

ONLINE ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES OF TEACHING- LEARNING ENGLISH THROUGH DIGITAL MODES

Dr. Subhashree Mukherjee
Associate Professor
Department of English
Kamla Nehru Mahavidyalya,
Nagpur

Abstract

Digital tools can help you communicate with learners outside the physical learning environment, and discover more efficient ways of dealing with sudden emergencies that the pandemic COVID has given rise to. Considering the present scenario we may have to communicate in the digital environment and get ready to witness long-term consequences. The COVID crisis has brought out the need in front of the education community that they have to learn how to be good digital teachers and understand the needs of learners with differing needs, or levels of abilities.

Keywords: *Digital, Challenges, Education, Environment, Future*

Digital tools provide a range of opportunities for learners to practise their language skills at their own speed and level, to communicate and collaborate, and to work creatively and use English language in the real world. Access and control over information and communication technology and taking its advantage in the strategic and important field of education are considered as an important component of power in present age that should not be neglected (Campbell:2001).

Technology can help you connect with a wider teaching-learning community, share ideas and get support of teachers-learners who are all witnessing the worst times. Experiencing and exploring online learning first hand can help you evaluate the opportunities and challenges that it provides for you and your learners. With so many digital resources to

Special Issue

419

May 2020

Website: www.langlit.org

Contact No.: +919890290602

**One Day National Webinar On Effects of Crisis on Language, Literature and Culture Organized by
Department of English, Vasantrao Naik Government Institute of Arts and Social Sciences, Nagpur
Indexed: ICI, Google Scholar, Research Gate, Academia.edu, IBI, IIFC, DRJI, The Cite Factor, COSMOS**



choose from, it is important to evaluate quality, ease of use, effectiveness for teaching and learning, and any potential problems. The best digital resources help you support learners in reaching intended learning outcomes. Through this paper the researcher intends to understand the Online Readiness of Students for Learning English through Digital Modes. The researcher tries to analyse the issue from the point of view of the students, keeping in mind the advantages as well as the challenges. By the word readiness the researcher implies physical preparedness more than psychological or attitudinal readiness. The first part of the paper deals with the readiness on part of the teaching community including their advantages and challenges and the second part covers the aspect from the perspective students.

The definition of literacy is always changing, and now more than ever, the definition is shifting to include the ability to function in a world that requires the use of technology (Leu et al., 2013), which is extremely relevant in the lives of all adults, including English language learners (ELLs). “English language skills and digital literacy are essential for obtaining and keeping a family-sustaining job, supporting children in school, participating in community life, obtaining community services, and accessing further education and training” (Harris, 2015)

Digital teaching has its own implications. Edwards et al (2011) discussed studies that referred to the necessity of online educators remaining enthusiastic and organized during the course and developing novel or creative activities (Edwards et al., 2011). There should not be a random way of teaching online. The teachers must adopt some well planned methodology. They can take a certain approach, maybe communicative approach in teaching Spoken English and GT-Method in teaching Grammar. But it should not be a random selection of sentences to teach grammar or correction of language. Tasks should be planned in advance and given on screen during the live class. In student-centred classrooms, learners are not only taught in context but learn to function in their new environments, whether they are making purchases, getting an identification card, looking for a new job, or making an appointment to see the doctor. Lesson objectives are about what students will ultimately be able to do instead of merely what they know (Savignon, 1983). Such practical tasks will ensure enthusiastic participation of students, which will give eagerness and motivation to the students.



The teacher has to learn how to harness the opportunities that digital tools and resources provide, and prepare for the challenges of using technology. He can create great additional materials using digital tools to make the resources more accessible, appealing and interactive. Use features of wordprocessing and presentation software more effectively or take advantage of the tools within a virtual learning environment (VLE) or the many apps available to create interactive activities. The teacher has to pick up simple tips for transforming the content already developed and learn how digital tools can help to create attractive and engaging activities out of them so as to attract the learning community. Carril, Gonzalez Sanmamed, & Hernandez Selles (2013) report that the necessity of using Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in online teaching changes both the nature of the teaching and learning processes as well as the need to develop ICT and other pedagogical skills (Carril et al, 2013).

Incorporating digital tools and resources into lessons can transform learning, but only when they are used well. Careful planning can help us ensure we use technology to support learning objectives and to improve learning opportunities, by providing authentic communicative and collaborative tasks, more effective differentiation, personalised practice activities, feedback and assessment. Adas and Bakir (2013) claim that online materials and using English web-sites are preferable methods being effective ways of learning English more appropriately, for these mediums facilitate students' direct communication with native English speakers.

Most faculty members do not receive significant preparation when transitioning to the online format and, therefore, must rely instead on their education and experience as classroom teachers to develop and implement online learning experiences (Johnson, 2008). Hence they have to think about how they can integrate digital tools and resources in ways that enhance and transform language learning. Whether preparing for a face-to-face, blended or completely online course, digital tools and resources can help at all stages of the planning process. From identifying course aims and learning outcomes, to organising and tagging resources to ensure that there is the right focus and balance of activities for your learners, to recycling, revision and assessment. Currently, institutional professional development tends to



be aimed at best practices for the online classroom and instructors tend to develop and teach courses in isolation (Duncan & Barnett, 2009). Part of the problem stems from ambiguous perceptions faculty still possess about online education (Allen & Seamen, 2011).

Though the advantages are many, especially in the current scenario of the pandemic, the challenges in front of the students' community are plenty. One of the challenges that English learners face in learning process is cultural differences that often render the learners to feel disturbed; a group of learners master sufficient number of vocabularies, in good command of comprehension. They are, however, unable to understand various expressions and sentences due to cultural differences (Abdullah, 2015). Prenskey suggests that digital immigrants did not grow up with the same technology that is often required to function in society today; so many older students and teachers have a great learning curve and always maintain what Prenskey calls an accent. Minimal digital literacy and training, lack of interest in technology, limited connectivity resources, non-availability of e-gadgets, etc. can be the major hindrances and challenges in this form of learning English. What teachers say and do may not always be interpreted correctly, and it can be difficult to remove any content that has been uploaded. The teacher has to be aware of social, cultural and environmental issues, and be a great example of how to operate in the digital world for learners.

Despite this dominance and superiority of e-learning in the educational environment, the learner's preparedness for such a new environment is seldom evaluated (Watkins: 2004). However, according to growth and expansion of e-learning, students' preparedness is necessary to be realized and evaluated as the success predictor in online curriculums (Dray:2001) and effective expansion of e-learning will not be successful without attention to preparedness and attitude of users, students and scholars for this technology (Bach:2007). The whole aspect of talking or listening to a machine and trying to remain as human as possible is quite awkward, with minimal movement and diction slow enough to match dial-up connections. And we all know that without forming strong connections first, students' attention span and dedication tends to dwindle. Besides, there is another online challenge of teaching English i.e. time management. Somehow, between logging in and out, that one hour of cyberspace somehow gets contorted sometimes by network issues, inability to properly



handle online resources by teachers as well as students. Fluent spoken English is challenging to decipher and interpret. In the specialised context of the classroom of an English course, it is common for spoken English to be delivered slowly and exceptionally clearly, but in online teaching this issue needs to be addressed carefully.

Therefore, what should be paid into attention prior to implementation of e-learning system is that organizations need to pass a process which assures electronic implementation success before launching e-learning project and investment on it. This process is to study preparedness for e-learning implementation (Oliver and Hung 2001). Several studies have shown that students need a certain degree of self-discipline, self-direction and personal initiative for success in e-learning (Naghavi: 2007).

Very often it has observed that the way in which English text appears on the page and the way in which it is pronounced and is quite different. For non-native speakers of English, this can seriously be very challenging and confusing too. One way to overcome this challenge is to participate in a range of speech related learning activities. The Internet makes a wonderful contribution here as a number of different online speaking and listening activities can be accessed, where participants can listen and then use small sentences to speak. Online as well as offline programs have been created to focus the learning of English in this way and are designed to provide a listening opportunity followed by the opportunity to put sentences together, rather than trying to memorise and combine separate, individual words. One study was found in the literature which included three items considering language skills. That paper analyzed student barriers to online learning, and identified “Lack language skills for online learning, Lack writing skills for online learning, lack reading skills for online learning, [and] Lack communication skills for online learning” (Muilenburg & Berge, "2005).

There is also a great difference between the readiness and preparedness of male and female students. Research has shown that male students prefer as well as handle e-resources in a better way and hence are more comfortable. Atkinson and Blankenship (2009), examined differences between undergraduate readiness for online learning between males and females and found significant differences existed between males and females in how comfortable students felt communicating electronically – with males being significantly more comfortable



than females. Many students, however, are not successful in an online learning environment; they prefer face-to-face classroom setting (Webster & Hackley, 1997).

For making the curriculum delivery online, the teacher has to take time to plan instructions and demonstrations, learn how to use digital tools and resources to further help and prepare learners to use technology effectively for learning. Effective teaching of English language through online communication can strengthen connections between learners and teachers, extending the learning environment and opportunities for collaborative learning beyond the walls of the classroom. Teachers can use a range of tools to support synchronous communication such as webinar platforms, and asynchronous communication such as forums and social media. The job of the teacher in this digital mode thus also include creating an environment that promotes and inspires independent learning by selecting appropriate tasks for learners, sending reminders to motivate them to complete tasks, and dealing quickly with any technical problems.

Many of the jobs available in the future will be digital, and many will also involve communicating with people in different countries. This means companies will need people with good digital skills and often good English skills too. Children who grow up in a supportive digital environment can learn the skills that they need to get good jobs in the future. Though the teachers and students of our country are not very used to the online mode of delivery of curriculum, the time has now come to make ourselves and our students well equipped to understand the need of the hour and master the use of technology and become comfortable with digital ways of working and communicating in English.

References

1. Adas, D. and Bakir, A. (2013). Writing Difficulties and New Solution: Blended Learning as an Approach to Improve Writing Abilities. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*..3 (9). 254-266.
2. Abdullah, S. (2015). Challenges for teaching English as a Second or foreign language and their Remedies. *International Journal of Humanities and Management Science*.
3. Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2011). *Going the distance: Online education in the United States*. Babson Park, MA: Babson Survey Research Group and Quahog Research Group. Retrieved from <http://www.onlinelearningsurvey>.



4. Atkinson, J. K., & Blankenship, R. (2009). Online learning readiness of undergraduate college students: A comparison between male and female students. *The Journal of Learning in Higher Education*, 5(2), 49-56.
5. Campbell N. E-teaching, e-learning and e-education. A paper to inform the development of the ICT strategy in New Zealand for the Ministry of Education <http://cms.steo.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/C11315DE-804A-4831-AB75-D4E77393DD8/0/eteaching.htm>. 2001.
6. Carril, P. C. M., Gonzalez Sanmamed, M., & Hernandez Selles, N. (2013). Pedagogical Roles and Competencies of University Teachers Practicing in the E-Learning Environment.
7. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 14(3), 462–487.
8. Duncan, H., & Barnett, J. (2009). Learning to teach online: What works for pre-service teachers. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, 40(3), 357–376.
9. Edwards, M., Perry, B., & Janzen, K. (2011). The making of an exemplary online educator.
10. *Distance Education*, 32(1), 101–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2011.565499>