

# Teachers' perceptions towards using Web 2.0 in language learning and teaching

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**Abstract** This paper aims at exploring the perceptions of teachers towards using Web 2.0 in language learning and teaching. To this end, a study was carried out among language teachers serving in different Moroccan higher education institutions. The result of the research study demonstrated that just like students, instructors are also immersed in these web-based applications and have recourse to them for both personal and educational reasons. However, it has been noticed that though the vast majority of the surveyed teachers claimed that Web 2.0 technologies have a positive impact on language teaching and learning, many of them are still reluctant in effectively incorporating them in education settings. Indeed, it was found out that less than 15% of the respondents use these platforms to interact with students and no more than 2.4% of the subjects are actively involved in creating educational content and uploading it on Web 2.0 applications. However, given the various benefits of these online communities, we recommend that more teachers should embrace them as fully as possible to support classroom goals.

**Keywords** Web 2.0 · Language · Learning · Teaching · Faculty · Higher education · Morocco · Survey

## 1 Introduction

In the last few years, the Internet has witnessed an exponential growth and has evolved from a read-only information repository into a read-write platform. In the past, most of the content was created by web professionals. The web was simply a portal where common users passively receive web pages without being given the opportunity to post reviews, comments, or to give feedback. Today, the web has turned into a read-write

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venue for participation, collaboration, information sharing and social interaction. In contrast to the “readable” phase of the Internet (i.e. Web 1.0) in which people were limited to the passive viewing of flat data, Web 2.0, which represents a paradigm shift in how people use the Internet, emphasizes user-generated content, usability, and interoperability. Rather than being simple consumers of knowledge and information, Internet users are now content creators and the primary drivers of this emerging participatory culture (Lin 2007).

This transition from simple static HTML web pages to a more dynamic and participatory web has resulted in the emergence of a set of Web 2.0 technologies or social media platforms. These applications, which are inexpensive or even free and available to individuals who have Internet access, are of different types and functions, but all share the common characteristic of enabling people to create, share, collaborate, communicate and consume content (Harris and Rea 2009). Unlike other types of online platforms, Web 2.0 technologies do not require any web design expertise or publishing skills. As such, they make it easy for people to create and publish or communicate their content to the whole world.

Web 2.0 platforms can be classified into three major categories. The first category includes social networks such as Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, MySpace and Twitter. All these serve as online social communities through which people connect and interact with each other. The second category is composed of content sharing and organizing online platforms as YouTube, Dailymotion, Dropbox, Slideshare, Reddit, Digg, Delicious, and RSS readers. The third category contains content production and editing websites such as discussion forums, Wiki, Blogger, Google Docs, and WordPress. However, the functions and features of each of these Web 2.0 platforms often overlap, thus, making a technological application appropriate for more than one category.

These technologies are widely used by millions of people across different fields and for a variety of purposes. As such, they have completely revolutionized the way in which individuals communicate with each other as well as the way in which institutions, businesses and organizations interact with both internal and external stakeholders. The way these technologies have impacted our personal and professional lives is far greater than most of us could have anticipated. However, one of the issues that we need to shed light on in this work is the potential impact that these Web 2.0 technologies have on education, and especially on language learning and teaching. The main reason behind the choice of this field is mainly due to the fact that it has been noticed that the majority of social media users globally are teens and young adults (Statista 2014; Knight-McCord et al. 2016). These users, most of whom are likely to be students, are immersed in these web applications and resort to them for a multitude of reasons (Eteokleous-Grigoriou and Ktoridou 2014). They use them to view what others are doing, stay updated on current events, keep in touch with friends and family, do research, and most importantly to learn (Hrastinski and Aghaee 2012; Faizi et al. 2015; Faizi and El Fkihi 2016a; Doleck et al. 2017). Many studies have, actually, shown that students consider these online social communities as key resources for them across all disciplines and subjects and view them as effective educational technologies that help them broaden and deepen their knowledge in their specific areas of studies. Nonetheless, despite the positive impact that students feel these Web 2.0 technologies have on their learning, little research has been done on how teachers perceive the usefulness and validity of using these new digital technologies in education in general

and in language teaching and learning in particular. In fact, though a lot of research studies have demonstrated the teachers' positive attitudes towards online instruction in general (Benson et al. 2011; Dashtestani 2014; Murday et al. 2008; Puteh 2002; Shin and Son 2007; Woo and Reeves 2007) and towards the use of single social media technologies (e.g. Facebook or Twitter) (Salmon et al. 2015; June et al. 2015; Karal et al. 2017) in formal educational contexts, the faculty members' perceptions of using Web 2.0 platforms for language and teaching purposes in both formal and informal educational settings has not thoroughly been investigated.

The objective of this paper is, therefore, to explore how faculty members perceive the use of Web 2.0 technologies for language learning and teaching purposes. The remainder of this article is structured as follows. In Section 2, we outline the potential advantages and disadvantages of using these online technologies in education, mainly in language learning. Section 3 presents the results of a study we undertook to examine language teachers' perceptions towards using these web-based applications for educational purposes. Finally, Section 4 gives a brief conclusion.

## 2 Web 2.0 technologies and language learning: Potential advantages

With the emergence of the world as a global village in which people are communicating with each other in different parts of the planet, learning foreign languages has become of utmost importance. In actual fact, success today depends to a large extent on the ability of an individual to function in this globalized world whose members speak a variety of languages.

Given the importance of foreign languages, students have started resorting to Web 2.0 technologies to enhance their language and communication skills. In fact, instead of just being confined to classical learning contexts, many students are now using social media as potential technologies that can help them improve their foreign language learning. Thanks to these applications, students and language learners have more opportunities that go beyond the classroom walls to practice their language and communication skills (Faizi et al. 2014).

A general overview of research studies conducted on the use Web 2.0 technologies in education settings has proven that these web applications have many potential advantages (Manca and Ranieri 2016; Sobaih et al. 2016; Chugh and Ruhi 2017). Indeed, it has been noticed that the new digital platforms help build a strong sense of community, promote interaction and communication between instructors and students both within or between classes and provides students with enough opportunities to connect with classmates and get engaged in cooperative and collaborative learning despite being separated in space and time (LeNoue et al. 2011). Web 2.0 platforms operate as open spaces where students interact, reflect, exchange ideas, and expand their knowledge base. By using these digital technologies, students can, at any time, post questions about any problem they may encounter while learning, and can get answers or feedback from teachers or peers in a matter of minutes. For their part, teachers can, via these online communities, answer students' queries, assign or correct homework and provide tutorials for students who are having difficulties. All these interactions reinforce the achievement of desirable learning outcomes (Yu et al. 2010).

These internet-based technologies are also found out to be an effective way to promote students' engagement and retention (Annetta et al. 2009; Chen et al. 2010; Junco 2012). These technologies can be used to encourage students invest both time and energy in interacting with others through educationally purposeful activities (Kuh 2003; Rutherford 2012). As such, they can enable lazy, shy, intimidated or bored students to share ideas and to express their opinions in a more comfortable way. Web 2.0 technologies are new and have proved to be exciting for anyone. They have the potential to create interactive learning environments in which learners are engaged in managing their own learning. Incorporating these technologies into the classroom and beyond school walls helps bring curricula to life for the students who are using them. Having fun while learning will certainly keep students engaged and focused on learning materials.

A further educational advantage of these applications is that they promote collaboration because they provide teachers and students with a unique destination where they can remotely share insights and discuss projects. Today, knowledge is no longer an individual but a collective process. Thanks to the new media, projects, tasks and papers can be created on a collective scale by co-operation. Through these platforms, synchronous or asynchronous collaboration supports a constructivist approach to learning, in which both students and educators work together to co-produce knowledge, rather than an approach that emphasizes individual contributions (Stevens 2009). Wikis and discussion forums, for instance, facilitate cooperation and collaborative knowledge building (Cress and Kimmerle 2007). This collaborative production of knowledge contributes in reinforcing learning processes and fostering deep learning.

Taking all these educational benefits into consideration, Web 2.0 technologies can serve as ideal environments for learning and teaching languages. Thanks to the various features that they incorporate, these social applications can make language learning or teaching an easier process by being fun, interactive and interesting. The online platforms that help people connect with each other can also be used to make language learning faster and more engaging.

Via Web 2.0 applications all language learners can get in touch with native speakers of a variety of languages. Even though basic vocabulary and grammar rules can be well learnt from teachers who are usually non-native speakers, and no matter what language exercises or activities might be done in class, students may still need more opportunities to enhance their listening and speaking skills. This is so because class activities and discussion topics are not actual real-life situations. By contrast, Web 2.0 platforms, characterized by the constant availability of native 'instructors', provide a live experience in which a student or language learner can practice his/her target language in real time. This is actually where the web supplements real life and offers alternative ways for learning languages. Given this fact, the language learner can, through Web 2.0, turn a laborious task like studying into something enjoyable by meeting and interacting with native language speakers from around the world.

With or without their teacher's recommendations, students can access a social language learning network where they can get an answer to most of their questions, without having to go through the anxiety of asking it in class. Social networking websites, such as Facebook and Twitter are ideal spaces where a person can practice his/her language skills with real native speakers. Besides these free online networks, there are specifically designed web-based language learning communities that offer

interactive lessons, exercises and tests as well as audio and video resources in many languages. Users can, for instance, write a paragraph or an essay in a given language such as English or French and have a native speaker in the network correct it.

Despite the educational benefits that Web 2.0 technologies have been praised for, some educators argue that these digital platforms ruin students' writings (Purcell et al. 2013). However, research has demonstrated that authoring technologies, namely discussion forums, blogs and wiki spaces, are taking a more predominant role in language learning. In fact, by using social media, students are more exposed to different opinions and wider audiences and are given an opportunity to get engaged with language in a setting outside the classroom, which can help improve their reading, writing, and discussion skills through cooperative writing and reading opportunities. Before the Internet, writing was a solitary activity. Most students often see themselves as writing only to one person, namely the teacher. But in this new wave of virtual social environments, writing has become a very social way to communicate. With just a single post, a student can now reach thousands of people. As such, students always put in much more efforts into their writings because they assume that what they write will be for a wider audience.

Media sharing platforms such as YouTube and Dailymotion are also valuable resources through which multiple language skills can be learnt or taught. This set of online technologies, actually, has the potential to create a learning community where everyone has a voice (Duffy 2008). Using them either inside or outside the classroom can enhance conversation, listening, and pronunciation skills. YouTube videos can also be used to stimulate cultural lessons, enhance exposure to world languages, and to promote vocabulary development. These online channels enable students to get exposed to authentic language and foster a learning style that is more autonomous and student-centered (Watkins and Wilkins 2011). Given this fact, video sharing platforms offer endless opportunities for formal and informal student-centered language learning.

Beyond just getting materials from this type of social media technologies, language learners can also broadcast themselves. By producing their own videos, students can apply the target language to real-world situations, and by uploading them on the Internet, they can get feedback on their speaking skills from others. Creating student-generated materials such as videos or podcasts, thus, generating language, is an important part of the language acquisition process (Chartrand 2012; Swain 2005).

### 3 Language teachers' use of Web 2.0

Having detailed the potential benefits of using Web 2.0 technologies in education and in language learning in particular, the purpose of the present section is to investigate how language instructors perceive the use of these digital social platforms for language learning and teaching purposes.

#### 3.1 Research methodology

To examine the potential impact that Web 2.0 has on enhancing language teaching and learning, a research study was undertaken to explore how teachers make use of these technologies and how they view the role that these digital technologies may play in enriching the teaching and learning experiences. To this end, the web-based anonymous

questionnaire that we designed was submitted to a group of higher education language teachers. Our choice of an Internet-based rather than a paper survey was based on the fact that the former allows to reach a large number of participants and makes data collection and processing easier (Wyatt 2000).

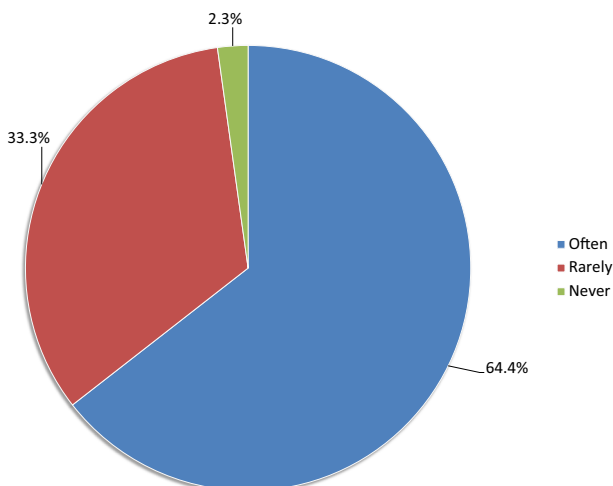
The questionnaire, which generated both qualitative and quantitative data, was composed of three main parts. The first part was concerned with collecting demographic information, namely age, teaching experience and inn. The second part focused on the subjects' use and usage of Web 2.0 technologies. The third part was devoted to gathering data about the teachers' perceptions towards using these technologies for language learning and teaching purposes.

The survey's target population was language teachers from different Moroccan public and private higher education institutions. A link to the questionnaire was sent via e-mail in December 2016 to about 137 teachers. A total of 90 participants returned the questionnaire. Their age ranged from 31 to 57 and their teaching experience varied between 6 and 35 years.

### 3.2 Data processing

To investigate the teachers' attitudes towards the use of Web 2.0 technologies, the faculty members were firstly asked to select, from a predefined list, the social networks that they are members of. Analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaire showed that 97.7% of the surveyed language teachers have a profile in at least one social networking website. The most frequently visited social networks among the participants are Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, Viadeo and Twitter.

In addition to this range of virtual online communities, it was revealed that the participants in the survey use another variety of digital platforms, namely media sharing platforms, discussion forums, blogs and wikis. To find out the usage frequency of all Web 2.0 technologies, the respondents were then asked how often they use them. The teachers were told to select one of the following three options: 'often', 'rarely' or 'never'. The results are illustrated in Fig. 1 below.



**Fig. 1** Usage frequency of Web 2.0 technologies

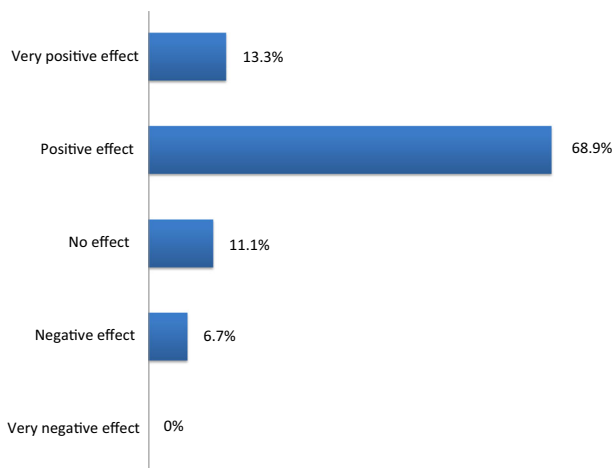
As shown in Fig. 1, the great majority of the participants in the survey (64.4%) pointed out that they often use these applications. Nevertheless, 33.3% of the informants claimed that they rarely use these technologies. Only 2.3% said they do not use Web 2.0 technologies at all. Note, however, that no distinction was observed between male and female instructors. Still, it was noticed that younger or less experienced teachers use these online social communities more often than older or more experienced faculty members. Moreover, though the main reason behind using these social media platforms may vary from one person to another, all the informants mentioned that they use them for both personal and educational reasons. This actually reflects the importance of these online platforms. However, of all Web 2.0 technologies, the most widely used platforms are social networks, media sharing websites, online forums, blogs and wikis, respectively.

To have a clear idea on the kind of impact that Web 2.0 technologies have on both teaching and learning, the surveyed teachers were asked to choose either ‘very positive effect’, ‘positive effect’, ‘no effect’, ‘negative effect’ or ‘very negative effect’. The findings related to the impact of these online technologies on teaching are shown in Fig. 2.

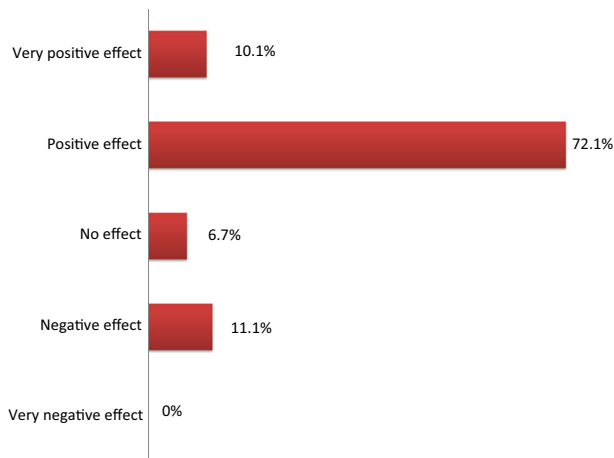
As seen in Fig. 2, 82.2% of the teachers emphasized that Web 2.0 technologies have a positive impact on teaching as they provide them with teaching and learning materials and enable them to prepare lesson notes and exams. This means that these technologies are capable of enriching the teaching experience of the respondents. Very few teachers (6.7%), however, argued that these internet-based platforms affect teaching negatively. 11.1% revealed that no effect, be it positive or negative, is felt.

Concerning the effect of Web 2.0 technologies on students’ learning, the majority of the teachers acknowledged that it is positive as these digital technologies broaden students’ understanding of different subject matters. Nonetheless, 11.1% of the respondents noted that these online social applications negatively impact students’ learning experience as is shown in Fig. 3.

When the teachers were asked whether the Web 2.0 technologies could help students improve their language and communication skills, 33.3% ‘strongly agree’ that these technologies do, in fact, enable language learners to enhance their skills. 48.9% ‘somewhat agree’ while the rest of the respondents (i.e. 17.7%) disagree with the fact



**Fig. 2** Impact of Web 2.0 on teaching



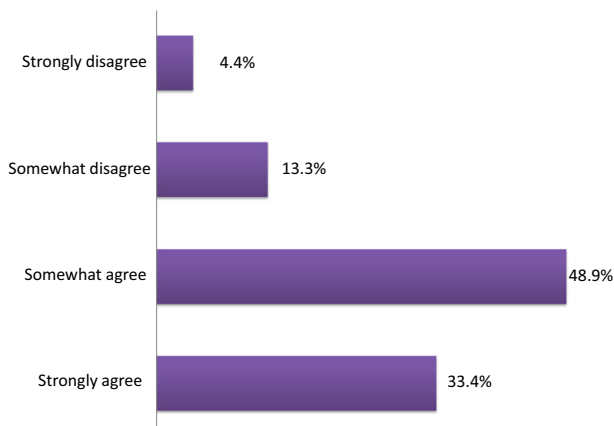
**Fig. 3** Impact of Web 2.0 on students' learning

that these online technologies may contribute to promoting language learning. This is illustrated in Fig. 4.

Even if the great majority of the interviewed teachers agree that Web 2.0 technologies present potential benefits for language teachers and learners, some instructors still feel that the use of these technologies in education is still questionable.

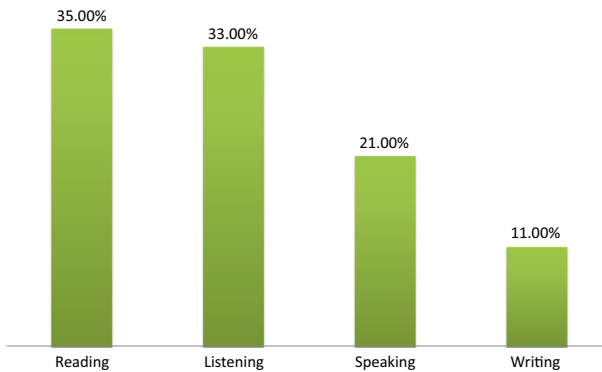
To investigate the teachers' perceptions of the relative impact that Web 2.0 has on improving each of the four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing, the faculty members who thought that the new media technologies could boost the students' language skills were asked to rank these skills based on their degree of improvement, with 1 being the most important language skill that students could improve and 4 being the least important enhanced skill. Figure 5 below summarizes the mean rankings associated with each language skill.

As Fig. 5 shows, the major language skill that is reported to be improving is reading (35%). Indeed, through Web 2.0 technologies, students can read an assortment of messages and articles. In this way, they can learn new words, turns of phrase and



**Fig. 4** Teachers' views as the potential of Web 2.0 to enhance students' language skills





**Fig. 5** Teachers' mean rankings for each of the four language skills

jargon, which help them to improve their vocabulary and, thus, their reading proficiency. Listening is viewed to be the second major language skill that students can enhance. Compared to classroom-based environments that are characterized by the scarcity of listening activities, Web 2.0 platforms feature an abundant variety of audio and video materials. This may be behind the enhancement of the students' listening skills. Speaking and writing are, however, associated with the lowest ratings.

Regarding the use of Web 2.0 platforms for interacting with students, the findings indicated that only 14.5% of the teachers confirmed they help foster the language learners' skills via these online communities. The rest of the informants (i.e. 85.5%) admitted that they do not interact with students online.

To check whether they are content creators or just knowledge consumers, the interviewed teachers were asked about their contributions and activities on Web 2.0 technologies. The study revealed that their contributions were mainly limited to providing students with links to video or audio resources (51.1%), giving assignments (20%), answering students' questions (15.6%), posting comments (13.3%), etc. Nevertheless, of all the teachers, only 2.4% were found to be actively involved in creating educational content and uploading it on the Web. Rather than just giving students links to educational resources created by others, these faculty members stated that they post their learning materials and resources such as lessons, tutorials, tests, past exams, answers to exercises, as well as any piece of information that might be useful to students.

When asked whether Web 2.0 technologies could be a good alternative to face-to-face teaching/learning, only 2.2% of the respondents claimed to 'strongly agree' while 28.9% of the teachers 'somewhat agree'. By contrast, 68.9% of the teachers noted that Web 2.0 technologies cannot take the place of face-to-face teaching or learning.

The findings above clearly demonstrate that despite the educational benefits of Web 2.0 technologies, many teachers are still reluctant or not yet equipped with the requisite skills, support and positive attitudes towards making efficient use of these technologies. Many studies have, actually, confirmed that there are many obstacles that hinder the full integration of these social online communities and technology in general in education settings (Kale and Goh 2014; Kafyulilo et al. 2016; Faizi and El Fkihi 2016b). The impediments that are often mentioned concern both the time and efforts related to the use of these platforms in teaching, the teachers' ICT incompetence, the lack of reliable

ICT infrastructure and technical support, as well as the fear that the line between faculty members and students can get blurry.

However, given that the use of Web 2.0 technologies for learning and teaching represents a strategic shift to enhance pedagogical outcomes (Chugh and Ruhi 2017), all the above-mentioned obstacles should be addressed by higher education institutions before faculty will be willing to embrace these technologies for teaching. Teachers should also know that chalk and talk do not fit the expectations of tech-savvy students anymore. Today, teachers have to accompany their students in their learning process, teach them how to collect, analyze, criticize and communicate information. In this way, the role of a twenty-first century teacher is getting more and more complex and multifaceted. Accordingly, training seems to be an essential means to get them prepared for this new task (Jouneau-Sion and Sanchez 2013).

## 4 Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to investigate the attitudes and perceptions of teachers towards using Web 2.0 technologies in language learning and teaching. For this purpose, a research study was undertaken among Moroccan higher education language teachers. The findings of the study revealed that just like students, faculty members are immersed in these online applications and resort to them for personal and educational reasons. However, even if the overwhelming majority of the teachers who participated in the study argued that these Web 2.0 technologies have a positive impact on both teaching and learning, they are not keen on bringing them into their classrooms. In fact, less than 15% of the respondents noted that they use these platforms to interact with students. Concerning the contributions of the teachers on these web-based applications, it has been noticed that only 2.4% of the subjects create educational content and upload it on the Web. For the rest of those who interact online with the students, communication is confined to posting links to educational resources uploaded by other Internet users.

Despite the reluctance of a lot of language teachers to make efficient use of Web 2.0, we strongly believe that these technologies will certainly contribute to the development of new teaching and learning modes that are likely to revolutionize education settings. Consequently, we recommend that teachers embrace these online platforms as fully as possible to support classroom objectives.

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