

## OVERCOMING COMMOTION IN SIMULATED LEARNING: AN ANALYSIS

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### Abstract

Education plays a vital role in moulding an individual towards desirable changes in behaviour. Higher education is for holistic life and not for mere living and such learning environments are more opted and classrooms play a vital role in it. Nevertheless, the epidemic COVID-19 brought a drastic change in the typical classroom teaching and learning throughout the world which questioned the status of offline teaching. To flatten the curve, a cessation occurred in traditional educational system, which resulted in complete lockdown, switching over to online mode, with insistence on social distancing. This emphasis on implementation of e-learning in education brought a shift in the perspectives on language teaching and learning. Gradually, in 2021, offline mode of teaching and learning began again and at present a hybrid teaching methodology is chosen by many institutions and teaching professionals. This paper attempts to assess the novelty implemented by the researcher while teaching English language in a higher educational institution and analyses the difference in perspectives in 'Pre, During and Post' COVID 19 period.

**Key words:** Higher education for holistic life, emergence of pandemic, disruption in the typical classroom, pre-during-post pandemic scenario, hybrid approach in teaching/learning.

### Introduction:

The epidemic coronavirus disease has triggered an unparalleled catastrophe in all areas, especially in the field of education. To mitigate its impact, more than 190 countries took it side to massive closure of regular classroom teaching and learning activities (Ali Erarslan, 2021). This outbreak resulted in drastic changes as there has been a swift shift from offline mode of teaching to online mode. In this transition period, to prevent the spread, many countries implemented complete lockdown and some countries continued their education through part-time schedules. Currently, in the process of English language teaching/learning, a hybrid model is followed. Though there are some glitches in the practical application and effective implementation of technology, practice is needed in achieving the desired outcome of learning.

### Literature Review:

Chinmay Tumble had researched on the antiquity of epidemics which wedged India earlier and he shared his findings in *Times Evoke* which helped in navigating the present health care challenges: India was the most affected country and lost around 40 million people to the pandemics of cholera, plague and influenza between 1917 and 1920 – the very important lesson learnt was not to celebrate the end of the pandemic. He also stressed the four stages of a pandemic – denial, confusion, acceptance and erasure. Erasure happens when we forget to take the lessons from the event and move on (May 8, 2021).

As the pandemic 2020 unbridled human suffering, public anxiety and economic destruction on an unprecedented scale, a lot of set patterns were implemented to eradicate that influential spread. Hence, a stumbling block occurred in the offline classes of all educational institutions throughout the world. Before the advent of COVID-19, many educational institutions followed traditional teaching methods; and **only a few institutions were executing online or blended learning methods**. Nevertheless, when the pandemic hit, the zero option to each and every institution was to shift from offline to online classes; in fact, **according to UNESCO, 191 countries in the world (98% of the global student population) transferred their learning methodology over to online lessons ([www.edtick.com](http://www.edtick.com))**.

The transition to remote teaching worldwide created the prerequisite to segregate the terms used for the approaches of instructional delivery. Online learning and emergency remote teaching are used as an exchange by the teachers and students during the corona wave period, which started in March 2020 and has continued since then. Nevertheless, Hodges et al., (2020) explained that online teaching was also a planned activity from the very beginning. The challenges are evolving even after the pandemic vanishes, and in this era, a hybrid model develops. A blend of digital and physical approaches to teaching and learning is followed in this transition period. This blended pedagogy mechanism is called phygital and it allows flexible teaching and learning (The Hindu, May 6, 2021). This kind of e-teaching and e-learning has created a new global economy.

Madeline Will's article in *Education Week* discussed how educators had to reconceptualize ways for students to validate what they understand while figuring out how students could work more autonomously (<https://www.elmhurst.edu>). Here, an attempt is made to designate the innovation in teaching English language in Pre, During and Post-COVID 19 eras.

### **The Objectives of the Study:**

The objectives of this study deal with the preceding English language teaching methodology, and the evolution of it based on digitalized teaching for quality improvement in language learning which is followed by hybrid teaching methodology in the current scenario. The study was done at three levels. Level I deals with the teaching of English language in an offline language classroom before pandemic; Level II brings out the effect of technology based language classroom on the students during the pandemic, and Level III deals with the language classroom after the pandemic.

### **Teaching Methodology: Pre / During / Post Pandemic Classes**

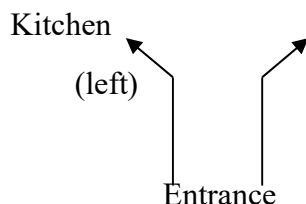
Three different classroom situations – the on-campus classroom before the pandemic, e-classroom during the pandemic and the post-pandemic hybrid classroom were considered to assess the variation in English language teaching and learning. Three different topics and three different teaching methodologies were chosen by the researcher for this analysis.

### Level I: ‘Pre-Pandemic’ Classroom

The researcher chose a topic “*Different Ways of Presenting Information - Interpreting Plans and Maps*” from the textbook “*Written Communication in English*” by Sarah Freeman for this study. The topic was taught with the objectives of enhancing the learners’ out-of-box thinking, ability to interpret plans and maps, and creative ability. Blackboard and chalk piece were the tools used in that scenario.

As usual, the learners came to the traditional on-campus classroom with fixed preconceived ideas. They are accustomed to the lecture mode of learning in a lockstep classroom, where individual attention and guidance to each sample in improving their communication skills is indeed difficult. As English is a skill-oriented subject, the researcher made use of interactive teaching methodology to train the learners in the language skills. The teaching commenced with the skill of reading practice so that the learners were comfortable and familiar with the learning process. The teacher is the role model of a reader for students.

Team work was assigned for making the learners participate in interaction. To motivate the learners’ listening skill and to make them involve in the topic, they were advised to watch a video which described a flat of an upper middle-class family. Focused listening was done by the learners which led them to selective listening. Top-down processing was practiced to make them draw the plan of the flat that they had listened. To initiate reading activity, a learner was selected in random and called to the front to read the description of Penny’s flat from the text. The other learners were directed to draw the plan when the reading work was carried out. For example: the letter ‘N’ was marked at the top which showed the direction north that is always upwards. Then, for the description such as ‘As you enter the flat, the kitchen is on your left.....’, the learners were advised to draw as per the guidelines.



Such activities made them read the text intensively and scan for specific information to complete their work.

The learners were stimulated to speak by describing the flat that they had seen in the text. Eliciting answers for literal comprehensive questions such as ‘Where is the kitchen?’ made them listen with concentration. Playing roles of the characters (e.g. Penny and Sushila) enhanced their conversational skill.

To improve their creative writing, drawing the plan, verbal description and interpretation of their own house or flat were practiced. Showing directions on the map from one place to another place given in the material made them familiar with stock expressions and notable landmarks used for directing someone to a destination.

To train them in note taking, they were asked to go through the instructions given in the material; and then note down each and every route to reach a particular place. For example, for the question “Help the stranger to go from New Delhi railway station to the Red Fort”, the learners were asked to write down notes for every move, “Come out of the railway station. Reach over bridge road. Go over three cross roads...”

The learners’ compositional skills i.e. note taking from narrative / descriptive writing and visual aids were enhanced by giving them assignments on (i) drawing the plan of your institution and describing it and (ii) writing necessary instructions for a stranger who wants to go to a destination from another using maps.

## **Level II: ‘During’ Pandemic Classroom**

During the pandemic, as per the set pattern, the teachers as well as the learners switched over to online mode. Training in functional application of Camu app and Microsoft Teams were given to the faculty and they were instructed to install these apps in their laptops and android mobiles before attending the training. The learners were given instructions regarding the usage of these apps in the college website with a demo video.

A separate whatsapp group was created to share information regarding the effective online functioning of the class. The staff handling that subject and the class representative were the admins of the whatsapp group. The faculty had to schedule the class earlier in advance in Teams app so that the learners can log into the session at the right time. To avoid disturbance (such as unnecessary talking, chatting etc) during the class, adjustments can be done in the ‘Settings’. While the learners got admitted to the online class, their presence i.e. register numbers can be seen on the right side of the screen. The learners were informed to switch on their videos when the teaching was going on.

For this level, the researcher had chosen a topic “Correction of Sentences” from grammar with an objective of accurate practical application of nouns, verbs, pronouns, prepositions, and articles for communicative purposes. With the application of technical tools, the learners were exposed to English language learning using appropriate activities. Generally, grammar is a discrete set of static structures which is taught as rules by majority of teachers. However, grammar is much more than a form and a robust learning of grammar makes the learners practice the correct form. The learners were given practice through online mode with a variety of exercises using PowerPoint presentation.

To motivate the learners and to make them participate in the online teaching method without fear, individual work, pair work, and team work as per the requirements of the exercise were given. Such exercises make the learners imbibe the functional use of language.

In training grammatical skill, inductive approach in teaching/learning was followed. For example, the class was divided into 5 teams with 4 students each. Each team was asked to select an alphabet from 'A' to 'Z'. When they selected an alphabet, a slide which had 4 sentences with an error in each sentence was shown on the screen. The team was directed to identify the error in the chat box. If the error was in article, they marked it 'A'; the error in pronoun was marked 'P'; the error in tenses was marked 'T' etc. After marking, each one should switch on his/her video and explain the reason for their choice. Similarly, all the teams were given chance to participate in the activity. The team which gained more points for right answers were the winners. For wrong answers, correct answers were thus taught inductively.

Substitution method was followed for familiarizing them with the strategy for spotting errors. For example, the sentences given below were written on the white board and the learners were advised to identify the right option.

- |                                |                 |                                 |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| ○ Eighty kilometres            | <b>are / is</b> | a good distance.                |
| ○ The teacher and her students | donated         | <b>her money / their money.</b> |
| ○ <b>Let I / Let me</b>        | show            | it.                             |
| ○ <b>He and me / He and I</b>  | are             | friends.                        |

In the inductive approach, the learners were aware of 'noticing' the error that help them in framing error-free sentences while writing. Instead of elucidating a given structure and following it with examples, the teacher commenced the session with many examples, thereby showing the students how the concept worked and they learn the grammar rule. The class ended with sharing quiz link created by using Google Classroom (GCR). The learners also actively participated in opening the link that was shared in the chat box. The answers submitted by them were evaluated automatically; and it also helped in the assessment of the learners' level of comprehension of the concept.

Follow-up work was given by uploading assignment questions in camu app on that day. Deadline was also assigned for the completion of the task.

### **Level III: 'Post-Pandemic' Classroom**

In Level III, "*Relating Causes and Results*" was the topic selected from the textbook "*Written Communication in English*" and it was taught with the objective of teaching the learners – varied ways to analyze the cause and effect of any event in the classroom discussion. The main aim was to train in analytical skill and enable them in making important decisions.

As hybrid approach (on-campus as well as online mode) was used for instructional delivery. Videos on this topic was prepared by the researcher and the learners were informed to watch and observe that video the previous day, which in turn facilitated their better comprehension.

A random selection of students was made in the classroom and the learners were directed to do activity in pairs or teams as per the situation demanded. To motivate global listening skill of the learners, four of them were selected in random and they were advised to read aloud the text

material. While reading, the listeners were directed to list out the factors that caused changes in the society. A sample PPT prepared by the researcher was shown for learners' comprehension.

Question: Factor 1 - Science caused changes in the educational field

(Example: scientific research)

Factor 2 - Development of science resulted in technological improvement

(Example: transformation in transport, communication etc.)

The learners made use of top-down processing for comprehending and listing out the factors.

After listing out the factors, the learners were trained in marking the cause and the effect of science using the symbol ' → ' or ' ← '.

Example 1:

(a) development of science → (b) improvement in educational field → (c) changes in society.

Explanation: (b) is caused by (a); and (c) is the result of (b).

Example 2:

(a) changes in society ← (b) improvement of technology.

Explanation: (a) is the result of (b); or (a) is caused by (b).

Global comprehension questions were asked to stimulate the learners' speaking skill. To prompt the analytical skill, a time-bound activity was given. The learners were divided into two teams. The first team was directed to enlist the negative impacts of science and the other team the positive impacts of science. Then, reading aloud the enlisted points by the selected learner was done.

After sorting out the varied factors, writing practice on the topic 'merits and demerits of science and technology' was given as assignment, and the learners were advised to upload their answers as single PDF file in Camu app. Objective type questions on this topic was prepared using quizizz.com and the learners were trained repeatedly to grasp the concept.

Many learners struggled in understanding cause and effect relationship at first; but by constant practice, they recognized the factors as they themselves experienced it in their own lives. The exercise helped them to understand the actions and their consequences; and it initiated their ability to think analytically in their personal and academic life.

## **Observations and Findings based on the Perspectives of Learners and Faculty**

### **Level I**

As English is a skill-oriented subject, it needs to be taught using interactive activities though the classroom environment is offline or online. Communication activities using digital tools, encourage creativity of the learners. Such practices make them get involved and do the exercises with interest.

In this study, observation was done in two perspectives: on the part of the learners and on the part of the faculty. After the completion of the topics, the students were asked to share their views on the usage of such exercises. At the beginning of Level 1 (before pandemic), the learners hesitated and they had fear in doing activity-oriented exercises. But learning at same age group

level initiated learning in the samples. In brief, using these interactive methods in the classroom helped the learners to learn not only English language but also any subject.

However, the teachers' perspectives vary based on the method they followed while teaching their subject in the classroom. The followers of conventional teaching did not believe in this emergency online method of teaching/learning and they not interested in such methods.

## **Level II**

In Level II (online mode implementation in learning), the learners had fear in switching on their video at the beginning of this session. Some started conversing in English by unmuting themselves. When each learner was given the chance to speak, they started coming out of their fossilized learning and converse with others in English in a husky voice at the beginning. A friendly and conducive environment helped the students to speak out. But constant practice only helped the samples to rectify the errors in course of time. These varied language functions initiate the students and they learn to work with others.

Another notable aspect is the fact that grammar, which is supposed to be the most boring subject for all the students can be taught easily using technology. The objective of these exercises is to learn English so that there will be an evolution in language learning. Here also the learners are given grammar exercises. Usually, the learners are allergic to vocabulary, idioms and tenses. But they got involved in the topic while using digital tools. They started doing each and every sentence eagerly searching for answers. They also submitted the answers with enjoyment. Even if the answers are wrong, they never feel irritated. But instead, they started clicking the mouse for the right option. The process of learning occurs with entertainment.

However, it is an accepted fact that this new e-teaching method enhances the requirement of the teachers with digital knowledge to bring back the language alive. It becomes vital that they should be able to operate technical tools with confidence. While teaching, if they face any issue due to poor net connectivity or problem in their system/android mobile, they should manage the situation though they are not expertise in handling digital tools.

## **Level III**

The pandemic has augmented the trend of moving towards the increased use of digital content and remote teaching alternatives. So, level III gave the learners opportunity to learn both offline and online. They had less fear and shyness in handling the digital tools. Their only issue was poor net connectivity. Amidst such issues, they learnt the topics with great enthusiasm. Teachers also worked continuously on new teaching strategies and practices long after face masks are obsolete. It's an accepted fact that teaching has primarily changed for the better choice. In this study, the researcher adapted to remote and hybrid teaching and focus on what is most important as well as what is possible. It is much easier to record the lesson in the classroom and have it available for remote students to view asynchronously.

The post-pandemic period also demands more from the teachers as hybrid approach was followed in the classroom. Material preparation itself swallowed their time as both hard copy and e-content for each topic should be handy. In brief, the approaches in learning can be modified based on the students' feedback.

### **Suggestions regarding e-teaching**

Online mode has prompted universities and teachers to use a variety of online learning techniques, such as Learning Management Systems, Internet-based technology for learning etc. (Liao et al., 2019; Eksail and Afari, 2020; Huang et al., 2020). In spite of its benefits, there are some risky factors also. As it involves high fixed cost, the institution which implements it has to upgrade itself. So, there is the need for training the teachers and students by experts in the technical field and they should be an expertise in technology related support mechanism. Another hazardous aspect is that the attention may be sidetracked from the main aim i.e. learning process to developing ICT skills which is subsidiary. The students may also tend to copy information. The learning process may be slowed down if the teachers are not proficient in using digital tools.

### **To Conclude**

The study reveals the fact that 'pre, during and post-pandemic environment' initiated innovative teaching/learning methods in all the educational institutions. Today's educational scenario needs integration of knowledge and digitalization. The access to information also grows exponentially and the acquisition of knowledge along with language skills and digital skills make learning possible continuously over the lifetime. Though there are some difficulties, there is no chance for 'Elusion of learning' because there are opportunities for under-achievers also to become creators and doers.

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