



# HARNESSING OPEN SOURCE DIGITAL TOOLS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR ENGINEERING LEVELS STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

*Plan of this paper is to investigate the uses of open source tools of English language learning and business English for tertiary level students specially engineering students of the current scenario in India. These sources are available to the general public, free of cost. There are plenty of open source tools to aid in the teaching and learning of languages. These tools are easily assessable for the learners to learn with minimum external support and the guidance. This paper illustrates the benefits of a few open source tools namely, English zone, and Vocaboly. English as a second language podcast and British Council's Learn English. This paper also discusses how to reap the benefits of language learning with these tools.*

**Key words:** English language learning, Business English, English language tools, English as a second language, Open source tools.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

There was a bygone era when American English and British English were considered as Standard English. This is the period of lingua franca. Tertiary level students or college Students of all engineering majors need to be good at communication in English. Now it's neither this nor that it is business English which is universal and stereotyped for all English speakers. Business English has introduced to improve professional interactions among international corporate and companies to negotiate the professional context. It is trained by the professional trainers from renowned and reputed institutions. The trainers will train the learner to learn the language professionally for instances business negotiation, telephonic conversation, report writing, e-mail drafting, small talks, professional presentations etc., it

will the learners to improve their vocabulary skills which will helpful to reach their goals easily. Trainers will train the learners to convey their approach systematically.

In the modern era, language learning is significant, especially, when the language is full of weird rules, illogic and contradictions. Owing to its influences from different languages, and on account of its unphonetic nature, English is such a language. Native speakers also, face inconvenient to master the implication of English in aspects such as pronunciation and grammar. “The 21st century confronts its citizenship with new choices, opportunities, and challenges due to the all-pervading technology into all spheres of life. In this era, the educational institutions cannot remain mere venues for the transmission of a prescribed set of information from teacher to student over a fixed period of time rather the educational institutions must promote “learning to learn”... “Traditional teaching and learning paradigms have been shaken by the impact of the integration of e-learning tools into educational practices... Due to the ubiquitous presence of technology the pedagogy of teaching methodology has also undergone a sea-change.” [1] Fortunately, for non-native English speakers, there is a multitude of open source tools for learning the language. “Most English teachers would agree that their students need to practice using English outside the classroom if they are to increase their communicative competence, but “practice” can consist of several types of English language use” [2]

Open source tools are sources where the application or the software available to the language learners at free of cost. Technological community is germinated with open source tools, free android applications and software. Various software is available free of charge to the general public who wish to learn English. Bug-free products are available for everyone to use the programs, applications or initiatives. This paper discusses a few English language learning tools, their advantages, uses, and limitations.

## **2. ADVANTAGES OF OPEN SOURCE TOOLS**

These tools are typically less expensive than the standard ones. There are hundreds of awesome open source tools available to English language learners. These phenomenal sites do not only offer an array of activities and exercises, but it also provides link to help ESL programs, books, schools, colleges and corporate domains. Such tools, which are free and simple to use, help learners learn the language at their pace and convenience. Most of these tools help the learners assess their needs and evaluate their progress from easy-to-learn interfaces. These tools support the practice of English language rules, vocabulary, verbs, tenses, pronunciation, intonation, sentence structure, which are the most important aspects of mastering a language. “In short, reading online demands new literacy skills in comprehending the different types of online texts available on the Web. As such, let us have a look at some studies on the comprehension of printed texts offline as compared with the hypertexts online”[3].

These tools assist the EL learner in translation, writing feedback, report preparation, speech recognition, natural language generation, and question answering, and generating an appropriate scoring system.

## **3. OPEN SOURCE TOOLS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING**

### **3.1. Mobile- Assisted Language Learning (Mall) Applications**

In this modern era, almost everyone uses smart phones. These handheld devices are storehouses of copious information that can be accessed instantly. The term MALL is the acronym for Mobile- assisted learning language. “...mobile learning (m-learning) has moved

from being a theory, explored by academic and technology enthusiasts, into a real and valuable contribution to learning" [4]

It is available even in the basic model mobile phones thereby acknowledge teachers and learners to enrich their mobile application, software and tools. The learner can be self- reliant in using these applications. Some of the prominent language learning applications are:

a	Offline dictionaries	d	Elementary English to Research English
b	Basic grammar	e	Grammarly.com
c	Essential English		

“In the educational field of learning English language, learners use mobile for learning English language; mobile offer them various activities for developing different language skills. Mobile technology has become an important tool in the teaching process and in students’ learning as well. It is crucial to learn how students feel towards learning English via MALL in their classrooms” [5]

### 3.2. Some Prominent Web Portals for Learning English

#### 3.2.1. English- zone.com

This website is uniquely designed for primary learners based on their grades, where the learners can have a better understanding of grammar and tenses. It assists the learners in learning how to speak and pronounce the English words in common. For instance, Audio clips help the learners practice clear pronunciation. It also helps to clarify aspects of spelling, including possessives, verb ending, contractions and more. Fun stuff zone helps the learners to find out clues in comic ways from jokes, funny pictures, riddles and games where the learners engross to conclude the answer. The following are the various components of the portal.

a	Grammar Zone	e	Vocabulary zone
b	Verb zone	f	Pronunciation zone
c	Spelling zone	g	Fun stuff zone
d	Reading zone		

#### 3.2.2. Vocabulary

It is free software that can be downloaded by the learners. Vocabulary building is one of the most challenging and crucial features in mastering a language. This software helps learners to learn new vocabulary, gives better understanding on the confronting vocabularies, learning how to use them while speaking and writing. This software is a recorded version which uses high definition human voice with stranded American accent. Quizzes and work sheets are provided to help the learners assess their performance. Here are some of the samples from Vocabulary.

a	Word Ticker	d	Spelling
b	Multi- choice test	e	Listening test
c	Memory games	f	Star war game

#### 3.2.3. English as a Second Language - Podcast

ESL Podcast is a trendy and readily available tool which can be stored in digital form. Authoritative updates and simple classification make this podcast an authentic resource. Majority of English learners from the non-English speaking world is indulgent about this podcast. There are dozens of helpful podcast lessons available in open source tools to learn about American language and culture. They are classified on skills level and categorized subject wise. One can choose an appropriate level to suit one’s learning style and pace. There

are plenty site available to a variety of English language situations for instance American English, British English, Australian English, Indian English and so on... . The proprieties use news, history and slang to break down the traditional mannerism of the English Language. “A podcast is a series of digital-media files which are distributed over the Internet using syndication feeds for playback on portable media players and computers. Utilizing podcasts in the classroom is very easy. The teacher can download many free ESL podcasts on the Internet to use in class. S/he can assign a podcast assignment for homework and form a discussion on the topic the next day” [1].Some of the salient features are listed below.

a	iTunes	c	Talk show
b	Commentary	d	Fly on the wall idiom

**3.3.4. British Council-Learn English**

BC affords its squeal of podcasts to help English language learners and improve the language and enhances listening skills through this channel. Activities that offer visual and auditory learning experiences make all the difference in one’s conversational English. This tool is designed to learn British as well as American English Grammar. There are some specific tools for EL teaching and learning, which strongly encourage research and real life applications. Some of them are

a	Learn English Grammar (UK Edition)	d	Fun & Games
b	Learn English Grammar (US Edition)	e	IELTS-International English Language Testing System
c	Listen & watch		

**3.3.5. Schoology**

This is a software application introduced by Nicholas Fahey. It is widely used in Canada and is gaining steady popularity in other countries as well. Schoology is used for the institution, administration documentation, reporting and delivery of e- learning education courses. It is a learning management system (LMS) that can be used for all levels of learners from kindergarten, grade 1 to grade 12 (K- 12) and with higher education students. It allows users to create, manage, and share content and resources. The learners are offered the services for free of charge. Though Schoology is not solely confined to learning English, it offers an excellent interface between the instructor and the learner, and helps in sharing content, reviewing and documenting performance. The application is available for iOS, Android and Kindle devices. This platform maintains attendance records, online grades, tests and quizzes, and homework drop boxes .This application is visually similar to face book. Some of the other e- learning platforms similar to Schoology are

a	Moodle	d	iSpring learns
b	Docebo	e	Canvas
c	Litmos lms	f	Edmodo

**4. HOW THESE TOOLS ARE EXPLOITED IN LANGUAGE LEARNING**

All the tools cited above lead to Google documents from which the learner may copy, store, retrieve, share and adapt the resources. New technology tools and blended learning models address the growing challenge of diverse styles of learning languages, especially that of English language . Some applications or tools have been specifically designed for the EL learners. Some of these are literacy tools that have useful features, while in others the content is automatically levelled. The ease of mobile access, the explosion of tools and the rise of machine learning profoundly impact how we learn a language.“Applying this view of creativity to language, language creativity can be defined as the playful use of language to construct new and surprising meaning. It involves various types of creative thinking and is a ubiquitous feature of everyday language use.” [6].

Some tools are designed for mainstream use and also serve language learners of various age groups while other tools have been geared specially towards younger learners. In language learning, "Teachers always serve as both facilitators and instructors, targeting their instruction to the particular needs of the students" [7].

While there are umpteen advantages of ELL tools, there are also limitations as it is asserted, "Oftentimes of lack of understanding on the part of educators concerning English language learners places their education jeopardy" [8].

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

A learner's success lies in expressing his/her thoughts creatively in new words rather than complicating it with other's theories and approaches. ELL tools have resulted in significant improvements to hundreds of reading and writing materials which have subsequently led to the development of new products. It would be helpful to take a quick dive into the underlying technologies behind these software categories and to look at the status of the associated technology applications.

These technologies, mobile applications or other digital innovations can be effective instruments in language learning and instruction. With these tools, learning is feasible to the learners without direct intervention from others, which makes the learners feel comfortable in learning the language. A key conceptual understanding is that the learners are active in without waiting for an opportunity. The Technology is represented as the professional teacher, tutor, mentor or guide. These tools provide learners their own convince to read, listen, speak and write in an ingenious way.

ELL tools are not exclusive learning solutions, rather they are instructional tools, which when used judiciously, can result in remarkable results for the learners. The effective use of these application and software's in English language learning results in effective learning of the language. These tools do have pedagogy implications in academic purposes. It is helpful for the business administration students, engineering students, law students, medical students and others , it is essential during the placement, recruitment and promotions. The learners should judiciously apply their knowledge of these helpful open source tools in English language learning and teaching to reap the benefits.

In all likelihood, these tools may be the future resources of English language learning. Hence, it is pertinent that learners familiarize themselves with these tools and exploit them for language learning in a fun-filled and meaningful manner.

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