STRATEGIES FOR L2 LEARNERS TO IMPROVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY THROUGH ONLINE LEARNING

Justin Z
Assistant Professor, Department of Science & Humanities (English), RMK College of Engineering and Technology (Autonomous), RSM Nagar, Puduvoyal, Thiruvallur (Dt.) - Tamil Nadu – 601206.
Email: justinsh@rmkcet.ac.in

Jaisankar D
Associate Professor and Head, Department of English, Academy of Maritime Education and Training, Deemed to be University, Kanathur, ECR, Chennai - 603 112 Email: jairanga08@gmail.com

Ravikumar M
Assistant Professor, Department of Science & Humanities (English), RMK Engineering College(Autonomous), RSM Nagar, Kavaraipettai, Thiruvallur (Dt.) - Tamil Nadu – 601206. Email: rrm.sh@rmkec.ac.in

Abstract

The second language learners of English face challenges while attending online classes for which effective strategies are provided to counter them. Various research articles related to online teaching and the challenges involved have been explored. To strengthen the research, an experiment has been conducted in the form of questionnaire among the L2 learners in various institutions from different locations. It was found that the online teaching of English to L2 learners has been ineffective and at the same time inevitable. Hence effective strategies such as the blended teaching methods like flipped class, use of social media, and Web-conference have been suggested in this article as the result of the qualitative and quantitative research undertaken.

Key words: Online learning, Online Teaching, Blended teaching, Web-conference, Social media, Flipped class room, L2 learners.

Introduction

Teaching and learning English as a second language has attained immense attention today in many countries due to the globalization. There have been a lot of innovative technologies developed to enhance learning English across the globe of late. With the technology explosion, digital learning has become imminent today. Traditional learning which focuses on the instructor as the centre of knowledge has become insufficient (Wang & Heffernan, 2010). As a result, traditional classroom activities such as lectures, home work and assignments have been moved to the websites and other electronic media. The devastating epidemic due to the spread of corona and its aftermath in the prolonged lockdown has increased the use of digital platforms for teaching and learning.

Hence, learning English online has become relevant and necessary for the L2 learners. Social media like the Google Meet, Zoom, Microsoft Meeting, etc., are some of the most popular platforms used for teaching and learning. The impact of learning English online has advantages as well as disadvantages. It is highly important to know the outcome of online classes in this context. Learning the English language online has been increasing nowadays due to the impact of the pandemic situation. E-learning is a blessing to the students who have easy access to the network and other technology required for the online classes. L2 learners are at the receiving end as far as the online classes are concerned. They neither have uninterrupted network connectivity nor they can follow the classes as they used to learn face-to-face in the classroom.

This research paper outlines the strategies to counter the challenges faced by L2 learners while learning English through online classes. It further recommends suitable course contents and teaching methodologies that are necessary to attract and stimulate the L2 learners towards e-learning

of English classes. It is also suggested that appropriate social media should be chosen as the platform for the smooth conduction of the online classes.

Learning a language is equal to acquiring a skill. Hence, the desired result is inevitable for the L2 learners. Most of the L2 learners are from rural backgrounds and have poor access to the internet and other facilities. Owing to the non-availability of infrastructure, the learning process could be affected. Online classes require a well- connected network, smart phones and better software to facilitate the teaching and learning process successfully and meaningfully to the students.

Research Purpose

This research article outlines the importance of enhancing the online learning process of English for the L2 learners. It further brings out the problems faced by the L2 learners while learning English through online classes. The paper also suggests various strategies to be adopted to enhance effectiveness of English learning for the L2 learners.

Methodology

This research work is based on quantitative and qualitative analyses, It includes evaluating and reviewing the various research articles, books, news, survey reports from students and other media reports.

Literature Review

Scholars have found different aspects of online learning and its advantages and disadvantages. Marta L. in the thesis, "Comparing Online English Language Learning and Face-to-Face English Language Learning at El Bosque University in Colombia," states that online classes conducted by the El Bosque University in Columbia could not produce the desired result. Higher education in Columbia wanted their students to learn English online as most of them come from a rural background and they were living in far away locations. In order to strengthen their education and increase an opportunity to work as government officers and in abroad, Touchstone® Online was aligned with the standards of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001), which are the standards used in Colombia for the teaching and evaluation of foreign language learning. All the English programs should have to comply with these standards and are expected to produce learning outcomes based on them. However, the outcome was not encouraging. Most students could not benefit from the online classes (2018).

Settha Kuama & Usa Intharaksa in the Research Article, "Is Online Learning suitable for all English Language Students?" examine the strategies used by all kinds of language learners and investigate the outcome. The students were graded under various categories such as cognitive, meta-cognitive, resource management, and rated their conceptualization of affection in online learning. With respect to affection in online learning, there was a fundamental difference in terms of perceptions. Meta-cognitive strategies and affection in online learning had an important link with the outcome of the online English learning. It was found that the low English proficient students lacked online learning skills compared to the proficient English learners (2016).

Huiwei Cai expresses an opinion in a conference paper titled, "E-learning and English Teaching," that the advancement of technology and information facilitates a conducive atmosphere for teaching English through online. The technology and the digital platform bring changes to the pedagogical strategies to improve the efficiency of online teaching and learning. The scholar discusses the advantages of e-learning in English teaching and suggests pedagogical strategies to enhance the teachers' ability to cope with the online classes. In a way, the new strategies help to improve the efficiency of teachers making their students master the language skills (2012). M.Subha says, "It has become essential and need of the hour to incorporate and refine the life skill called interpersonal communication skill to facilitate a learner to be successful and procure better career placement and to move upward."(2020).

Mahmoud Ahmed, in his case study, "How Effective is E-learning in Teaching English?" illustrates the current state of E-learning in teaching and learning English in the Department of English in King Khalid University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia(KSA). The result of the case study conducted, maintains that the female students have a positive outlook towards the e-learning of English when compared to their counterpart male students. The case study, further supports that e-learning could be effective with the usage of black boards. Online quizzes are found more effective than assignments. However the e-learning is found to be ineffective as many students don't have access to the internet connection (2014).

Martin Lamba and Fauziah Eka Arisandyb, in their article titled as "The Impact of Online Use of English on Motivation to Learn." states that the young people today use English in their day-to-day life while studying the language regularly in school or university. The author of this article investigates how the Metropolitan youth in Indonesia use English online. They do as they are globally motivated by international trade and communication especially in their country. This paper is also concerned about self-instruction and social activity. Most of the students favoured self-instruction rather than social activity-based online classes (2018).

Rebecca Aaron in her thesis titled "The Influence of Online English Language Instruction on ESL Learners' Fluency Development," states that with the availability of speed internet and other social platforms, many students prefer to attend online learning English now-a-days. Online classes have become cost- effective and also convenient for the students. Though there is growth towards online classes, the effectiveness of learning is wanting many a time. Teaching English online has focussed primarily on reading, writing and listening. Therefore, the speaking skill which is very essential in mastering a language has been sidelined in online classes (2016).

FINDINGS
Challenges faced during Online Classes
Classes conducted online were used for distance education initially. Globalization and the spread of international trade and communication have made online classes inevitable. The popular and the reputed universities across the world started online classes for certain sections of the people who couldn't present physically due to the location and the lifestyle. Online classes have become part of the curriculum very recently due to the explosive growth of digital media and social networking. The pandemic situation heightened the need for online classes everywhere across the globe due to the extended lockdown to restrict the spread of Corona virus. Almost all theory subjects including English are taught online nowadays.

English being, a language requires certain strategies to make the learning feasible especially online. In this regard, the research is undertaken after going through an experimental survey and qualitative discussion and interviews with the L2 learners who attended online classes for learning English. Some of the Universities conducted internal assessments and end semester exams also through online. The paper also brings out the outcome of those exams conducted online.

Students studying in two universities and two colleges have been interviewed as a part of the survey.. Students pursuing different streams and subjects in Saveetha School of Engineering which is a part of Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Science (Deemed university), Academy of Maritime Education and Training University, Professor Dhanapalan Arts and Science College for Women and Christian College of Engineering and Technology which is affiliated to Anna University were interviewed about the success of their online English classes from 2020 April to January 2021. Technical English, Creative Writing in English, Business English and Communicative English under Engineering stream and Background to English Literature, British Literature, and American English under Arts & Humanities subjects were analysed. Almost all the students are L2 learners. Most of them did their schooling in vernacular medium.

Students were asked a set of questions (questionnaire)
1. Is listening to the teacher in English online classes easy or hard?
2. What is the difference you feel between online and offline English classes?
3. Are you able to attend the online classes without technical hiccups?
4. Is there any drastic change in your grades in online exams?
5. How do you overcome technical issues during online classes?
6. Are you able to improve your speaking and writing skills through online classes?
7. Do you write the exam without malpractice?
8. Do you want to continue the online classes further? Why?
9. Are you able to interact with the teacher during the online classes?
10. Which language skill are you able to develop during online classes?

These questions were asked face-to-face and some through social media (Google form questions). The result was astounding. Many students responded that they liked the online classes in the beginning as they need not present physically and they could cheat easily. However, they got bored and became anxious to get rid of the unwanted situation they have been forced to follow.

The technical issue was found to be the major challenge as many of them could not afford laptops and smart phones with uninterrupted networks. There was a clear divide between the urban and rural students. Compared to urban students, the rural students scored low grades as they could not learn to use the technology effectively. The low attendance further did not help them to learn better. The writing skill is the one most affected during English online classes. Neither the teachers nor the students could do anything to enhance writing skills as it was hard to download and upload in peak hours.

Technical stream students were more benefitted than the Arts stream students. The students belonging to the Arts stream did not fare well as they had to take MCQ tests which were not conducive for studying the literature. Literature classes need discussions, collaborations and interactions. Online classes had such limitations as time constraints to avoid elaborate discussions on topics. Students felt unhappy that they missed out on the real-life experience of listening to poems and plays being performed in the classrooms.

Students from Technical Institutes found it very difficult to understand writing tasks such as Essay Writing, Letter Writing and Dialogue Writing as they could not practise in the online classes. They also complained about audio issues while attending listening classes. They couldn't practise Interview skills as vigorously as they used to practise before the recruitment process.

STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCEMENT OF ENGLISH ONLINE CLASSES

Flipped Class Room

Video lectures can be shot before class time and uploaded for the students. They can come to class well-prepared and the teacher facilitates discussion on the same. This saves time as the teacher need not take the same lesson already shot in the video. Students also can benefit from this as they can participate live and meaningfully as they have the knowledge of the topic that is being discussed in the class online. The flipped classroom can connect both online and offline classes. It can empower the online class as it can make the class more lively and meaningful. It makes the teaching pedagogy feasible even online. The students can watch the video lectures at their comfort zone without worrying of any unwanted interruption or technical hiccups. Richter and McPherson (2012) are of the view that in today's digital age, every student can access free internet materials such as video contents at their own convenience.

Flipped class room is the emerging technology in this digital age.(Johnson, Adams Becker, Estrada, &Freeman, 2014). "There is a dire need for revolutionary changes in the education system, not only in the syllabus and pedagogy, but also in the attitude towards the test and marks system."(Balamurugan, 2019) It is a kind of blended learning where the face to face and the distant learning are combined to make the learning easily accessible and comfortable. It is also student centred approach to learning where students take active role in the learning and teaching process. The teachers act as facilitators by motivating, guiding and providing feedback to students' learning (Sams & Bergmann, 2012). By this learning the students save time not listening so much time in the class but participating in the discussion of the topic presented in the video content (Zainuddin & Attaran, 2015), Flipped class room technology is also in line with the Bloom's revised taxonomy of cognitive faculty which is very relevant today as for as the outcome based learning and teaching pedagogy. Pushpalatha says, "Involvement in learning always brings pleasure. This technological learning environment brought active participation and engagement in the learning."(2020).

The students practice the lower level of remembering and understanding outside the class room while the higher level of cognitive learning such as analyzing, applying and evaluating and creating learning cognitive activities take place in the class room.

Optimum Use of Social Media

Social media encompasses web based networks such as websites, Blogs, Wikis, Online networking sites and virtual learning. Selective social media will go miles to help online teaching of English classes. Carey (2012) is of the opinion that MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) will change the nature of future higher education. MIT, Harvard, and Berkeley are offering free MOOCs via edX, a not-for profit venture (check it out at: https://www.edx.org/). One famous MOOC on artificial intelligence was offered by Sebastian Thrun, a renowned robotics expert at Stanford. More than to say, the marginal cost of enrolling into the class is virtually zero. It is not an easy task to accept a course taught by an unknown professor from the unknown institution. However, it can't be just rejected for the same oblivious reason. Ensuring integrity and authenticity will be an issue for any online course including MOOCs. Nevertheless, the integrity issue is solved by conducting proctored tests in different venues. Most of the well reputed universities have joinly created Coursera to offer free online classes. The motto of Coursera is "Take the World's Best Courses, Online, For free of cost (Azevedo, 2012). According to the Sloan Consortium study conducted in 2010, almost 30% of university students took online courses (Allen and Seaman, 2010). There is steep increase in online class takers recently.

Communication, collaboration, community, creativity, and convergence are the main features of the social media which are relevant today to learn or teach any subject through online (Friedman and Friedman 2008). Bloggers engage interactive communication by posting their own contents as well as commenting on others postings. Students can learn and improve their writing skills in English by blogging articles and posting comments on other articles in the blogs (Efimova and de Moor 2005). Popular social media networking sites like Facebook and Twitter facilitate communication among groups of people, large and small. The rapid pace of message over networked Web 2.0 technology platforms is maybe the best evidence by videos that go "viral."

Assignments can be given through Twitter and Facebook. Writing skills can be enhanced through using social media platforms. Home Assignments regarding writing skills should be instructed to publish in online journals or blogs. Students should be instructed to make comments and post articles in the group and should have healthy discussions based on that during the online classes. Discussion on literature and language can be done regularly on social media and the final deliberation should happen during online classes.

Blogs can be used to create a communicative atmosphere where teachers and students will be able to share information and their skills to make online learning English enriching. L2 learners

should be introduced to YouTube video lectures to enhance their listening skills. It provides effective non-traditional learning. The students can download and upload videos useful and guided by the language teachers.

Video Conference

Online classes should be supported by video conferences rather than limiting to audio. It may consume much data but the teacher can feel the real classroom atmosphere and teach effectively like the face-to-face class. In the absence of video conferences, the students can only hear the sound which will bore them and they will lose interest in participating in the classroom activities. Hence, data availability should be facilitated before starting the online classes. The Management should make sure that every student has access to the video conference in an online class. It will also avoid malpractices during exams. Live chatting is also one of the best strategies for students to learn effectively during online learning.

Conclusion

Online classes cannot be avoided nowadays given the present situation today. The teaching and learning process has been affected very badly especially in the under-developing countries. Online learning of English is a new venture for the L2 learners who are used to face-to-face classroom teaching. Online classes have added new challenges while learning English. Nevertheless, they find it hard to adjust to the online technologies used. In order to facilitate better teaching and learning process, the strategies are suggested keeping in mind the present situation of the L2 learners. Motivation and incentives will also boost the L2 learning in this challenging online class atmosphere to learn English effectively.

WORKS CITED

Allen, I. E. and Seaman, J. (2010). Class differences: Online education in   the   United   States, 2010. Sloan Consortium. Retrieved from
  http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/class_differences.
Azevedo, A. (2012). MOOC's could hurt smaller and for-profit   colleges,   Moody's   report   says. Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved From http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/moocs-could-hurt-smaller-and-for-
  Profit.
Balamurugan, K. (2019). "Proficiency in English Language through Practical
Experience." *Online International Interdisciplinary Research Journal*. Vol.09. 19-22.
Carey, K. (2012, September 7). Into the future with MOOC's. Chronicle of Higher Education. 59 (2), A136.
Efimova, L. and de Moor, A. (2005). Beyond personal webpublishing: An exploratory   study   of conversational blogging practices, *Proceedings of the 38th Annual   Hawaii   International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS'05)*. 107a.
Friedman, L.W. and Friedman, H.H (2008). High impact areas of the new media technologies: A review, Management Online Review,
 July, http://www.morexpertise.com/download.php?id=97
Halili, S. H., Abdul Razak, R., & Zainuddin, Z. (2014). Enhancing collaborative learning in flipped classroom. *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied   Sciences*, 9(7), 147–149.
Hamdan, N., McKnight, P., McKnight, K., & Arfstrom, K. M. (2013). The flipped learning model: Awhite paper based on the literature review titled "A Review   of Flipped Learning."*Arlington, VA: Flipped Learning Network*.
Huiwei Cai. (2012). "E-learning and English Teaching," International Conference on Future Computer Supported Education, *Science Direct IERI Procedia 2,   841– 46.*
Johnson, L., Adams Becker, S., Estrada, V., & Freeman, A. (2014). *NMC horizon   report: 2014* Higher Education Edition. Austin, Texas: The New Media Consortium.

Marta L., "Comparing Online English Language Learning and Face-to-Face English Language Learning at El Bosque University in Colombia." Thesis: Virginia Common wealth University, *VCU Scholars Compass*, 2018.

Mahmoud Ahmed., "How Effective is E-learning in Teaching English?" A Case Study. *Journal of Education and Human Development*, Thabet Al-Maqtri University of Bisha: · July 2014.

Martin Lamba and Fauziah Eka Arisandyb., "The Impact of Online Use of English on Motivation to Learn," *Computer Assisted Language Learning, University of Leeds*, 2018.

Pushpalatha, U. (2020). "Technology Integrated Language Learning for Business Shipping Students." *International Journal of Scientific and Technology Research*. vol.9. pp.6046-49.

Rebecca Aaron., "The Influence of Online English Language Instruction on ESL Learners' Fluency Development." Brigham Young University, Department of Linguistics and English Language, BYU: All Theses and Dissertations. https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/6579, 2016.

Richter, T., & McPherson, M. (2012). Open educational resources: Education for the world? Distance Education, 33(2), 201–219.doi: .1080/01587919.2012.692068

Sams, A., & Bergmann, J. (2012). Flip your classroom: Reach every student in every class every day. International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE).

Settha Kuama & Usa Intharaksa. (2016). "Is Online Learning Suitable for All English Language Students?" *PASAA*. Vol. 52.

Subha, M. (2020). "Enhancement of Placement in Engineering and Professional Courses." *International Journal of Scientific and Technology Research*. vol.9. pp.6282-85.

Wang, S., & Heffernan, N. (2009). Ethical issues in computer-assisted language learning: Perceptions of teachers and learners. British Journal of Educational Technology, 41(5), 796-813. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8535.2009.00983.x

Zainuddin, Z., & Attaran, M. (2015). Malaysian students' perceptions of flipped classroom: A case study. Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 1-11.