CHALLENGES IN ONLINE EDUCATION DURING THE PANDEMIC; USING ONLINE TEACHING RESOURCES POST PANDEMIC- AN INSIGHT

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ABSTRACT

Online education before the pandemic was considered to be a farce and something non serious in India. Of course there were many online courses that were available for higher education professionals but the pandemic encouraged everyone to explore those tools. Google meet and Zoom became household names. This paper analyses the challenges and opportunities that are seen in online education in India. It also explores some of the lesser-known tools that are available nowadays that can help in complementing both online and regular classes in the off-line mode both to provide content based knowledge as well as exercises and tools for the enhancement of all the four aspects of communication in the students: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. While technology cannot be a substitute for a teacher; but it can serve as a powerful tool in the teaching-learning process.

Keywords: pandemic, online education, noodle tools, feedback, testing and evaluation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Online education before the pandemic was considered to be a farce and something non serious in India. Of course there were many online courses that were available for higher education professionals but the pandemic encouraged everyone to explore those tools. Google

meet and Zoom became household names. In India, where the COVID-19 pandemic devastated communities throughout the country and many teachers were unable to attend face-to-face classes, technology became an invaluable asset for ensuring students continued learning. These tools could be utilized in various ways: from core remote learning solutions such as textbooks and home visits, to tech-enabled solutions like WhatsApp, YouTube, TV shows and radio shows. One of the major obstacles to using these technology tools was that many schools lacked any internet connection at all. Furthermore, teachers had to purchase internet data packages at their own expense. Some educators were more adventurous, eager to test new technology and discover its potential for teaching and learning, while others were less daring. However, after the pandemic was over and students returned to classrooms, the importance of internet and the tools available was lost to some teachers. This is essentially because they could not realize the full potential of using the internet for enhancement of the teaching learning process. During the pandemic, some teachers chose to use the lecture mode. This resulted in students dozing off during during teaching and some chose not to pay attention at all while switching off the camera and microphone. Testing and evaluation during online teaching was another challenge for the teachers.

2. Challenges in Online teaching during the pandemic

A number of challenges were faced by teachers and educators, students as well as parents at various levels. In a country like India, the class divide had a great impact on the education of children. Children with affluent and middle-class background could afford online education easily. The children from economically challenged or underprivileged backgrounds found it hard to cope with the challenges of online education. The class divide was greater in the case of the urban rural divide. In remote areas or areas where internet connectivity or even regular power supply was a challenge, it was very hard to make the task of receiving online education possible for many. One of the biggest challenges faced by online English teaching in India is making sure students receive top-notch education despite all of their distractions. This challenge was compounded when one considers that many Indian villages are plagued with poverty and illiteracy.

The kind of distractions during the pandemic included presence of a number of family members at home, atmosphere, not suitable for education, lack of peer learning and lack of control on the part of the teacher. After the lockdowns were opened, the schools and colleges continued to run in the online mode. In this way, the greatest challenge to continue educating children and young learners was an uphill task. The great challenge was to make learning possible without affecting or compromising with the quality of education. Furthermore, many parents lacked the financial resources to purchase devices and data packs for their children. In some states, government authorities issued guidelines to teachers regarding using WhatsApp

for sharing worksheets with their students. Furthermore, they established a toll-free number that teachers could call in order to confirm they were actually teaching their pupils.

Teachers also felt inadequately supported in providing students with adequate assistance; for instance, tracking student progress and behavior patterns in remote classrooms proved challenging, while government support of providing laptops or reliable internet access proved inadequate. Teacher-student interaction was another difficulty faced by TEs. Students reported that many failed to participate in online classes due to connectivity problems, poor audio or video during classes, and the need for extra time for downloading content - all due to the fact that many rural students didn't have reliable internet access at home.

3. Role of the Internet and the responsibility of the teachers after the Pandemic

It is a sad fact that the internet which has the potential for becoming a very effective tool for the teaching learning process and enhancing communication skills of the students is looked at by the students only as a means of entertainment or a resource to plagiarize from. As teachers we have the responsibility not only to provide raw data and information to the students to be able to pass a course but we have a bigger mission. It is to enhance the learning skills of the students, to inspire them to seek knowledge on their own. As teachers, it is high time for us to bite the bullet and accept the harsh fact that books are not the only source of information and knowledge for the present generation. Also the role of the teacher is no longer that of a 'sage on the stage'. Rather s/he has been reduced to 'a guide on the side'. This does not mean that the stature and the importance of the teacher have been reduced even a little bit. On the contrary the role as well as the responsibility of the teacher has increased to a great extent.

The challenge, therefore, for the present generation is not to search for information like it was 10 years ago. Rather, it is the availability of too much of information everywhere especially over the web. Because of this 'information explosion' the pupils find it hard to distinguish between the useful information and the junk that is readily available on the internet. The task for the teacher, therefore, is to act as a filter or a sieve and give out the useful information. Most of us rely on only one or two search engines and a couple of other familiar sites while suggesting sources of material to our students or surfing for our personal use as well. However, the internet has a lot of material which is available for both the students as well as teachers for honing communication skills as well as pedagogical skills.

4. Online Resources and Tools that can be clubbed with regular education

Although the pandemic is over, but the learning from it need not be done away with. Most of the teachers researched and found out many useful tools that could help with educating students in a more effective manner. These rules can be clubbed with regular classroom

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teaching and make the teaching learning process, more effective, interactive, and fun. Some of the tools are as follows:

4.1 Blogging

One of the best ways to initiate the students into online learning and developing two basic communication skills i.e. Reading and Writing is the introduction of 'Blogging' as a complementary exercise for teaching beyond the classroom. The advantages of blogging are many including the additional reading practice that the students get while reading the entries made by their teacher as well as their colleagues. Another advantage of blogging is that many students who hesitate to speak in the classroom get a chance to contribute to the discussion on the blog. His or her writing skills would also improve to a great extent because the student would write and the teacher can give him/her personal feedback. Of course this feedback has to be given in a very subtle manner and that too personally so that it does not discourage the student from contributing further in the discussion in the future.

Blogs can be divided into three categories namely the tutor blog, the class blog and the learner blog. The tutor blog which is run mainly the teacher of the course has the entries done by the teacher. The class blog is another kind of blog where both the teacher as well as the students have the freedom to write in the main area. It is used as a place where the discussions can be organized. The learner blog is the personalized blog of each student.

4.2 Search Engines

While many teachers still use the traditional methods of teaching like chalk and blackboard or books and exercise books, a lot of teachers use the web for searching for new exercises and activities for classroom teaching. However most of this new generation of teachers have not been able to utilize the full potential of the internet because of lack of proper information on web search. Most of us rely on generalized search engines which despite being very good search engines do not necessarily provide academically suitable links only. To overcome this handicap, it is always advisable to search for the topic of your interest and then uncover the buried sites using "related searches".

Intute (http://www.intute.ac.uk/search.html) helps the researcher or a scholar to construct advanced queries and find out the scope of one's research. It helps the researcher narrow down the scope of one's research to a particular field like Education and Research Methods, Social Sciences, Communication and Media studies among many 17 other subject areas.

While many teachers spend a lot of time on the web to find the best suitable exercises for their students, they are not entirely sure whether a particular exercise or website would be suitable for their class or not. Twurdy "too wordy" (http://www.twurdy.com/) is a tool to help the teachers gauge the difficulty level of the text for their students. It is said that this website

is good for gauging a text or website to a teacher's students' proficiency level and also 'reports readability'.

If one needs American primary sources then using the Library of the Congress American Memory (http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/browse/) is a good resource for finding documents, sound recordings, images, maps, and other American primary sources. iSeek Education (http://education.iseek.com/iseek/home.page) is a targeted search engine for 'students, teachers, administrators, and caregivers' as it provides 'trusted resources from universities, government, and established noncommercial providers'. It also provides intelligent – instantly identifiable lesson plans, activities, school subjects, grade levels, and more with iView navigation.

If a researcher needs sites chosen by 'expert researchers' one can look at Infomine (http://infomine.ucr.edu/) and Libguide (http://libguides.com/community.php). Infomine provides 'scholarly internet resource collections' on various subjects like Social Sciences and Humanities, Visual and Performing Arts, Government Information, Business Economics, Physics, Engineering, Computer Science and Mathematics etc. Libguide is a resource to 'Librarian-created topic pathfinders'.

For general reference answers one can use Ask.com, Answers.com, and Columbia Encyclopedia (http://education.yahoo.com/reference/encyclopedia/). The scope of this paper does not allow giving all the search engines available on the internet but one can access Noodle Tools (http://www.noodletools.com/debbie/literacies/information/5locate/adviceengine.html) which is a very good resource for the introduction to the various kinds of search engines. It is the library for all the search engines.

4.3 Online Journals

With digitization of the libraries across the globe it has become possible for the scholars and researchers across the world to access the articles, research papers and journals from any part of the world by paying little or no cost. Most of these resources are made available by the academic institutions (mostly higher education institutions). Given below are a few resources.

INFLIBNET and JSTOR

Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET) provides excellent opportunities for the researchers and teachers to access the digitized information from the libraries all across the Indian universities. JSTOR (http://www.jstor.org/) stands for Journal Storage. It is a digital library that was initially found in 1995 that requires purchase of subscription either by the individual teacher, researcher or the participating institution (college or university). It provides thousands of journals in its database and one has the opportunity to actually read all

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the major journals in the world. It allows full text search that is provided by more than 800 publishers of the database that contains more than 1,400 journal titles in more than 50 subjects and disciplines.

4.4 Websites that Build Communication Skills

For teaching communication skills while a lot of teachers rely on well known books, there are some who use the internet as a resource. Due to the huge amount of information that is available on the internet a lot of time is spent on going through resources which are not very effective or suitable for classroom teaching. An introduction to some of the best websites for teaching and building communication skills is being given here. One Stop English (http://www.onestopenglish.com/) is a very good ELT site that lets the users download lessons for various communication skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing in English. It has also some very good activities for teaching pronunciation, developing vocabulary and integrated skills. It also specializes in teaching Business English and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) like Banking and Finance, Law, Human Resource, Hospitality and Tourism among many others. It also has a lot of Grammar Games that can be played in the classrooms. The best part about this website is that it is free.

English Zone (http://english-zone.com/index.php) is another very lively and interactive website that has no dearth of resources on English Language Teaching. It has exercises on Grammar based on various parts of speech, Reading zone that has activities for developing reading skills in the second language learners. Exercises and activities for building pronunciation, using the dictionary, learning skills like spellings and capitalization and learning to converse are also given special focus. The best part about these activities is that they are graded both according to the age of the learners and also the language proficiency of the learners.

Boggles World ESL (http://bogglesworldesl.com/) has crosswords, word searches, worksheets for young learners, role plays, activities for sentence level speaking and writing, word skills games, ESL business activities, flash cards, songs for teaching grammar and parts of speech and many other activities. Similarly 4Teachers (http://poster.4teachers.org/index.php) is another effective tool for teachers and allows them to undertake a number of teaching learning activities. Tools for Educators (http://www.toolsforeducators.com/) provides the opportunity to the teachers and educators to download and print free worksheets, online worksheets, game makers and programmes for teachers to make and print teaching resources with pictures or classroom materials for students and learners. Besides these, it has printable board games, crossword puzzle maker, spelling worksheet maker and reading sheet wizard to make spelling worksheets where students select the correct spelling of words or have the students write the correct spelling.

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ANVILL-A National Virtual Language Lab (https://anvill.uoregon.edu/anvill2/frontpage) is a speech-based toolbox for language teachers developed by the University of Oregon, US. It is a research project of the Yamada Language Centre of the University of Oregon. It targets both the traditional programmes i.e. face to face and distance or online programmes. It provides extra speaking and listening skills to the learners. It also provides the teachers an opportunity to create media rich lessons. There are templates for audio, video, and image tasks; there are also tools for text-based discussions like blogs and forums.

The BBC has also contributed immensely to the teaching of communication both in the print and online. The CBSE has also suggested BBC CCE worksheets prepared by the BBC for English. But besides the books and worksheets, the BBC World Service has launched BBC Learning English (http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/) on the web. It is an inexhaustible source of materials for teaching and learning English. It provides exercises on General and Business English, activities for grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, slang and everyday expressions. It also has an English soap "The Flatmates" which has more than 200 episodes that teach English. Each episode targets a particular part of speech and vocabulary. The BBC Learning English also has a lot of audio files in the downloadable format that can be used by the teachers for teaching not only pronunciation but also various parts of speech. The website is a storehouse of stories, listening activities and grammar exercises.About.com (http://esl.about.com/) is also a very good resource for teaching communication. It has activities to improve specific skills like pronunciation and grammar. It also has exercises to develop vocabulary listening skills etc. The material provided in the website is also graded.

ESL Lab (http://www.esl-lab.com/) is a good storehouse of activities for learners and teachers of English. All the material is divided into three categories viz. Easy, Medium and Difficult. Hundreds of listening activities based on various situations are given on the website besides listening quizzes for academic purposes and vocabulary lessons. There are some other good websites that provide excellent material for classroom teaching. Some of them are listed below:

- English Learner- http://www.englishlearner.com/

- Non Stop English- http://www.nonstopenglish.com/

- Nation Multimedia- http://www.nationmultimedia.com/edu/

- OWL Purdue Online Writing Lab- http://owl.english.purdue.edu/

- Rong Chang- http://www.rong-chang.com/

- English at Home- http://www.english-at-home.com/

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- Learn English- http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/

- Crossword Puzzle Game- http://www.crosswordpuzzlegames.com/create.html

4.5 Using the Corpora available on the web

A Corpus normally refers to the collection of writings on a subject and writings by an author or group of authors. For the purpose of language it is a collection of samples of written and spoken language from a wide range of sources, designed to represent a wide cross-section of a society. It also represents the spoken and written forms of a language by both the native and the foreign speakers. However for the purpose of classroom various types of corpora have been identified namely books, magazines, newspapers, Emails, television, radio and conversations. Other types of corpora include the learner corpus, the multilingual corpus and non-conventional corpora.

One of the most helpful corpora includes the British National Corpus (http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/) which is a collection of 100 million words of English written and spoken language. It helps the user identify the usage of a particular word in Standard English. By identifying the proper usage of a word, the user can train him/her self to use the word correctly and communicatively in various situations. The corpus can be used easily both on the computer as well as smart phones.

4.6 Creating and using Rubrics for Evaluation with the aid of the Web

One of the tasks for judging the progress of the students is evaluation. Tests and assignments are given for this purpose. Sometimes the challenge before the teacher during evaluation is to gauge the effectiveness of the tools employed for assessment. For this purpose various experienced teachers set parameters for awarding marks. These parameters are mostly very effective but are personal to each teacher which are not documented a place because of which they are lost with the retirement of each teacher. The internet has provided a solution to this as well. Based on the experience of various teachers in different subjects, with the help of web programming some tools have been created that help each teacher set a standard set of parameters or a benchmark for the purpose of evaluation. The introduction of a rubric also makes the evaluation process transparent besides making the expectation of the teacher clear to the students.

Rubistar (http://rubistar.4teachers.org/) iRubric (http://www.rcampus.com/indexrubric .cfm), and Rubric4Teachers (http://www.rubrics4teachers.com) are some of the websites that produce rubrics for teachers for every subject based on the inputs given by the teacher. Given below is a rubric for evaluation of the practical criticism of a poem by students of literature. Online teaching tools and assessment are becoming more prevalent in language education. While these can be highly beneficial, there are also challenges that must be addressed. One of

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the most prevalent challenges when taking online exams is proctoring. Services like Examity and TOP HAT utilize webcams, screen videos and other technology-enabled features to closely monitor students' exams.

Online tools and means of assessment in Language teaching challenges

This collection showcases a selection of research efforts designed to enhance online learning experiences. Whether they focus on introducing new technology or reviewing existing software, the conclusions drawn from these studies have significant lessons for educators. Zoom, Google Meet, Webex and other available tools can assist teachers in assessing students in multiple ways, such as through grading rubrics, Canvas Assignments, plagiarism detection and peer assessment, surveys and classroom polling. Furthermore, these tools collect formative feedback on student learning and foster an atmosphere where questions are encouraged.

Other tools that can be employed for language learning include discussion boards, blogs or wiki pages, and case studies. These activities can be effective when conducted online; however they must be designed properly in order to promote active learning.One of the primary obstacles that hinder students' online learning is internet connectivity issues. As a result, they often encounter poor quality audio and video recordings, downtime, and connection losses between teachers and students.

Thankfully, video streaming software and other digital tools have seen a dramatic growth in usage. Unfortunately, this has created an immense challenge for professors to keep up with students' growing demands. In addition to technical concerns, pedagogical issues also arise when teaching and learning online. Here are some of the most frequent challenges encountered by online language teachers:

a.   First and foremost, instructors must identify their learning objectives and determine the most efficient means of achieving them with appropriate tools and methods. Doing this allows educators to select the most suitable online activities and tools tailored towards their requirements.

b.   Another essential factor when designing assessment is the type of evaluation they wish to use. It should be tailored towards achieving specific learning objectives and designed to offer meaningful feedback on students' progress.

c.   Finally, the tool should be user-friendly for instructors to manage and set up. It must provide a simple interface that makes creating and editing assessments effortless.

The assessment should be designed with mobile-friendliness in mind, enabling learners to take it on their smart phones and laptops. It should also offer data encryption and password

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protection in order to safeguard students' privacy. Some online assessment tools offer features like live assignments, instant assesment and attractive test templates that make taking the test an enjoyable and rewarding experience. Furthermore, these platforms provide superfast results which can be shared with students via email or on a student's online profile page. An ideal assessment platform should also provide smart reports and statistics to assist in critical decision-making processes.

5. CONCLUSION

After the pandemic, the nature and meaning of education has changed a lot. Colleges and universities must reevaluate their course offerings in light of a global marketplace where students are increasingly opting for quality virtual programs over traditional classes. Maintaining competition in today's marketplace is no small feat. It necessitates a strategic approach to teaching and learning in the virtual classroom. Teachers should utilize assessment tools to monitor student progress and give them feedback on how they can improve their performance. Rubrics and performance criteria are ideal for this purpose since they tend to be transparent and scalable, meaning you can use them for everything from grading individual students up to creating grade books with performance metrics for entire courses. In a recent study of the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers observed that students performed better on short quizzes than papers because they were shorter and allowed them to focus more directly on answering the questions rather than worrying about their grade.

Formative assessment in the online classroom is easy to integrate, so teachers don't need to adjust their lesson plans or curriculum. Furthermore, it requires minimal effort with no compromise in quality.

Another advantage of digital forms of assessment is their accessibility; they can be utilized by a wide range of students, not just those underserved by traditional classroom models. This holds especially true for older students or those unable to attend class regularly due to work or family obligations.

Furthermore, online forms of assessment can be more adaptable and accessible to students with limited resources, potentially leading to increased participation rates by eliminating the need to make costly or time-consuming adjustments to their schedules.

Overall, these findings indicate the need for further research into the effectiveness of various assessment methods in virtual classroom settings. This will assist educators in understanding which methods work best and how best to implement them for maximum benefit to all students.

Furthermore, this research should offer a basis for improving the implementation of online forms of assessment in virtual classroom settings. Therefore, it is essential that this work be

conducted promptly and its findings published; this will serve as an invaluable reference point for educators around the world as they consider what steps need to be taken in order to enhance their teaching methods online.

Looking at all the above resources and experiencing them, it can be asserted that the web is a very good tool for the teaching learning process and should not be seen only as a means of entertainment. With the help of thousands of activities and resources available on the web, the job of the teacher has been facilitated to a great degree. The task before the teacher in the present era of information overload lies in identifying the effective tools for learning and making them available to the students. Online learning technologies have a place in any curriculum, despite their inherent challenges. As the most efficient and effective way to educate a global population, they hold great promise for classrooms, communities and nations as a whole.

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