

# Is online teaching of the English Language in Engineering Colleges feasible?

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**Abstract-**Today's pedagogy is totally re-structured because of the pandemic-COVID-19. Schools and colleges have started teaching the subjects through virtual classrooms. Teachers and students are trying to adapt themselves to this new method of teaching in spite of a lot of crisis in this new method. It is often viewed that teachers can never be replaced with any technology. However, teachers need to join hands with the available technologies to tackle emergency situations like this COVID 19. Though computer-assisted language teaching and mobile assisted language teaching have already been in practice, the teachers have not given much importance to those technical teaching aids. Only because of the enforcement of the lockdown, teachers have started using the digital platforms. The Engineering colleges teach all Engineering and Humanities subjects with the assistance of Google Meet and Zoom. Just like an Engineering Subject, the English Language is also taught under the title of Technical English and Communicative English. It is observed that the teachers who teach engineering subjects struggle in the online teaching process since they have a lot of teaching components that may not be feasible to be transferred online. However, it is observed that teaching English as a subject does not create big challenges to the language teachers. The feasibility of teaching English Online is analysed in this study and reasons for the comfortable teaching are identified.

**Keywords:** Pandemic, Pedagogy Computer assisted language teaching, Communicative English, Teaching aids, Technical English, Mobile assisted language teaching.

## 1-INTRODUCTION

Changes are universal and the teaching industry has also been witnessing enormous changes owing to this COVID 19. All traditional classrooms have been transformed into virtual classrooms. Today, it is crucial to infuse technology in education because it has a lot of scopes and opportunities as per the needs of today's learners. The age-old teaching-learning materials are found to be obsolete are no more interesting to the current learners since the internet, mobile phones have become an essential part of human life and the same technologies have started influencing the education industry to a greater extent.

Teachers and students are busy teaching-learning online. Virtual classrooms today are used by educators to reproduce a habitual practice of teaching that has been carried out for so many years in the teaching sectors. Virtual classrooms try to teach exactly as it is done in a typical classroom. [7] Moreover, this virtual learning is viewed to be a better substitute to the earlier classroom practices since it has a facility of sharing the contents as e-mails, slideshows, videos, PDFs, animations, and word documents and the learners can also access the materials quickly anywhere. In addition, Learners can have a backup of their lessons and can learn from their home or in their convenient place. Hence, E-learning is observed to be the best and the most convenient alternative to the traditional classrooms.

The term virtual classroom was introduced in 1986 and the usage of computers in conducting conferences is called as a "virtual classroom". [7] The initial setups were based on using only audio and video and there were problems in establishing a proper bandwidth connection [3]. This situation changed when video conference technology was introduced, and online tools for learning emerged [12]. Those tools provided options for using real-time audio and video, slides shows, text-based interaction and collection of learners' feedback [4].

## II. EDUCATION METHODS DURING LOCKDOWN PERIOD

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resultant lockdown has brought drastic changes in the educational practices. Online classroom platforms are quite prevalent. Teachers and students are trying to adapt themselves to this new method of teaching in spite a lot of crisis in this new method. It is often viewed that teachers can never be replaced with any technology. However, teachers need to join hands with the available technologies to tackle emergency situations like this COVID 19. Though Google Meet, Zoom and other online teaching platforms have already been in practice, the teachers have not been aware of them. Only because of the enforcement of lockdown, teachers have started using these digital platforms. Since the rise of the internet in the 1990s, English language (EL) teachers have had what might be described as a difficult relationship with technology. Initial teacher education has been slow to embrace digital ways of teaching and learning, meaning that many EL teachers feel that they have been poorly prepared to use technology in their teaching (2).

Teachers give lectures, share video contents, taking feedback and monitoring students. All the things that were done in the physical classrooms have been done online today. Hence teachers need to play a new role that is more challenging than their role in the regular classrooms. They need to be technically stronger. The teachers who have never used even an LCD projector in the normal classrooms are in a situation to use computers, mobile phones, Power Point presentations today. Hence, today's pedagogy is witnessing a sea change. It is expected to be a positive change. However, overuse of virtual learning has made it less effective. Technology can be an aid in teaching and learning and it cannot replace the entire practice of teaching and learning. Wallace identifies that the contents available online were often "unpredictable, changing, and sometimes hard to find. He further adds that "online teaching of science was unproductive. Students face trouble using web tools because they are not yet designed to support learning. Reading online was also difficult for students so they often skipped material and read as little as possible." [15]

Availability of good network connection determines the success of the online teaching and learning. The poor network connection will de-motivate both the teachers and the learners. In addition, they need to spend more money on getting additional net packs that may lead to additional expenses to a middle-class learner and a teacher of an average income. Moreover, online teaching- learning becomes mundane since it has made teaching and learning similar as speaking and listening in a phone or video call. Even though, there are facilities of seeing each other, teachers and students don't prefer the video mode. Only the voice of the teacher plays a big role in the entire process of teaching along with the background of a power point presentation prepared by the teacher. Students remain muted throughout the session and they need to listen to the lessons given by the teacher. They can just be available online and may listen and may not listen to the lessons. Hence, this method may soon become unpopular among the teachers and the students. There is no interaction between the teachers and the student. Patrick confirms that instruction is not the only important factor in education, but also the relationship between the student and teacher. It should be understood that teaching cannot be done via telephone lecturing. Instead, it is a pure transaction of aptitude added with a lot of gestures, postures, and with a favourable verbal frequency. According to Biggs & Tang, "Good teaching is getting most students to use the level of cognitive processes needed to achieve the intended outcomes that the more academic students use spontaneously." This appears to be missing in the prevailing methods teaching science online. [1]

### III. TEACHING ENGLISH ONLINE IN ENGINEERING COLLEGES

Similar to the other subjects, the English Language is also taught online. Technical English is taught to I year students of Engineering in the even semester. It includes Grammar components like articles, tenses, voices, prepositions, letter writing, essay writing, and logical arrangement of jumbled sentences. Teaching all these components does not need big technology since it does not have diagrams, charts, calculations, etc. Hence, the English Classes are viewed to be the hours of teaching without any tension. Mostly, students have a pressure-free opinion towards English classes as a result majority of the students score a pass mark in the exam. In this background, teaching English online is not a challenging experiment to the learners.

### IV. LITERATURE SURVEY

A lot of research articles published in connection with the usage of virtual classrooms. Online learning spreads internationally since students and teachers feel comfortable and see possibility in setting up and accessing opportunities to learn alternatively [16]. Giorgi Basilaia.et.al. [6] made a study on Transition to Online Education in Schools during a SARS-CoV-2 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic in Georgia. They made a study on the efficacy of the tools and resources used for online classes. Veena Shenoy.et.al. [13] worked on Technology Adaption, Teaching, Learning, Students Engagement and Faculty Experience during this COVID 19. They found that virtual classrooms gave better teaching-learning experience. Krish found that online learning environment is not only useful for students to access knowledge and materials but also to associate and make collaboration among course participants [9]. Kaup.S [8] and the fellow authors studied on sustaining academics during COVID-19 pandemic: The role of online teaching- learning. They suggested that most of the virtual learning and hand-on training cannot be imparted by online teaching alone. Prakash Sandhya [11] studied on the challenges posed by forced Virtual Classroom teaching in COVID times. There are a lot of research works done on finding the efficacy of using tools in virtual classrooms and the effects of virtual classrooms on teachers and students. As per the knowledge of the author, no such research has been done regarding the feasibility of teaching English online in Engineering colleges.

### V. RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This paper makes an attempt to investigate the efficiency of virtual classrooms in the background of engineering education. The author of this paper is a language teacher in a private engineering college in Tamilnadu, India. The author observed that virtual classrooms are more appropriate for language classes. In this connection, 50 language teachers who teach Technical English in engineering colleges including the teachers who work in the institution where the researcher presently works are selected in random for the study and they are interviewed in person and over phone and data are collected and analysed

## VI. FINDINGS

Table 1-Is teaching Technical English feasible in virtual classroom set up?

S.No	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
No of respondents	30	10	4	6
Percentage	60%	10%	8 %	12 %

Table 2-Technical English was comfortable because

S.No	Familiar contents to students	Scope for application in real life	Availability of alternative sources for self study	Students are interactive	All the above
No of respondents	12	8	5	5	20
Percentage	24%	16%	10%	10%	40%

## VII .DISCUSSION

From the collected data, it was found that out of 50 respondents 70 % (table 1) of the teachers strongly agree with the feasibility of teaching English online. The respondents were able to identify the reasons for the feasibility (Table 2) of learning English online. They are 1. Familiar contents, 2. Scope for application in real life, 3. Availability of alternative sources for self-study, 4. Students are interactive, 5. All the above.

24% of the respondents found the components of the syllabus are familiar. The reason is, the contents in the syllabus have been studied by the students already in schools. Because of this, the teachers need not strain much to make the students understand. 16 % of respondents felt that components are very easy to teach and not as difficult as technical subjects. Matching with their opinions, the Technical English paper covers only the basic grammar, reading and writing skills materials. They also added that the majority of the students answer well in the examinations. Even if the questions asked in the exams are very complex, almost ninety percent of the students secure pass marks in their university end semester examinations.

16% of the respondents felt that the scope for application in life has motivated the students to show positive learning in the English subjects. The components given in the syllabus are very much applicable in their everyday life circumstances and so teachers give examples from the samples of real life. This realistic learning experience motivates the students to enjoy the learning and so the task of the teachers becomes easy.

10% of the respondents added that there are umpteen sources like YouTube video lessons and mobile applications in addition to the textbooks and so the students are able to study the portions by themselves, without the assistance of anyone. In fact, everybody who has gone to college or schools in their life is aware of the contents given in the syllabus and so they need not completely depend on the teacher to learn the lessons.

Another 10 % of the respondents opined that students are interactive in the classes. Since the language teachers give tasks like language games, debate, discussions, presentations, stories, students eagerly take part in the discussions. However, only the students of above-average levels take part actively in the interactions whereas the students of below-average level remain calm throughout the session. Even if the teachers force them to participate in the discussion they may remain quiet quoting poor network connectivity. This is a drawback in the online classes and so the teachers cannot make the entire class interactive. Moreover, overall 40 % of the respondents felt that they are more comfortable in the online English classes because of all the above said four reasons.

## VIII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is limited to 50 respondents chosen in random from the nearby institutions in the city where the researcher presently works. Those institutions may have good admission records and students with good academic performances. As a result, the language teachers are hopeful about the feasibility of teaching English online. However, the teachers, who work in rural areas where the students are without good exposure to the English language, should be carefully identified and interviewed for better data output. Hence, the study is hopeful for providing scope for further research on the same area but with the teachers of rural areas as its respondents.

## IX.SUMMING UP

It is found in the study that teaching English online to the students of Engineering colleges is feasible. The reasons identified are familiar contents to students, the scope for application in real life, availability of alternative sources for self-study, and scope for interaction. It is found in the research that the components that were taught in the schools were repeated in the higher courses like engineering. In fact, any subjects that are taught in the higher-education courses should be done with international or national standards. The complexity of the syllabus should be higher than the level of complexity kept in the curriculum and the syllabus of the lower classes. It is strange to find that the subject titled Technical English that is taught in the first-year program of the engineering courses have the same complexity level of the syllabus that was taught in lower classes and so both the teachers and students don't feel the subject as a challenging one. Hence, the study recommends that the contents of the syllabus should be designed according to the standard of the courses. The components of the English Language shall be fixed matching with international assessments like IELTS and TOEFL and so students will be able to clear the competitive exams that they take up after the completion of their degree programs

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