



Online Teaching Challenges and Opportunities in Synchronous Group Debate Tasks

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ABSTRACT:

To cater to the needs of pandemic situation, online teaching is normalized but the issues cropping up from the new way of teaching needs special attention from the teacher and students. The suggestions prompted by the investigator in the paper are from the teacher's point of view mainly, even though these suggestions are for minimizing the issues which students encounter also. The new scenario expects teachers to use their time judiciously to cover the syllabus and at the same time, realise the course and student learning outcome. A shift in the strategies adopted until now in the motor and brick classroom is welcome to face the new online teaching situation. Combining of features could make our teaching method efficacious.

Key Words: *Online Teaching, Group Discussion, Issues in online teaching, Platform break-out rooms for discussion, new normal scenario, Teaching Strategy*

1. INTRODUCTION

Two's a company, three's a crowd goes the saying and this illustrates the anomaly which the online language learning task, Group Discussion creates, if the strength of the class is an ideal one, let alone the class size of 50 or the more. The situation in which language teachers find themselves is highly demanding, as lock down during the pandemic pressurizes teachers and students to adopt online teaching. But the experience of online teaching makes teachers and students realise its advantages and its challenges. It makes an opportunity to hit upon new strategies to tackle problems of any sort in the process of teaching and learning. This paper highlights the obstacles encountered in synchronous Online Group Discussion Task and the resultant attempt to contribute to the investigator who is also a teacher of English at a deemed university in Chennai.

2. Discussions

2.1.Challenges in online group discussion

A few challenges teachers face in online teaching need an elaborate discussion to drive home the necessity for a new teaching strategy in the new normal scenario.

2.1.1.Simultaneous Responses

The most important obstacle teachers face in language learning task, Online Group Discussion is the voice which goes to the extent of confounding the audience, that is, the students gathered online and the teacher sometimes and mainly, it is simultaneously heard. Students' attempt to please the teacher or to impress others on



the platform, they express what they conceive in their mind at a time. The desire to garner as much score as possible pushes them to vie with one another to catch the teacher's attention.

2.1.2.Awkward Pauses

The pauses that sound highly discouraging to both the teacher and students are another drawback of online teaching. It raises the doubt on students' presence or attention at the other end on the matter under discussion. The insufficient exposure to the topic or unwillingness on the part of students to discuss the topic could be the reason for the lack of their responses. Whatever the reason could be, they refuse to admit openly the reason for their reluctance or avoidance of answering or involving in the discussion.

2.1.3.Out of Comfort Zone

The hesitation to involve in the discussion could be due to their inadequate proficiency of English or lack of ideas about the topic. Their poor reading habits lead to their unpreparedness for the discussion. As a result of vague ideas, repetition of points occurs. This repetition of ideas results in undesirable arguments among the students on fixing whose ideas come first.

2.1.4.Ghost Calls

Locating the person from their voice is difficult on the platform if the class has more than 50 students. It requires constant watching the monitor.

2.1.5.Strain due to constant Viewing

The viewing of the monitor at a stretch is health hazardous and this fatigues students sometimes. Their attention must be on the points thrown for the discussion and their constant presence is a need till the end.

2.1.6.Lack of Socialising

The social nature of human beings finds the new situation which forces them to be indoors intolerable. Students' need for assistance from co-learners or teachers finds no chance in the lock down period. The lack of outlet or the support through socializing is highly disadvantageous to students.

2.1.7.Time Paucity

Within the stipulated hours, the coverage of syllabus is beyond teachers' capacity sometimes even in regular classes, because of the heterogenous class. Online class throws some technical problems additionally as well.

2.1.8.Internet Connectivity Issues

The internet connectivity problem exists especially in the remote areas of India and preventing the unexpected power failure due to which loss of internet connection from happening is beyond one's control. The non-availability of data poses a problem for students.

2.1.9.Technical Snags in the devices

Facing any sudden technical snags may thwart students' or teachers' interest in involving or conducting Group Discussion.

2.2.Opportunities in online GD

The presence of break -out rooms in some of the platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Team gives a solution for chorus responses, hesitation to speak due to lack of right ideas and lack of socialization. Many simultaneous discussions can happen in different break-out rooms with student members of their choice. The group can be



small or big depending on the willingness of students and or teachers. Discussion can be practical irrespective of the group size. The effectiveness depends on the time allotment.

The teachers' visit is possible for every group and the teacher's observation time can vary from group to group following the proficiency level of student members gathered in the room. So, the possibility of a constant check makes this chance of discussion in the break-out room interesting.

The opportunity to contact them direct, almost one -on -one enhances the chance to facilitate the discussion as students need constant motivation or support. This direct contact opportunity imparts a feeling of closeness to students. Even other group members' attention is on the teacher's instructions or suggestions.

The strength of these platforms is the presence of break-out rooms. These rooms encourage students to shed their hesitancy as their company is close-knit and they receive any kind of support from other group members.

The availability of accessories to these devices is a great help to have the feeling of closeness. The earphone is a boon to hear their voices clearly from anywhere on earth. The use of earphone quells the disturbance in the reception of sound.

The 'real' control on the discussion procedure defeats the accusation that seemingly lacks control of students in online teaching. The recording of the discussion in the break-out room shows how the discussion has gone on.

Interaction among students is bound to happen since students are in groups within the break-out rooms. The interaction among them helps to modify their interlanguage and thus, improves their communication, thinking and critical skills. Those who hesitate to say in front of the whole set of students find this break-out rooms a boon to practice speaking English well.

Critical thinking of students reaches higher level with the use of these devices and technologies within the online class. The external motivation in the form of cues and appreciations boosts their morale to verify and analyse to confirm the authenticity of the matter and applicability of the findings. The chance of receiving reading material is high with the availability of the internet.

3. Conclusion

To utilize the advantages of online platforms, slight modifications in any task's procedure may fall in with the expectations of students and teachers in using them efficiently. The regular courses within the classroom at educational institutions demand the rigorous way of following each task's steps. But online teaching could combine features of a task with another one may be a suitable solution if it can mitigate or eliminate the issues we face with the targeted task otherwise. The investigator suggests the discussion to be among students in small groups within the break-out rooms and their sound articulation of the claim students make individually in the open with the presence of other students' presence. This amalgamation of debate and group discussion features will assure the mitigation of chorus responses, awkward pauses, hesitation on the part of students to speak, ghost voice representations, minimal socializing and avoidance of out-of-comfort zone.

References

Books

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