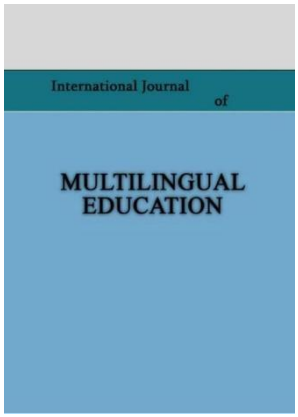


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# Implications on applying the Web 2.0 software to teach a Chinese L2 learner online

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# Implications on applying the Web 2.0 software to teach a Chinese L2 learner online

**ABSTRACT**

The rise of information and communication technologies has increased people's access to educational resources and stormed the process of E-learners in the past decades. Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic forced more people to stay at home to do things via online. Of course, education is no exception. While numerous distance Chinese learning tools or websites are booming, not all these tools or websites are suitable because of E-learners' variations in Chinese language proficiency, computer literacy, or the complexity of the tools. Hence, being able to choose effective Chinese E-learning tools for Chinese learners is crucial for Teachers of Chinese to Speakers for Other Languages (TCSOL) as it affects not only learners' motivation and overall success as well as teachers' teaching pedagogy and performance. The present study analyzed a series of user-friendly, free Web2.0 digital tools for distance Chinese learners to study along with a textbook, Practical Audio-Visual Chinese 2, designed and carried out experimental teaching courses for Japanese participants with elementary Chinese proficiency. Lastly, it concluded with ST2D implications for TCSOL based the feedback from users.

***Keywords:*** *Distance Chinese learning, digital tools, E-learning, modular teaching*

## Introduction

Students of Chinese language learning programs mainly consist of non-native citizens and overseas Chinese. Early Teachers of Chinese to Speakers for Other Languages (TCSOL) had to travel abroad due to the reason that the majority of their students were across from the globe. However, in the age of rapid technological progress, education is no longer bound by the physical confines of classrooms; in fact, the online education has gained its popularity, and its accessibility has grown accordingly. Despite being miles apart from each other, instructors and learners are still able to attend classes online through the use of Chinese E-learning tools, effectively realizing the concept of transnational education. As to modern distant education, it can be broadly categorized into synchronous and asynchronous learning (Lin & Lien, 2010).

Synchronous learning refers to the online learning model that instructors and students interact in a specific virtual environment while asynchronous learning takes place while learners and instructors have no real-time interaction. However, the issue related to which digital tools are more advantageous to supplement Chinese language learning for TCSOL is rarely assessed and entails further investigation.

The present study aimed to explore the synchronous distance learning approach by employing digital tools to aid Chinese language teaching and further investigate which of these tools could maintain students' high level of motivation and achieve favorable results within a limited one to two hour of class period. The study participant was a full-time Japanese employee with intermediate English proficiency and elementary Chinese skills. With her previous experiences in distance Chinese learning programs prior to participating in this study, it could reduce the time spent on such technical preparations as configuring headsets, microphones, video and audio levels and allow the lesson to commence with haste. This study utilized Skype and its PowerPoint integration as the primary platform for instruction, coupled with Studystack's mini-games to raise the student's learning interest and Dropbox as an online storage for both homework and course materials. Finally, the study organized a suitable combination of digital tools to aid in distance Chinese learning for elementary level learners, further hoping to help not only the learners with their strive for knowledge, but also give inspiration for future TCSOL's course design in distance Chinese language teaching.

## Literature Review

### *Distance Learning*

Wang and Chen (2003) state that distance learning is a teaching process that bypasses physical barriers using media to deliver systematically designed teaching materials to learners. According to Hsin (2002), interactionism is the most suitable linguistic teaching philosophy in terms of distance learning through video conferences, followed by functionalism and the least appropriate structuralism. As for educators of distance learning, Lin and Lien (2010) illustrated a necessity for educators to be equipped with basic abilities such as multimedia operation and typing. Huang (2010) found that the most significant feature of synchronous distance learning is the learning opportunities provided by the accessibility of personal computers. Huang (2010) also points out that the fundamentals of synchronous distance learning using video conference are speaking interactions and appropriate integration of videos and worksheets. Based on the foregoing literature, the following features in distance learning are summarized below:

1. Educational activities that bypass time and physical barriers.
2. Real-time interactivity.
3. Course design is centered around aural/oral education with internet learning resources.
4. Educators must have sufficient computer skills.
5. Learners can save time that would otherwise be spent on traveling.

***The trend of applying technology in Chinese language learning***

The advances in internet technology in recent years saw an increased amount of digital tools being integrated into language teaching. Many scholars have begun researching computer-assisted language education due to the machine's ability to provide both independent and cooperative learning models while making study opportunities seem omnipresent (Lan, 2009). Hence, using technological integration to assist Chinese language learners in their metamorphosis from interlanguage to mastery is a fundamental skill for TCSOL educators of the new era. Although technological integration in Chinese language learning might be an inevitable trend, teachers are still irreplaceable in terms of instructing. While designing a course, TCSOL must not focus on the integration of digital tools itself, but the necessity and suitability of these multimedia tools in teaching while asking themselves these questions (Chen, 2011):

1. What language functions should the student perform? Will the course design or technological application suffice in helping student perform the said function?
2. What are the instructional and learning goals? Will the course design or technological application suffice in helping student achieve those goals?
3. How should the students display their language skills to echo the course design? Can digital tools assist in this case?
4. What kinds of evidence can be used to prove or measure the student's performance? Can digital tools assist in this aspect?

Shuh (2005) also states that integrating technology into Chinese language learning is not simply replacing existing teaching materials with digital ones. Educators not only need to adapt their course to new teaching philosophies and systems, but also themselves in order to solve pedagogical problems using the most appropriate resources at hand.

The study summarizes the following points from reviewing the statements above regarding applying technology in Chinese language learning.

1. Consider the audience

2. Adapt digital tools to the needs of the students
3. Educators should evaluate which digital tools can help students achieve the highest efficiency
4. Whether the learners be able to accept these tools and utilize them in after class practices.

**Introduction to digital tools for distance Chinese learning**

A common question many distance learning educators found asking themselves is "which digital tools can minimize the students' learning difficulties and maximize efficiency?" The biggest difference between traditional and distance learning is the ability for educators to solve students' problems face to face, and such problem is especially pronounced in teaching basic level students whose vocabulary are limited. Teachers usually have to build context and use repetitive exercises to help basic level students achieve better learning efficiency. Under this premise, the study has organized a list of digital tools based on researchers' teaching experiences and students' feedbacks.

| Name | Description | Pros | Cons |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Skype** | Skype is a communications software widely used across the globe. It has more features, such as multi-person conference calls and screen-sharing, than MSN. Teachers can instruct multiple students at once while sharing course materials on their screen. | 1. Supports up to 4-person conference call.<br>2.Screen-sharing feature. | Bad connection can impact teaching quality. |
| **IDroo** | IDroo is a plugin for Skype that provides a digital whiteboard for users to draw or write on. Anyone can see and interact with the whiteboard as long as they are invited to the call. | 1. Digital whiteboard provides a space to write and draw.<br>2. Can insert texts and images on the board. | Bad connection can impact teaching quality. |
| **Go Animate** | Go animate is a website for creating animations. Teachers can create short clips based on textbook model conversations using pre-existing assets, giving students an opportunity | 1. Easy to use.<br>2. Teachers can voice characters on their own. | 1. Free version has less characters, background assets and a limited word count.<br>2. Clips are only |

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|---|---|---|---|
| | to practice listening skills before commencing the lesson. | | available for use on the site. |
| **Toondoo** | Toondoo is a website for creating comics. Students can practice oral language skills with teachers using custom-made comics. | 1. Free.<br>2. Plenty of assets to use. | None at the moment. |
| **Studystack** | 1. Can create vocabulary cards.<br>2. Offers many mini-game templates. | 1. Free.<br>2. Easy to use. | Only available online. |
| **Dropbox** | Dropbox is cloud-based online service for file storage, offering students a space to download teaching materials uploaded by the teacher. Free version offers 2GB space upon registration while the paid version can provide up to 100 GB. | 1. Easy to use.<br>2. Files can be shared with specific users.<br>3. Real-time file updates. | Real-time updates only apply when the Dropbox app is installed on the computer. |
| **Freez Screen *Video Capture*** | Freez Screen *Video Capture can be used to record course materials that are otherwise unavailable for download, such as videos or stroke sequence animations.* | 1. Easy to use.<br>2. Free to download. | 1. Videos downloaded are only available for personal uses due to copyright issues. |
| **Voki** | Voki's main feature lies within its ability to create a virtual avatar that supports voice recording and comes with various designs, making distance learning more intriguing. | 1. Easy to use.<br>2. Varied character designs. | 1. Only supports one-way interactions.<br>2. No feedback options for students. |
| **Audacity** | Teachers can use Audacity to record pronunciations of the words students have the most trouble with into files and send them to the students for after class practice. | 1. Easy to use.<br>2. Free to download. | None at the moment. |
| **Picpick** | Picpick is a screen capture software that is similar to the functions of the Print Screen key, albeit with higher image resolution and greater ease of use. | 1. Easy to operate.<br>2. Screenshots can be edited in-app.<br>3. Free to download. | None at the moment. |

**Course Design with distance Chinese E-learning tools**

Due to the student's desire in improving her aural and oral skills, the courses were designed to reflect said request. Clocking at 60 minutes per period, this course was based on *Practical Audio- Visual Chinese* 2, Lesson 1 with the incorporation of above-mentioned digital tools.

| **Lesson Plan** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teaching goals: Teach the student how to describe common symptoms of sicknesses, share her experiences of being ill in Chinese, and enable her to perform the tasks while she needs to seek medical care in Chinese-speaking countries. | | | | | |
| Period | | Activities | Target Language skills to be Train-ed | Duration (minutes) | User Guide for Teaching Tools |
| First Period | Preparation | Have the student install IDroo and make sure her headset and microphone are in working condition. | Listening & Speaking | 10 | 1. Skype Make sure the student's audio and video feeds are clear.<br>2. IDroo Have the student ins-<br>tall said app and login. Both par-ties can use the whiteboard. |
| | Warm up | 1. Ask the student to share her experience being sick.<br>2. Have the student practice saying words regarding common sicknesses<br>3. Have the student watch a short animated video. | Listening & Spea-king | 10 | 1. Skype Make sure the stud-ent's video feed is on so that the teacher can pay attention to her mouth shapes in order to check pronuncial-tions.<br>2. Go animate |

| | | | | | |
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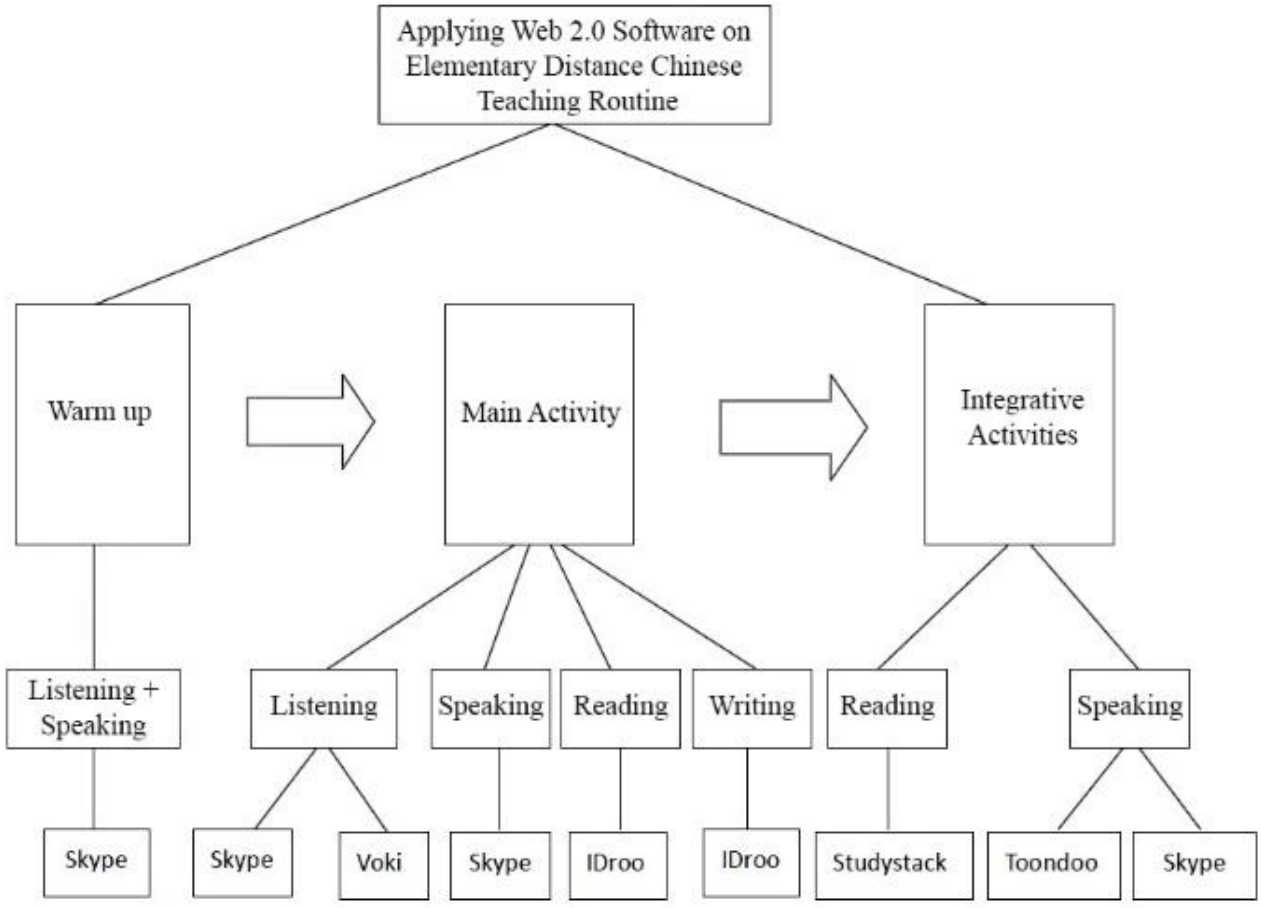
| | | | | | Create short animation bas-ed on the text. |
| | Main activity | Teach such Chinese words of common symptoms as coughing, runny nose, fever, diarrhea, and the like. Each word should be introduced along with pictures and example sentences. Explaining the words in English is discouraged unless necessary. Ask the student to write down the words on her notebooks with each vocabulary taught. | Listening, Speaking, Reading & Writing. | 20 | 1. Skype Show Power-Point ma-terials to the student via screen-share.<br>2. IDroo Tea-chers can write down the Pinyin of the words that the student has trouble pronoun-cing.<br>3.Voki After teaching a word for the first time, ask the student to repeat after Voki's teacher avatar for more exercises.<br>4. Picpick The student can use Pic-pick to screen-shot and send any problem she might have in operating soft-ware to the teacher.<br>5. Freez Scre-en *Video Cap-ture The teacher can pre-record the stroke sequ-* |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | *ences of harder Chinese characters into clips, providing references for the student should the need arise.* |
| | Integrative activities | 1. Use vocabulary cards to review the words taught today and quiz the student on the pinyin of individual words.<br>2. Break the example sentences used in class into small phrases, randomize them and ask the student to restructure them. This exercise focuses on sharpening the student's language fluency<br>3. Ask the student to present a short story using the words taught in class and the 4-panel comic provided to them. | Reading | 20 | 1. Studystack Make word cards and sentence reconstruction games for after class practices.<br>2. Skype Keep in touch with the student and provide help on the learning matter ASAP.<br>3.Toondoo Create a 4-panel comic for the student's oral practice. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Take-home Assignments | 1. The teacher will send the pronunciation recordings of the words taught in class while asking the student to practice and record her pronunciations as homework.<br>2. Have the student download, finish, and upload the worksheets of the lesson taught today. | 1. Audacity Ask the student to record and upload her word pronunciations for later feed-back.<br>1. Dropbox Pro-vides an online storage space for up-loading home-work and sharing files. |

The foregoing lesson plan and the application timings of multimedia tools is modularized and plotted into the following flowchart:



## Conclusion and Implications

The present study has been adapting the class period from 1 to 2 hours per week in accordance with the student's request since September, 2011 till present. Starting the class from Lesson 7 of *Practical Audio-Visual Chinese* 2, the study has been customizing the lessons around the student's performance while integrating the various abovementioned multimedia tools into the curriculum. Thus, the study concluded the lesson plan introduced in this study could be applied to elementary Chinese learners who wished to enhance their oral skills. Through the video call and digital whiteboard feature of Skype+Idroo, teachers could immediately correct learners' pronunciation errors and explain the problems they might have. Studystack, on the other hand, was mainly used for previewing and reviewing the lessons. It could also help create flashcards and language mini games to make student's learning venture more interesting. Additionally, the user interface of the website was written entirely in English, which made using it after class much easier for non-native students of Chinese.

Based on users' feedback, some pedagogical implications are concluded as the following.

### *1. Similar tools overlap in functions*

Although a plethora of multimedia tools exist on the internet, many of their functions overlap with each other. Take Voki and Audacity as examples, the two both focuses on recording audio except that Voki comes with an extra feature to play sound files with virtual avatars of the user's choosing. With every new tool introduced in class, students will need to dedicate extra time in familiarizing themselves with said tool, which is extremely inconvenient. Although starting the lessons with a wide selection of tools is acceptable, it is advised to narrow down the software used in class based on the students' affinities towards each in order to streamline the learning process.

### *2. The timings of using online animations*

Using Go animate as a warm up session is well received by the student, remarking its benefit of aural skill training. However, the loading time for the animation is quite lengthy and the video itself is bandwidth-intensive, which can sometimes disconnect Skype's ongoing video calls. The student even proposed a solution to have the video link shared via Dropbox, so that she can practice on her own after class. It is generally advised not to play the animations unless the connection stability permits doing so.

### *3. Diversifying language mini-games*

Although being an adult, the student still has a high acceptance for games. The language games used in class are mainly "connect phrases" and "sentence reconstructions". Despite finding them interesting, the student also noted the lack of variety in the games and inquired the study on the possibility of designing more language games for her as after-class practices.

### 4. Do not over-rely on multimedia tools. Instead, teachers are the true leaders of the course

Although the myriad forms of multimedia tools are sure to draw the student's attention, the primary component of teaching still lies within human interaction. Despite acknowledging the integration of multimedia tools and their aid in maintaining learning motivation, student A still mentioned the desire for more face to face interaction with the teacher, specifically the exchange of thought-provoking questions and answers. It is evident that teachers are still irreplaceable to students, and that is what every aspiring TCSOL should keep in mind.

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