

Delivering ESL Lessons Online to Engineering and Technology Students during Covid19 Pandemic: Opportunities and Challenges

Dr. C. Suganthan¹, Dr. A. Minnal Carolin², Dr. Sivakumar Nagarajan³, Prof. Ramesh P S⁴

¹Assistant Professor, Department of English, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore – 632014, India

²Assistant Professor, Department of Communication, SRM Institute of Hotel Management, Kattangulathur, Chengalpattu-603203, India

³Associate Professor, Department of Information Security, School of Computer Science and Engineering, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore – 632014, India

⁴Assistant Professor, Department of Smart Computing, School of Information Technology and Engineering, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore – 632014, India

¹ Email: suganthan.c@vit.ac.in

² Email: minnalca@srmist.edu.in

³ Email: nsivakumar@vit.ac.in

⁴ Email: ramesh.ps@vit.ac.in

Abstract: Education around the world is facing a setback due to the onset of the pandemic from the year 2019. The field of education and the academicians around the world working hard to provide uninterrupted education to their wards and the only option left with them is the online mode of education. Shifting their mode of delivery from face-to-face conventional classroom education to an entirely new system requires a lot of effort. This study intends to understand the challenges and opportunities before the teaching community to deliver quality education to their students through online mode.

Keywords: Online education, video conferencing, digital assessments, language activities, online ESL classes

1. Introduction

The pandemic that started around early 2020 has changed human lives and lifestyles in many ways and education is not an exception. The start of the covid19 pandemic startled the whole world and there was total unrest in many key sectors including education. The government of India had no other choice other than to close the educational institutions to stop the spread of the deadly infection. Social distancing is seen as the key preventive measure to stop the spread and that is practically impossible keeping the institutions open.

Impey et al., (2020) The education sector was left with an option, which is conducting all the academic practices online. Online education worldwide is in the budding stage and was looked at as an option for continuing education before the pandemic. Nevertheless, the pandemic has warranted the entire education system right from primary classes to doctoral degrees to go online.

The idea of education online came up with a lot of questions and answers. Online education is a new phase towards education in India. Many institutions in India do not even have the proper infrastructure to provide online education to every student. However, the scenario made the institutions and faculty get ready for delivering education online. Shivangi Dhawan, (2020). The concept of e-learning raised a few arguments like accessibility, affordability, flexibility, learning pedagogy, lifelong learning, and policy.

This paper is a descriptive study based on the survey conducted with the students and faculty involved in the teaching-learning process of technical education.

2. The objective of the study

The objective of this study is to find the pros and cons of the teaching-learning process in the online mode of education. This study intends to find the comforts and discomforts of the teachers and students in this mode of education.

3. Methodology

This is a descriptive study to find the possibilities and limitations in the online mode of teaching. Two different questionnaires have been prepared and distributed among the faculty and students in engineering institutions. The target populations are the teachers and students who are involved in the online education post covid19 pandemic. The study has taken fifty samples for analysis and the results are provided as figures in this paper.

4. Challenges to the academicians during the pandemic

The entire world is facing a setback due to the onset of the pandemic and the education sector is one of the most affected by the pandemic. Every human in this world started to go ahead with a new normal. Unfortunately, the academicians were given new normal in their profession too, which is handling their classes online. Teaching English is a skill that has to be transferred to the students unlike teaching the concepts theoretically. A skill is something, which is hard to be taught theoretically. The academicians handling ESL classes online face so many difficulties in imparting the skill to their students.

Chaudhery, Urvesh. (2021) The developing trend of the contemporary education system is raising a question of the efficacy of online courses compared to traditional classroom learning and concerning individual student needs, perceptions, and learning outcomes.

The teachers teaching online face several problems as mentioned by F.Prince William et.al. (2021) The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is creating a psycho-emotional chaotic situation as countries have been reporting a sharp rise of mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, stress, sleep disorder as well as fear, among its citizen.

5. ESL classes through video conferencing

The teaching fraternity is forced into a new mode of teaching through video conferencing. Before the onset of the pandemic, a video conferencing facility was a technology mostly used in business sectors to convene meetings and discussions. However, video conferencing tools are the most commonly used ICT tool to conduct virtual classes. Video conferencing tools like Zoom, Google Meet and Microsoft Teams are the tools hardly ever heard by the teaching community. Unfortunately, teachers worldwide are forced into learning these tools to sustain themselves in this field. Even the companies that provided videoconferencing tools have incorporated many features compatible to deliver lectures through their tools. For instance, Microsoft Teams has developed a feature to download a list of participants to enable the teachers to provide attendance at the end of each session and almost all service providers introduced features like forced mute, kick out participant and other such teacher-friendly features to ensure smooth conduct of virtual classes.

6. Opportunities and challenges in delivering lessons

Teaching online is a different skill set and not every teacher can excel in this skill. Teaching live before a monitor or a screen needs a skill that can be mastered by a few. Unfortunately, the pandemic has forced everyone in the teaching community to take up this skill and learn it. To the surprise of the entire teaching fraternity, the teachers irrespective of their age and exposure to online teaching skills have taken this as a challenge and successfully delivering virtual classes to their students.

As per the study conducted for this research, the first question to the participants was their level of satisfaction towards teaching online. The answers left me awestruck because almost 48.6% of the population agreed that they are satisfied with this mode of teaching. The remaining 22.9% disagreed and answered 'no' whereas 28.6% were not able to say clearly about their stand and answered 'maybe'. Figure 1 shows the satisfactory levels of teachers teaching their courses online.

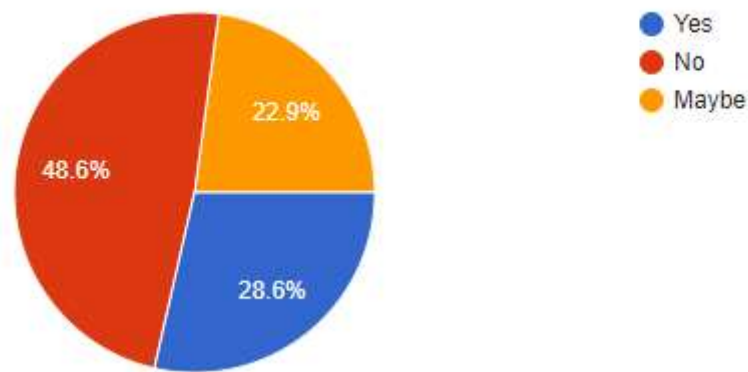


Figure 1. Satisfactory levels of teachers with online education

Anything beneficial always comes with challenges. In a question about the challenges faced by the teachers teaching online, 71.4% of the population answered ‘monitoring the classes as their response and that is the biggest challenge among teachers. Teaching online restricts the teachers with fewer options to monitor the students. It is a difficult task for the teachers to ensure whether the students listening to them in virtual classes. On the other hand, 22.9% of the population said that teaching facing a monitor/screen is their biggest challenge. Figure 2 suggests the challenges faced by teachers while teaching online.

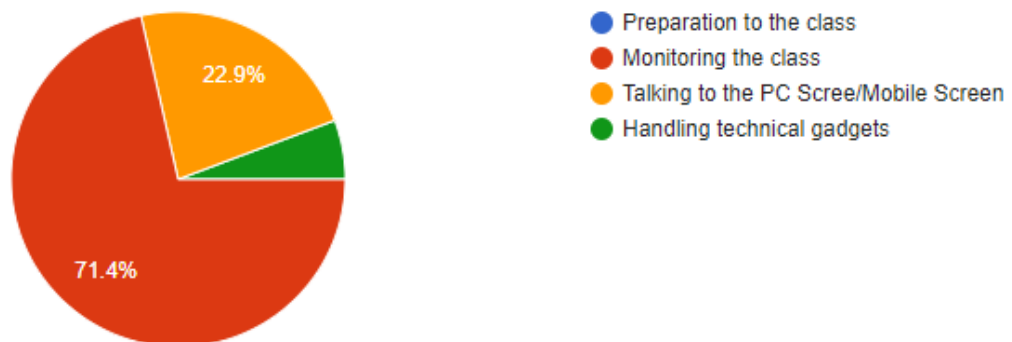


Figure 2. Challenges in the online mode of teaching

To a question about the comfort feature in delivering virtual classes, 37.1% of the population agreed that they are comfortable in preparation for the class, delivering lectures, assessments in the virtual mode of teaching. However, 14.3% said that they are not comfortable in any of the above-mentioned aspects in the online mode of teaching as mentioned in figure 3.

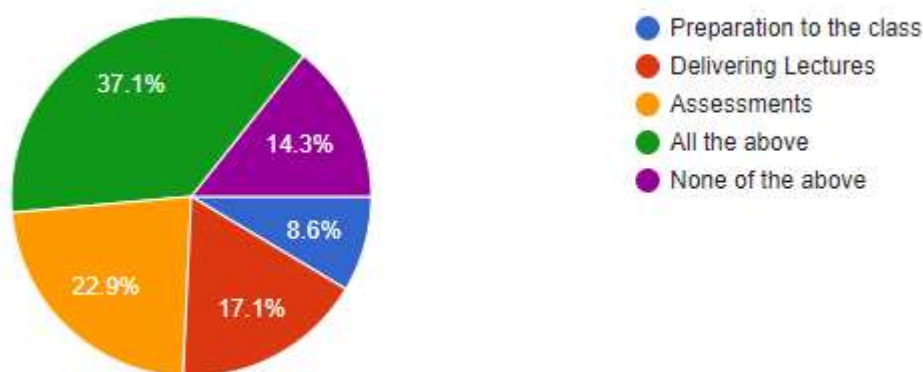


Figure 3. Comfort factors for teachers with online education

7. Opportunities and challenges in conducting language activities

Teaching online is challenging and teaching language classes online adds more fuel to the fire. The author is a language teacher himself could list out the difficulties and opportunities in delivering language activities online. ESL activities are mostly skill-based. The activities are mainly categorized into activities based on Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. In addition, the activities are either individual activities or group activities.

Network issue is a major hindrance in conducting the language activities online. Activities like impromptu speeches or group discussions need uninterrupted internet service, which is not a guarantee in a developing nation like India. Hindrance in the network affects the smooth conduct of language activities. The next important hindrance is time management. Language activities are mostly time-bound activities and it is nearly impossible to maintain time while conducting activities online. This is due to various factors like a network issue, slowdown in the server of the videoconferencing tool and other such hurdles.

A few opportunities can be considered in a positive note in conducting language activities online. The primary opportunity is to record the activities performed by the students. This enables the language teacher to assess the performance of the students in a better way. This mode for conducting activities provides a possibility to get the speaking assignments as a recorded video. This saves a lot of class timings spent on assessing speech assessments during class hours.

8. Opportunities and challenges in conducting an assessment online

Assessment is an inseparable part of the teaching-learning process. The teaching fraternity faced a huge struggle in taking the assessments online. Videoconferencing tools came in handy for delivering lectures online whereas conducting assessments online is still in the testing phase undergoing several trials and error processes. Furqon Edi Wibowo and Umi Novita (2020) say, "The new ways of learning process include online assessment. Teaching is unique, it aims to expand human potential, to enhance others' capacity; capacity to learn, think, make a decision, and evaluate. Providing MCQ assessments was possible and handy with freeware like google forms, Microsoft forms and Moodle. The real test for the teachers was in providing descriptive-type questions. Later with the help of several software vendors like codetantra and examly, the possibility of providing descriptive type test with remote proctoring option opened up. These vendors provided video proctoring options along with answer upload options and also minimized the possibilities of malpractice with their stringent measures. As per Hard et.al (2006), Fair and effective methods for promoting academic integrity have

long been considered within post-secondary education. Yet, there is a widespread belief that departures from integrity are on the rise

As per the data obtained from students, the biggest challenge that they face while taking exams online is the pressure of writing as well as uploading the answers in the portal to the right question. Figure 4 clearly portrays the concerns of students in taking the assessments online.



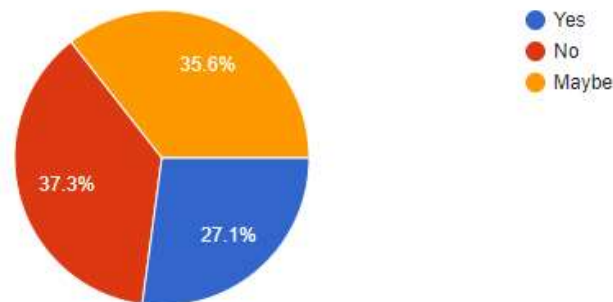
Figure 4. Student concerns in the online mode of assessment

9. Students' response towards the efficacy of online learning

A study conducted among engineering students regarding their experience of taking the classes online and their experiences is given below. A majority of the students showed dissatisfaction towards learning their subjects online and they also feel that online classes are no match for the efficiency of conventional classroom learning. The data presented in figure 5 represents the stand of students towards online learning.

Do you feel satisfied learning your subjects online?

59 responses



Do you find learning online more beneficial than conventional classes?

59 responses

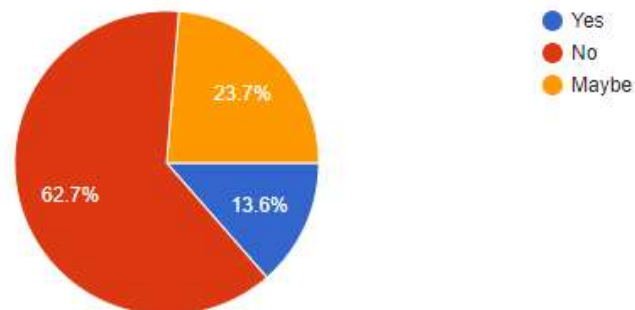


Figure 5. Satisfactory levels of students with online education

Increased screen time is the concern of the entire nation towards the student community. The students also are agreeing with this as per the data in the questionnaire presented in figure 6.

Which is the biggest challenge to you while learning online?

59 responses

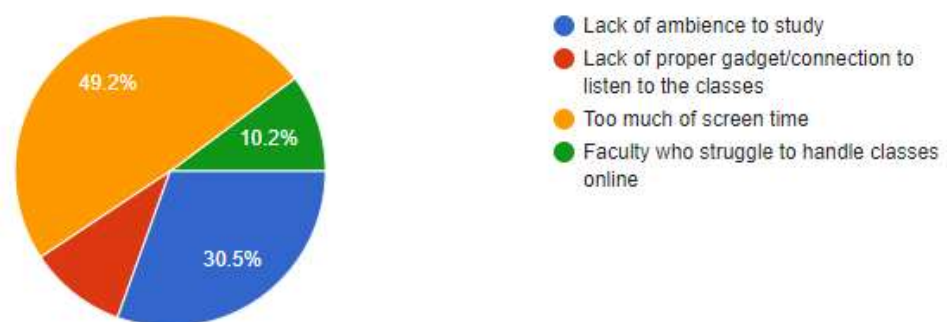


Figure 6. Biggest challenge for students learning their subjects online

On the other hand, the students also have given a positive note about taking the classes online. The majority of the students have said that the facility to access the recorded lectures at their convenient time is the biggest advantage in this mode of education. Mukund Mundargi (2021) Online programs allow people of a wide age group to learn at their own pace, without inhibitions, and without compromising on their other responsibilities. Figure 7 given below shows the graphic presentation of the data.

Which is the biggest advantage in listening classes online?

59 responses

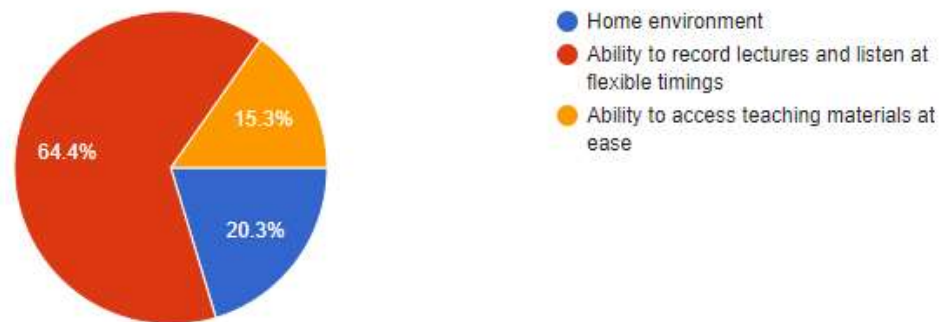


Figure 7. The biggest advantage for students learning their subjects online

At the end of the survey, most of the students answer towards continuing the online mode of education is a big no. 59.3% of the students answered no whereas only 18.6% said yes to continue this mode of education. The detailed presentation is provided in figure 8.

Are you willing to continue online education if you are given an opportunity even after the pandemic?

59 responses

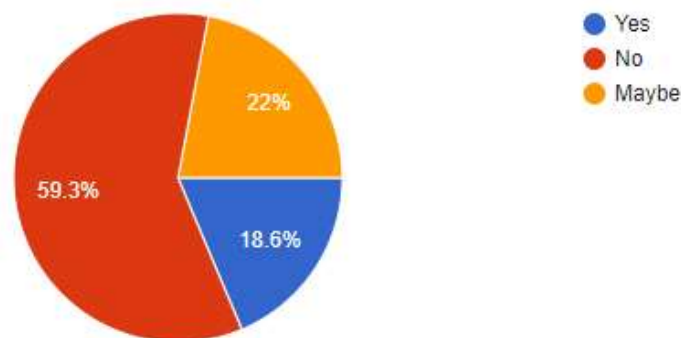


Figure 8. Willingness to continue online learning

10. Conclusion

This study with the help of the survey conducted among the teachers as well as students has given a clear stand about the teaching-learning process in the online mode. As per the results of the survey, one can clearly state that the online mode of education can be a temporary arrangement to bridge the gap. This mode of education is providing a temporary solution and this mode is not a match to the conventional classroom teaching and learning. The results of the survey from both teachers and the students convey the pros and cons of the online mode of education. This study shows that neither the teachers feel comfortable nor the students feel beneficial in this mode of education.

REFERENCES

1. Impey, C. (2020). Coronavirus: Social distancing is delaying vital scientific research. The Conversation <http://theconversation.com/coronavirus-social-distancing-is-delayingvital-scientificresearch-133689>.

2. Dhawan, Shivangi. (2020). Online Learning: A Panacea in the Time of COVID-19 Crisis. Journal of Educational Technology Systems. 1-18. 10.1177/0047239520934018.
3. Chaudhery, Urvesh. (2021). Online Education in India. International Journal of Engineering Management. 2. 113-119.
4. F.Prince William, S.Deepika, S.Divya, R.Pavithra, J.Metha, "Psychological Distress During Covid-19 Pandemic Among School Teachers in Selected Schools, Chengalpattu district, Tamil Nadu, India – Retrospective Study", Journal of Chengdu University of Technology., Vol. 26, no. 18, (2021)
5. Wibowo, Furqon & Novitasari, Umi. (2021). AN ANALYSIS OF ONLINE ASSESSMENT IN TEACHING ENGLISH. PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education). 4. 521. 10.22460/project.v4i3.p521-529.
6. Hard, S. F., Conway, J. M., and Moran, A. C. (2006). Faculty and College Student Beliefs about the Frequency of Student Academic Misconduct. J. Higher Edu. 77(6), 1058–1080.
7. Mundargi, Mukund. (2021). Covid-19 Pandemic and Online Education. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353878855_Covid-19_Pandemic_and_Online_Education