

English Teaching in Digital Age under the shadow of a Pandemic

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Abstract :

The purpose of this study was to find out how English was taught under the shadow of a pandemic like Corona.. Delivery of classes through online medium has been a recent modification brought out by the education system in India in the wake of the current pandemic situation. Thus, this survey describes college and university teachers and students' perceptions and concerns with regard to taking online classes that have been made mandatory in the wake of COVID19. The sample consisted of 70 teachers and 407 students from colleges and universities in Bangalore city. Online survey method was used for the purpose of data collection. The findings show that the following areas are important for teacher and student satisfaction with online classes, these areas are: quality and timely interaction between student and professor, technical support availability, structured online class modules, and modifications to accommodate conduction of practical classes.

Keywords: English Teaching, Digital Age, Pandemic, Covid-19, Teaching and Learning, Technology.

INTRODUCTION

As a result of corona virus (COVID-19) started from China, many universities have changed their regular courses from offline to online (Gewin, 2020). Because of its dangerous effects, countries told their people to follow isolation. So all the universities also declared the classes to be online which affected the education very much. As we all know that English is a global language and it is being taught in all over the world. Mostly all non-English speaking countries are giving more stress on upgrading the speaking level of the students but because of COVID-19, the teaching methodologies have been changed totally.

Among the most significant forces for change in recent years is the technological sophistication we now possess. This sophistication not only affects our lives in profound ways but also seems to hold tantalizing promise for increasing our efficiency in education. With the advent of Internet and multiple formats that can be communicated over the World Wide Web, we now have several new and exciting ways to present information. The web allows the incorporation of animation' moving pictures, and sound into lessons which extends our abilities to present materials that encourage students' interaction with the subject matter. Pictures and animations help bring to life scientific principles and multimedia allows students to take a more active role in learning. Digital education is innovative use of digital tools and technologies during teaching and learning, and is often referred to as Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) or e-Learning. Exploring the use of digital technologies gives educators the opportunity to design engaging learning opportunities in the courses they teach.

We've seen a varied response from educational institutions to the lockdown. In general, only those with a solid educational practice, with students who have access to connectivity and devices, and with staff already trained in the use of online teaching have been able to maintain their activity with minimum disruption, while others—the vast majority—have simply done the best they can under emergency conditions, hoping to weather the storm.

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Classes that will continue as best they can, voluntarism, online teaching seen simply as a side dish, students without access to computers or an internet connection, teachers who simply assign essays based on reading material, or measures such as a universal pass have become sadly common. The problem we face from now on is clear: what initially looked like emergency measures no longer are. For a long time, classes will be at half capacity, many students or teachers will be forced to self-confine, attendance will be irregular, and many methodologies we used before will no longer apply.

The word ‘innovation’ is derived from Latin word ‘innovare’, which means to change something new. In other words it can be said that ‘innovation’ involves the practical implementation of new ideas. Due to tremendous progress in information and communication technology, the scenario of contemporary teaching techniques is entirely changed. And the teacher of 21st century should shed traditional concepts and techniques of classroom teaching and should adopt the recent and innovative teaching techniques. Teaching English depends on the potential excellence, skills and update knowledge of English teachers. The role of English teacher in present context has remarkably changed because of various factors such as social, cultural, economic and technology developments across the globe. The subject of teaching English at this level is very wide and the difficulties the teacher faces are at large. Due to globalization the world is changing rapidly, hence a teacher has to improve and update knowledge of innovative techniques to meet the demand of changing era. English language teachers must be innovative, imaginative, and resourceful and have thorough knowledge of the subject and adopt new techniques to change socio, economic status of the country.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

It’s not uncommon today to see students from kindergarten through high school using tablets instead of textbooks, and find teachers manipulating large touch screens instead of writing on a board with chalk or dry-erase markers. Digital literacy is more important than ever, and school districts around the country have been scrambling to gain access to high-tech tools that – hopefully – will better prepare students to enter the workforce or further their education. There are certainly many benefits of a digital classroom, such as the ability to live stream current events, Skype with other classrooms around the world, and provide interactive maps showing how a particular region has changed over time. Artificial intelligence alone is a topic that could be explored at each age level with access to the appropriate tools. However, children today are often overwhelmed with screen time both at home during their leisure hours and increasingly during the school day.

How can you balance the science of education and the delivery mechanism of technology to help students become well-rounded learners in a world where technology truly is not optional? Students are digital natives. They’ve grown up with technology; it’s woven into their lives. In fact, it’s one of the basic 21st-century skills that they’ll need in school and the workplace.

Technology integration in the classroom now begins during elementary school and carries through to high school and higher education. But using computer technology in the classroom isn’t just about digital devices in class—it relates to anything that facilitates an interaction between teacher and student. Technology in education programs could be seen as a culprit, or it could be harnessed to improve student engagement and effectiveness—and that’s what we’ll discuss below.

Pros of using digital tools in classrooms

Volumes of data on any topic under the sun are available with a few taps or clicks — and teachers have an entire world of tools for education at their fingertips. Whether you are looking for a specific line from a famous published work or attempting to quickly determine exactly how far it is from Earth to the Sun, the Internet is a wild and wondrous place. Teachers are able to pull this information together in a way that is logical and cohesive before presenting it to their classrooms. Plus, these enhanced tools level the digital playing field and allow children the same access to information regardless of their circumstances at home.

the exciting uses of technology include Some of:

-Showing instead of telling-PowerPoint presentations, interactive images, video and audio all assist visual and auditory learners to grasp important concepts.

-Increased participation and engagement- Online polling or asking quiz questions during lectures (with instantaneous results) can increase engagement and make it easier for shy students to participate.

-Gamification of Learning- Using role play simulators or video-game style reward systems can make learning more fun.

-Automating tedious task-free teachers to have more meaningful interaction with students.

-Collaborative Projects- These projects are a lot easier with screen sharing, messaging, and cloud-based applications like Google Docs.

-Up-to-date information- Connection to the web means students can learn about the world in real time, as events unfold instead of being limited by out-of-date textbooks.

Gone are the days when one student was tasked with creating a PowerPoint presentation for a group. Through technology, students can start working on a project together in class and seamlessly collaborate, communicate and bounce ideas off one another using social media, interactive whiteboards and more. Physical and social barriers no longer exist, letting students work together from anywhere and at any time. Technology has also enabled students to engage in spontaneous discussions and find instant answers to problems or questions they may have about a topic.

Address the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines with thoughtful use of technology

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework for ensuring your course delivery meets the needs of all students. It's the ultimate way to provide flexibility in how, when and where learning takes place. The three tenets of this framework are providing multiple means of engagement, representation and expression. In order to represent content in a variety of ways, you might consider complementing a textbook reading with a podcast. Alternatively, multiple ways of expressing students' understanding could mean offering students learning opportunities through journal articles or video reflections. Finally, multiple forms of engagement might mean gauging students' interests at the start of the term through icebreakers or a student interest inventory—and then use these insights to tailor your units of study accordingly.

Being digitally literate is more than obtaining “isolated technological skills,” according to the NMC Horizon Report: 2017 Higher Education Edition. Rather, it's about “generating a deeper understanding of the digital environment, enabling intuitive adaptation to new contexts and [the] co-creation of content with others.” Here, the traditional whiteboard is almost extinct, while technology has never been more essential in the virtual classroom. Creating presentations, learning to differentiate reliable from unreliable sources on the Internet and maintaining proper online netiquette are all vital skills that students will learn to develop in the classroom.

Technology use can also help universities deliver a better return on the investment students pay for their education—as well as make learning relevant to a primarily Generation Z audience. Mobile technology in classrooms is a must-have if students want to be prepared for almost any career today. Student achievement may be boosted if they have the means to continue working on projects outside of the classrooms.

Cons of Digital Classrooms

Perhaps the largest challenge in implementing a digital classroom is the cost. Some schools are able to foot the bill easily, while others – especially inner-city schools – that struggle to provide the basics and pay teachers a living wage, cannot possibly afford the expensive technology. Parent-teacher organizations are often able to step in and help, but this upfront investment in the tech required to drive your smart classroom isn't insignificant. Unequal access can deepen the digital divide.

Other challenges include:

-Distractions- Laptops and tablets can do much more than show educational material. Students are often tempted by games, social media, messaging, and other things and can get off task.

-Maintaining expensive devices- It is also important to keep in mind that we are still dealing with children. In addition to the usual glitches and bugs, you are likely to find the technology sticky, smudged and perhaps even broken.

-Cheating and Plagiarism- are a lot easier in the digital age. Although there are ways to mitigate this with tools like Turnitin.com, question randomization, and specially structured tests and assignments, it adds another layer of complexity,

-Low-quality sources- The Internet is full of unreliable information. Students may need guidance to help them find trustworthy sources when they are doing research.

Students don't have equal access to technological resources

An online education should be accessible to students. But some students can't afford iPads or even the textbooks required for class. Others simply do not have reliable Internet access. Point these students in the direction of your institution's library or community resources, or create assignments that allow them to work in groups and share resources. You might also consider using open educational resources (OER), which provide a

cost-effective alternative to the traditional college textbook. Don't make technology the focus of your class, and don't make it barrier.

Technology in education can create privacy concerns

Video conferencing or web-hosting solutions have brought with them some concerns around data protection. For example, do platforms offer end-to-end encryption in basic plans provided to students? Social media handles set up as part of a tutorial or learning activity can also lead to student information being accessed by a wider audience than intended. What's more, Zoombombing—disruptive intrusions into a video conference call—became a common occurrence during the COVID-19 pandemic. And though they maintain academic integrity, remote proctoring solutions can make test-takers feel uncomfortable. Students may not want to have their homes shown in front of a proctor and being monitored can increase stress and anxiety.

It's clear that the benefits of technology in the classroom outweigh the cons. But the key to technology in the classroom is always going to be the teacher-student relationship, because that's where the education happens. Technology can be a highly effective tool, but that's all it is—a tool. In today's hyper-connected world, sensible use of technology can enhance education. By using technology as an aid in the classroom, educators can create memorable and impactful learning outcomes for their diverse group of college students.

THE SKILLS NEEDED IN DIGITAL AGE

In order to effective teaching and learning in the digital age, educators need to possess a diverse set of skills, including digital literacy, communication, creativity and innovation, problem-solving, and collaboration skills (White, 2013). These skills became more inevitable during the COVID-19 pandemic when Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) (Khlaif et al., 2021) became a sudden need for most of the educational institutions around the globe. To cope with this situation, schools, colleges and universities were bound to use technology to teach remotely. Not being the "tech-experts" (Taylor, 2018), it is expected to have difficulties and challenges while teaching from home for many staff members. Having poor connections, not being trained, or lack of experiences on online teaching caused interruptions in that quick shift of learning and assessment (Clune, 2020). Though the pandemic situation is over now, technology-based teaching is still needed and goes hand-in-hand with conventional teaching. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning are also being considered among the new learning tools and services (Bonfield et al, 2020).

Considering the 21st century skills, technology-based skills play big roles in pedagogy. These skills include the use of computer and other information technologies in teaching that facilitates instruction and learning. Computer-assisted learning and computer-assisted research (Moursund & Bielefeldt, 1999) are the major areas to gain the most learning outcomes in the digital age. Both of them can be used in "distance learning" in a synchronous or an asynchronous setting.

In teaching skills, content and pedagogy are two main areas where improvement is being considered for years. According to White (2013), "Content and pedagogy are no longer sufficient in a digital world because there is now a technological dimension for accessing information and for communicating." Koehler and Mishra (2008) argued the correlation between teaching and technology by integrating these two main elements. According to them, "integrating technology into teaching" is not an easy task and they refer to no "definitive solution". They introduced three core components: Content, Pedagogy & Technology; which make the TPACK (technological, pedagogical and content knowledge) framework to assist teaching in the digital age.

In order to get the most of the digital age teaching experience, teachers must be well-trained and overcome the shortcomings in online teaching techniques. Tzifopoulos (2020) refers that "the teacher is a catalyst for this whole process", so a well-trained teacher is supposed to use technology effectively. Tzifopoulos added, it's too early to assume that technology would replace the teacher, but we can definitely emphasize teachers' roles in digital platforms in any emergency situation, like COVID-19.

Metacognition is another enhancing skill in learning that can be considered very important. It combines meta-level knowledge and mental actions (Jacobse and Harskamp, 2012) where the learner has a significant control on the cognitive learning process. Though metacognition has been proven to be effective in problem solving in mathematics (Jacobse and Harskamp 2009), this strategy is useful in overall successful learning (Meirovitz et al, 2022). On the other hand, considering the learners' skills in receiving digital-oriented contents, we must consider that learners can benefit from their involvement with digital tools, mobile devices and digital/online games (Marc Prensky, 2006). Learners are in need of two types of skills- digital skills and digital navigation skills (Grand-Clement et al, 2017).

Digital skills refer to technical skills while digital navigation skills are the ability to find, to prioritize and to assess the quality and reliability of information in digital settings. Digital navigation skills are not new, and can be considered as “less technical” skills compared to digital skills. Digital navigation skills are important as they enable us to adapt to digital world.

In light of the above discussion, we focus on some skills that are needed to be addressed by the educators and the learners, such as:

- Self-learning and sustainable learning
- Digital literacy / digital fluency – integrated technical, cognitive, and sociological skills (Eshet-Alkalai, 2012)
- Information management
- Critical thinking and problem solving (White, 2013)
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Creativity and innovation (White, 2013)
- Communication (digital and non-digital)

ONLINE LEARNING & TEACHING METHODS

The starting of corona has pushed all institutions of the world to adopt online teaching methods to deal with the lost times and catch up with the academic fulfillment of the students. It proves like a boon but it also has some problems.

Since it was a sudden change for every institution, teachers and students have taken it as a Plan-B right from the very beginning. These methods helped a lot but starting from the use of technology and other elements which were helping in the implementation of virtual classrooms, it required a new start.

Some basic methods were working for a majority of teachers and students but it was not confirmed whether these methods will work for other teachers also who are teaching different courses. Every new starting has its own positive and negative points.

Online Teaching Methods:

- 1. Experiment with graphical presentation:** Presentations are one of the most effective ways to put forth an idea. Apparently about 65% of the population are visual learners. More than just lectures, if you implement creative visuals and slides, the retention of the topic presented will increase drastically. Using only your words doesn't work. It should be balanced.
- 2. Use virtual white board:** Written thoughts can be always put across more effectively than mere spoken words. There is a possibility of students missing many important points if the lectures are only vocal. So many online software are there which give a variety of features about how to teach virtually more perfectly.
- 3. Try flipped classroom method:** Here the students review and prepare for the class-to-come by studying the material prepared beforehand. This is then implemented through debates, problem-solving exercises, group discussions, quizzes, etc. under the teacher's guidance. One of the main technique in flipped classroom is pre-recorded study materials. You can either tape your own or if possible share your colleague's video as well. You can also share your colleague's video as well.
- 4. Take live online classes frequently:** Taking live virtual classes will help you to not only keep an eye on the student while you are teaching, it also helps them in assessing their progress in real time. Depending on the response to your classes you have the advantage you change the methodology or modify to suit them on the go.
- 5. Exercise healthy group discussion and debates:** One of the main negative outcomes of the online classes is the sense of isolation. So it is suggested to conduct group discussions, and make way for healthy debate platforms and other forms of team activities.
- 6. Records screen and videos by different tools:** In case of online classes, the teachers and the students need to create many videos. The students need to make video presentation as a part of assignments so as to explain their work or understanding of the concept. The teachers need to record the live teaching session or create a response video to the queries asked by students.
- 7. Use Artificial Intelligence for improving teaching techniques:** Artificial Intelligence is one the less explored yet extremely effective technology especially in the educational field. It can prove very beneficial if it is customized as the online requirements. Artificial Intelligence can be used to analyze the performance of students.

8. Use the technique of self-study: It has been observed that the students who acquired good marks during their board exams have given more emphasis on self-study. The same technique can be implemented on online teaching but in a little different way. The teacher can assign topics to students which they need to study on their own. This helps the students to explore the topics in their own preferred ways according to their areas of interest. This type of teaching technique will help each student to bring in a different and new perspective while understanding the topic or concept.

CONCLUSION

The result of this study indicates that face- to- face learning was perceived more positively than online learning in term of social presence, interaction, satisfaction and overall quality. Even though online classes were reported to be convenient in term of saving time, still both teachers as well as the students perceived it to be less effective and structured when compared to classroom mode of learning. Technical support was found to be an important factor critical to determining satisfaction with online classes. Yang and Cornelius (2004) in their study had reported similar findings. They found that students showed dissatisfaction with their courses when instructors were unavailable to provide technical support. Students also reported dissatisfaction when they had limited technical skills (Zeng & Perris, 2004). Thus; these findings from previous studies are in tandem with the current survey results where technical issues were found to be the most influential factor when it came to satisfaction with online classes. The results found here will thus allow college administrators to determine how technical support can be expanded and extended to reach all students and teachers, thereby, improving their experience and making the classes more effective.

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