IJAS

Learning Strategies To Improve English Language Skills Ofthe Undergraduates Through Digital Teaching

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ABSTRACT : *Owing to abrupt closer of educational institutions due to Coronavirus, teachers have adapted online teaching. In Indian context,teachers too have faced challenges to deliver curriculum using digital platforms - particularly teaching English language online. The purpose of this paper is to update new digital teaching- learning strategies to improve English language skills of the undergraduates. For this purpose, a questionnaire on digital language learning was administrated to 200 second year undergraduate students. A pre-test, training programme and post-test were conducted to make investigation authentic. The researchers have conducted intensive training forfifty(experimental group) studentsfor15 days through digital platforms with student-centric activities aiming to improve English language skills. Students have been introduced several online resources to develop English language skills apart from curriculum which draw their interest to self-learning after the class. At the end of the training period, theresearchers have found noticeable improvement among students in English language skills.*

KEYWORDS:*Coronavirus (COVID-19), English Language skills, Digital Platforms.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) spread lead tolockdown since mid-March 2020 in many countries and imposed numerous changes in the entire world. This scenario challenged global education system. World Economic Forum (April 2020) mentioned in its article that about 1.2 billion students in 186 countries had to stay at home during this lockdown. Due to the sudden educational disruption children and youth were out of schools and colleges and unable to continue academic learning. UNESCO (April 2020) responded to COVID-19 school closures andencouraged distance learning strategies. As a result, studentsmoved from classroom teaching to online teaching using digital platforms for further learning. Some of these digital platforms are in use more than two decades in education system however they have not been utilized properly till now.Susan ko and Steve Rossen (2017) quoted that the teachers need to apply web tools and techniques which help teaching on online environment

(p. 40) more effectively.

1.1 Online teaching during COVID-19 lockdown in India

In India, educational institutes were closed from 16[th]March, 2020 and national wide lockdown started on 24[th]March, 2020 to prevent the coronavirus spread.Thissuspension of regular classes disturbed ongoing academic year activities. Hence, educational institutes moved to virtual classroom teaching- learning process. Teachers adopted online teaching to ensure learning and accomplishing curriculum. Roshni Chakrabarty (2020) noted in India today's article that the learning online platforms has gained prominence about 5years, but this dreadful situation forced teach and learn online.Jack Prince (2020) explained that whiteboards, breakout rooms, notes, chat, and poll providewonderful opportunities to create online classroom more interactive. Teachers can integrate these facilities to make onlineteaching livelier.

1.2 English language teaching through online during COVID-19 lockdown
English language teaching with integrated digital platforms is not very new in India owing to its countless advantages. According to Frayer (2005) as mentioned by Hafiz (2013)opine that'Integrating ICT tools in teaching can lead to increased students learning competencies and increase opportunities for communication'. English language online with students' friendly digital tools helps students to learn with effectiveness of learning. Teachers face challenges to apply student friendly digital platforms to enhance leaning and to meet their expectations (Rashid, Cunningham, Watson, & Howard, 2018). Teachers were obligated to teach and conducted language activities on virtual classrooms due tosudden lockdown.

1.3 Aim of the research

This study focuseson teaching and testing English Language skills of first Year B.Tech. Biotechnology students at KL University, Vaddeswaram, India through online during COVID-19 lockdown.

1.4 Statement of the problem
Teaching learning process in colleges is forced to shift from classroom to online platforms due to COVID-19 lockdown. Therefore, there is a need for innovative strategies in online teaching-learning process for enhancing English language learning.

1.5 Objective of research
 1. To implement innovative strategies to enhance English language through online teaching.

 2. To make use of online platforms to bring desired leaning outcome among the language learners.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the present scenario learning through digital platforms is the only way for learners. Mutambik (2018) stated that in 1960, technology has been aided in language education and the use of technology in English language learning increased over the decades. Davies, G. (2012b) focused on "Lessons from the past, lessons for the future: 20 years of CALL", during his study he threw the light on leaning strategies that are implemented so far and their advantages and disadvantages. It has been observed through his study the major skills in

English would have been improved, if AI and ML are introduced by this time. However, Arif suryo priyatmojo. (2018) emphasized that "The English language learning in the digital era requires all learning elements that include teachers, students and infrastructure to synergize the same vision and mission that produce an independent learning activity and outcomes in line with digital citizenship".

Research proved that the LSRW skills in English have improved a lot with the help of technology. Digital Story Telling is one of the effective strategies to improve Language skills. Apart from the art of storytelling, students through can improve speaking and listening skills (R K & K, 2020). Integrating Storytelling model in English language teaching-learning process is proved as an effective strategy to enhance four language skills (Nazir Atta-Alla, 2012). In addition to that, Blogs, video conferencing, online books, interactive books, languages games, pep talks, slide show preparation etc. are other digital activities can be adopted for English language teaching and learning process. Digital technologies provide lot many learning opportunities to engage in language activities that produce comprehensible output (Stanley, 2013).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The present study focuses on innovative strategies in online teaching to enhance English language learning and bring desired learning outcome among the undergraduate students. A structured questionnaire was designed to identify how online teaching-learning help students to develop English language skills and was administeredto 100 randomly selected students. After collecting the data from the students, their perceptions were analysed, tabulated, and interpreted. The statements were measured with Likert scale: Disagree strongly:1, Disagree:2, Not a Strong Opinion :3, Agree:4, Agree strongly:5

The questions were asked to make the learners understand on online teaching to develop language. Learners were asked to respond to every question in the column by marking tick.

- I enjoy learning language from online teaching.

- Online classes are consuming more time to improve my language skills.

- I love doing language activities on online platforms.

- I can learn many newskillsthrough online classes.

- Group discussion on online classrooms is not effective.

The data was analysed and calculated according to the 5- point Likert scale.Pre-test was conducted for 100 randomly selected students by the researchers. Based on the scores of the sample learners, a training programme was designed.Theresearchersdivided students into two group: one group is experimental group and other is control group.Each group had50 students. Control group was taught syllabusin the traditional method through online class. Whereas theresearchers designed an intensive online training program for the experimental group to improving language skills, by including a variety of language activities to their online classes. On the other hand,the control group did not receive any training. The training schedule was conducted for a period of 15days. Control group was taught just using online class in the traditional method.

3.2 Training

Jamie Johnsonopines that Online teaching opens new levels of creativity and opportunity.Each session of online training session was sixty minutes. Itwas conducted five days in a week for three weeks. The learners participated in the following activities to improve English language skills by attending online classes. The researchers used WebEx, WhatsAppand google forms forquizzes as online platforms to interact and teach online. The researchers designed activities based on the syllabus of the first-year degree students atKL University.

3.2.1 Activity 1

*Vocabulary test through google form and quiz in online class:*Very first day of online class was exiting for students. The researchers welcomed the class online and confirmed with them that they can see and hear. The researchers used ppt to explain Palindromes withexamples. Class was divided into two breakout groups whenever necessary. Flashcards were shared on the screen and students participated actively.Later, students were asked to take up quiz on google form and submit it. The researchersemphasized importance of keeping good personal vocabulary recording few free web links on vocabulary test to develop their proficiency.

3.2.2 Activity 2

Google quiz on grammar: As the part of teaching,the researchers taught 'Adverb' sharing whiteboard with students on WebExplatform. Students were given chance to write some examples on whiteboard online which made them more attentive in the class. The researchersconducted quiz using google quiz on the same topic. Students participated with great interest to check their grammatical skills. The researchers explained significance of student autonomy in learning language and encouraged them to learn and test their English language skills on online resources like BBC English and Cambridge.

3.2.3 Activity 3

Practicing Reading Skills using digital platforms: As the part of the curriculum the researchers demonstrated reading paragraph to the online class and gave inputs to practice reading skills. Students were motivated to read small paragraph from the latest news about COVID-19. Students were inspired to read which helped them to build vocabulary and share the current issues in the world. A few students gave feedback that the class entitled them with information about the present scenario in the world and gave them interest to read news to improve language. The researchers encouraged students to read online books, stories, novels, and interest of their own choice.

3.2.4 Activity 4

Improve writing skills using Cambridge English write & improve website: The researchers taught writing formal letters with sample letters and gave a situation to write formal letters.The researchers explained to students how to use Cambridge English write & improve website to practice writing skills to improve. Most of the Students adopted this tool to progress in writing skills by taking the advantage of instantfeedback system in it.

3.3 Post-test

The researchers conducted Post-test for experimental group to measure application and impact of the students after the successful completion of the fifteen days of intensive training. At the same time the post-test was also conducted to the control group after completion of

same syllabus. A significant increase in score was observed in the experimental group after the training programme. Theexperimental group also felt they developed an instinct for learning language.

3.4 Findings

- A good number of students 'StronglyAgreed' that they enjoyed themselves digital classroom on WebEx platform.
- It was learned that most of the students were reluctant to participate online in discussions initially. But after few brainstorming sessions, they were encouraged to participate in discussions.
- It was proved that experimental group of students enhanced English language skills through innovative practices of English language teaching using digital platforms.
- Mostof the experimental group students scoured good marks in the test at the end of the training programme.

4. CONCLUSION

Research findings validate that the training programcentredononline teaching English language skills to enhance language skills of undergraduateswas effective than the traditional classroom during Covid-19. the study indicates that this online teaching is a substitute during the COVID-19 lockdown crisis. This research focussed on limited number of students and it can be extended to wide range of students. The researchers limited their activities to two to three sites. It can be extended too.

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