Dynamics of Teaching English and Engineering Education in the Post-COVID-19 Pandemic Era

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all the human activities and has disrupted education. It has compelled the global and abrupt conversion of conventional face-to-face instruction to virtual mode. As any teacher would confirm, the situation in classroom is far more complex now than before the pandemic. The fact today is that as students are back to the educational institutions we cannot go back to the traditional teaching and learning process. The educators must rebuild the classroom strategies. This is applicable to teaching English to engineering students as well.

Effective communication is the key to successful teaching and learning to engineering students, whether in a physical classroom or a virtual classroom in the Post-COVID-19 era. Present paper aims at discussing digital tools that are useful in improving the communication skills. The virtual platforms like both asynchronous and synchronous, digital whiteboards, social media channels, Document Management Tools Learning Management System, websites, and various other online tools are of great help to the educators.

Key words: COVID-19 pandemic- English -Engineering education - virtual classroom-digital tools-online platform.

FULL PAPER

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all the human activities and has disrupted education. It has compelled the global and abrupt conversion of conventional face-to-face instruction to virtual mode. The UNICEF-ITU report signals that this is the largest mass disruption in education in modern history and has affected 1.6 billion children globally. Though policy makers around the world have called for a move to remote learning to combat thecrisis, this surely has led to an imbalanced landscape given the lack of Internet access for many.

Before the pandemic, the Education Commission had estimated: "By 2030, more than half of the world's children and young people (800 million) would not have the skills or qualifications necessary to participate in the emerging global workforce.Today, approximately one-fifth of young people worldwide, or 267 million, have already been affected by unemployment. In the future, they are also expected to earn less. With 1.3 billion people entering adulthood in the next decade, it is critical that out-of-date approaches to education will serve as yet another barrier for future generation. While traditional academic skills are important, we have also seen the role that playful, creative, and engaging experiences have in helping children cope with unpredictable and rapidly changing situations like the Covid-19 pandemic."

As any teacher would confirm, the situation in classroom is far more complex now than before the pandemic. The fact today is that as students are back to the educational institutions we can not go back to the traditional teaching and learning process. The educators must rebuild the classroom strategies. This is applicable to teaching English to engineering students as well.

English education was in fact, introduced in India in the middle of the 19th century. The role of English in our education system has been shifting over the years. Several commissions and study groups stressed the need of the rationalization of the English curricula, textbooks and examinations. The service nature of the teaching of English has been largely realized and the need of the diversification of courses to suit the divergent requirements of different categories and consequently of the suitable changes in teaching techniques. In the present scenario, it is a universal agreement that technology has become an integral part of educational system around the world. The methods of teaching and learning English have also changed significantly. Much importance is laid on linguistic competence, communicative proficiency, grammatical precision and vocabulary building.

A new way of learning technique has emerged with the facility of computers and internet. The terms - Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) have been increasingly used to. The basic objective of these is to expose the learners to acceptable models of English being used in different situations. This could be considered potentially effective. Thus, the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) has been found to improve student attitude towards learning.Several universities in India have introduced Multimedia English Language Lab in the curriculum. Thereby teaching English has reached the next level, called Blended Learning. "Blended learning refers to a mixing of different learning environments. The phrase has many specific meanings based upon the context in which it is used. Blended learning gives learners and teachers a potential environment to learn and teach more effectively". (Marsh, 3)

To cope with post-Covid-19 pandemic, the higher education has been converted to digital or online mode. Educators have tried best to adopt a flexible way of using recorded videos, live sessions, and quizzes to overcome online delivery. In the meantime, many not-so-explored teaching methods have emerged as alternate options of teaching methods. Such a rise in few teaching methodologies is one of the best outcomes of the current online teaching. The covid-19 has made teaching much challenging for all the educators calling to try new teaching methods. Flipped classroom, case teaching, mentoring, mini-projects, paper writing, online discussions and debates, film show can make wonders in an online teaching terrain. These new methods are more enjoyable, less time-consuming, and it encourages developing new experiences by practicing existing knowledge.

The pandemic has necessitated universal remote teaching;the necessity of teaching and learning with asynchronous platforms such as Canvas, Blackboard, D2L and synchronous platformssuch as Zoom, Microsoft Teams,Google Meetare yielding significant benefits when these methods are layered into face-to-face instruction."The well-established best practices of hybrid or blended teaching and learninghave served as a guide for new combinations of instructional delivery that have developed in response to the shift to virtual learning." (Stein, 2020)

Effective communication is the key to successful teaching and learning to engineering students, whether in a physical classroom or a virtual classroom. However, maintaining online communication with not one, but over

sixty to seventy students is undoubtedly challenging. Communication platforms help overcome it; they enable communication with larger groups, with video conferencing, instant messaging, audio calls, virtual rooms, and more, with any device and from anywhere. Online whiteboards or digital whiteboards help emulate the classroom whiteboard/ blackboard experience with the students. Most of these tools offer an infinite canvas with shape libraries for creating different types of diagrams, charts, graphs, and other visualization purposes i.e., creating posters, graphic organizers, etc.

Social media channels also provide a great platform for teachers, students and parents to stay connected. Channels like Facebook, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, etc. allow the creation of exclusive communities or groups so that teachers can leverage on to communicate and maintain presence after online class hours, share and store important information, presentations, and resources related to lessons, Conduct Q&A sessions, encourage students to maintain communication among themselves and engage with each other while studying or doing homework, conduct live events such as webinars with Facebook or Instagram Live.

From test papers to lesson plans, there's an array of documents for teachers to maintain regularly. A central location to store, organize, and manage all these documents is essential to properly keep track of them, especially when you are teaching remotely. Document Management Tools such as GSuite, MS office, OneDrive, Dropbox, and Evernote simplify the process of maintaining the documents, store all documents, files, etc. in the cloud which also allow students to access them with any device from anywhere.Institutions' Learning Management System (LMS) such as MOODLE is also useful for documents and file sharing. Whether you are teaching online or in a physical classroom, quizzes are a great way to check a student's performance. Online quiz makers make it easy to create, format, and share assessments online and create answer sheets that can be easily tracked, evaluated and get the score sheet of all the students. There is a plethora of online quiz makers that are both free and paid, starting from Google Forms.

Other digital tools that are helpful to teach English are Youtube ,Quik,Padlet,Mentimeter, WordItOut, Pixtoon etc.Youtube has proven to be helpful to teach language. Video may be sent to students before the class, so that they watch it and get ready for what they are going to study. Videos can also be used in class for presentation and practice time.Quik creates awesome videos with just a few taps. Students can choose photos and video clips and create an awesome video that can be shown in class.Padlet collaborates in a better way and is more productive. Beautiful boards, documents, and web pages can be created that are easy to read and fun to contribute to. Mentimeter makes the students feel involved by enabling them to contribute to presentations with their smartphones and show the results live. Add polls, word clouds, Q&As, slides and more to presentations and create an interactive experience.Another creative way to teach English with technology is using word clouds to teach vocabulary. WordItOut transforms text into word clouds. It can be shared, so everybody can find and enjoy learning.Pixtoonis the world's most popular and easy to use comic and storyboard creator.Story Bird helps to build books in minutes whichsurprisingly inspiresthe users to write.Powtoon can be used to make animated presentations for free.Students can record a conversation or answer questions orally using Phone audio recorder and send them via WhatsApp or any other apps. Quizlet is an online learning tool that lets you create flashcards, short tests and spelling Quizzes. Google Forms and Microsoft Forms are useful to create surveys.

There are many websites that help to improve all the four skills – Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. For listening – elllo.org, lingorank.com, breakingnewsenglish.com, eltpodcast.com, eslpod.com; for speaking–

eslgold.com/practice-speaking, englishspeak.com, espressoenglish.net, for reading–goodreads.com, eslgold.com/practice-reading, manythings.org; for writing–readble.com, owl.purdue.edu, grammarly.com, thesaurus.com/writingprompts, writingcenter.unc.edu/esl, noredink.zendesk.com. To improve the pronunciation of the students bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/englishfeatures/pronunciation, forvo.com, photransedit.com, howjsay.com are resourceful.

Many digital tools and online resources are available, but it is up to the discretion of the educators to select the apt one to impart the required skillsets to engineering graduates so that theyare industry ready. Thus,from the introduction of audio-visual aids in the language classroom to the setting up of language labs, teaching English has come a long way to virtual classrooms where Breakout rooms are created to form small groups to facilitate group activities and peer learning. Smartboards have replaced the traditional projectors. With several new concepts of e-world the regular classrooms have been replaced by virtual classrooms.

However, the conventional on-campus lecture model offers a higher level of interactivity and engagement between the students and teachers. The educators will have to think out of the box to bring in the element of interactivity and collaboration in their e-learning modules (Dasgupta, 2020). In addition, education faculties should integrate more effective lessons about online education into their curriculum, regardless of the divisions, so that the future educators are well-equipped with technology and online education (Korkmaz, 2020).Online learning can be effective (Means, 2013; Rudestam,2010; Zhao,2005), but a well-designed mixed mode delivery of online and face-to-face education should be more effective for learning in general but especially so should there be future instances of virtual learning (Tucker, 2020). The idea of blended learning or flipped classrooms (Bishop, 2013) has been promoted and researched in recent years as very effective models of teaching.Future iterations of online education will no longer be bound to the traditions of single teaching modes, as educators can support pedagogical approaches from a menu of instructional delivery options, a mix that has been supported by previous generations of online educators. (Dunlap, 2018)

Education systems around the world are urgently recalibrating, realizing that they are dangerously outdated. Many are seizing the opportunity to modernize their systems for the 21st century – reimagining learning to equip students with the skills they need to be productive and life-long learners.As millions of students are likely to remain without a stable physical classroom for the foreseeable future, which may lead to the very real threat that virtual curricula will focus solely on literacy and numeracy rather than engaging, hands-on activities that help fostering essential skills.Embracing blended pedagogy mechanism, called the phygital, (Divya, 2021) allows flexible teaching and learning in the post-COVID-19-pandemic era.With a better focus on student independence and proper resourcing, educators must better analyse what they are teaching overall. Also, identify the underlying skill sets the students to walk away with and focus on practical, hands-on application that is easy to transfer to real-world settings.

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