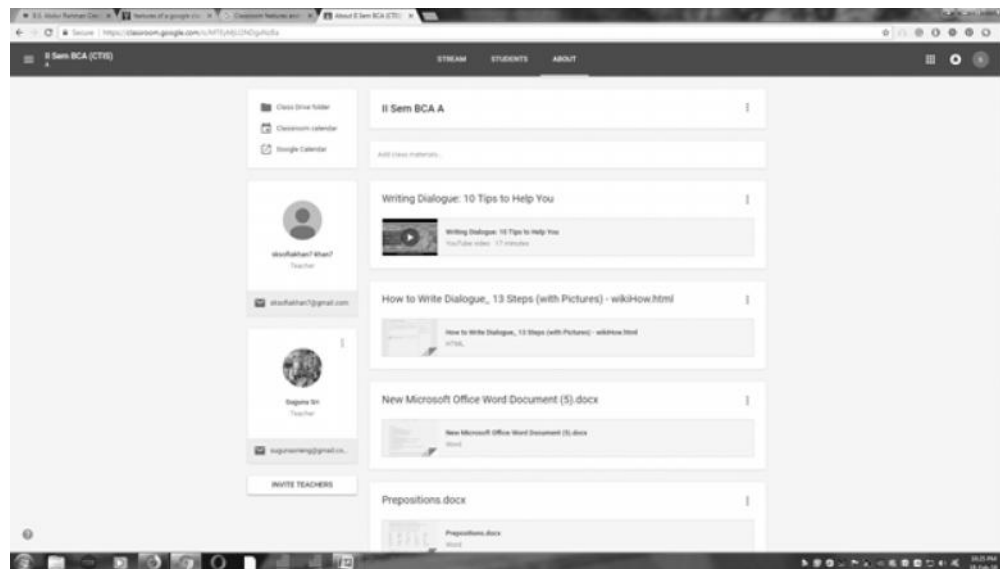


Fig: 2. The screen shot of Google Classroom. The course material and the video uploaded is seen.

Features of Remind:

Remind is an app that teachers and administrators can use to communicate with students and parents about important education-related reminders. Messages relating to exams, assignments, events and any other pertinent information can be sent through remind. Teachers can get around the 140-character limit by sending an attached document with longer messages,

Remind for communication:

The remind app is used with the II semester ECE students for whom the author is the class advisor. First the app was downloaded from Google Playstore and the class was created. The students were also made to

download the app in their smart phones. Just as in Google Classroom the students were made to join using a code last semester. Basically this app is used to convey any important information and encouraging messages to the students. Since all of them are members they interact. Even learning material like the audio file for listening and links from youtube with motivational videos were uploaded last semester (Fig.3). Students submitted the assignments through the app only.

Future plan:

This app will be used to communicate with parents to let them know the progress and performance of their wards in the class.



Fig: 3 The screen shot of remind app .The names of students appear on the left side and the listening file uploaded by the teacher can be seen on the right side.

All the three tools have a common feature. Though they are collaborative by nature, the best part is, students get to know what has been taught if they were absent for the day and also they facilitate paperless submission of assignments.

Since Zoho writer, Google Classroom and remind app are used for the first time by the author, more features of these tools have to be explored to see how it works.

Limitations:

Collaboration in online environment learning according to Curtis & Lawson (p22) lack the non-verbal cues that are the component of face-to-face contact which might reduce the extent of the communication that occurs. The verbal exchanges between the learners and the instructor while working on the task or the document beyond the classroom are not possible. The learners have to be satisfied only by the comments posted by the instructor. Though technology enables application of new tools to support learner choice and self-direction on part of the students, the use of these technologies should be incorporated by the teachers into their teaching and learning more effectively.

Though all the three tools are useful for language learning, there are certain limitations in their usage.

Zoho writer:

- Since students logged in using a common email id created for the class, some mischievous students are able to tamper with the notes shared by the author. As

they work as collaborators on the same document, they change the words or delete the entire lesson. It is not possible to track them individually. If they had been made to log in with their individual email ids, perhaps this problem could have been avoided.

- Due to the above reasons students have still not been encouraged to peer edit their writing.
- It is not possible to upload audio files. Zoho supports only certain file formats.
- Even though the document is 'marked final' (option available) and shared with 'Read only' option with the collaborators, still it is possible to delete the words from the original document.

Google Classroom:

- As the students are accessing this tool beyond the classroom in their mobile phones, no actual problems were observed by the author from their side and the students have not reported any technical problems so far, though there are possibilities.
- They sometimes do not complete their assignments on time as they are not working in the language lab under the direct supervision of the author.
- The students instead of typing their assignments scan their writing in the scan app and upload in the Classroom.

Remind

- An effort was made to communicate with

few parents for a sample study, but they were unwilling to cooperate.

- It is not possible to make students peer edit their work.

Findings:

Though it is early to comment on the findings as the author has still to explore the potentiality of the tools to the fullest, the three web 2.0 tools are being used in the study to see if they can improve the writing and learning skills of the learners. She is of the opinion that the students are eager to learn and explore something new. Since their lessons and assignments are stored in the Writer and Classroom, they are easily able to prepare for their exams from their mobile phones instead of carrying papers and notebooks.

It has to be remembered that the students taken for the study are in the second semester. For them, this is a novel method of learning to write and learn using technology.

Recommendations:

An elaborate study with a research design and statistical details will shed more light on how Zoho writer and Google Classroom can be used for collaborative writing and learning.

Conclusion:

Due to the advancement in technology it is possible to make language learning interesting by incorporating technology in the classroom to accelerate the growth of

teaching-learning process. Many teachers are faced with challenges of effectively integrating technology into their classroom instruction. Teachers who incorporate technology in their day to day teaching have more chances to develop professionally. They will be able to design and implement technology supported experience for students. Training and workshops need to be conducted for teachers at the tertiary level so that they are updated about the various technological tools available today for the teaching learning process. They also need to be aware of new pedagogical strategies made possible with the use of technology. Institutions should encourage teachers to use innovative teaching practices like using ICT tools and mobile devices in the classroom and also enroll for online courses for their professional development.

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