

Teaching English Online during COVID-19: Tradition versus Individual Talent

Dr. Naveen Nandal, Assistant Professor, Sushant University, Gurugram

Dr. Rajendra Kumar Dash, Associate Professor, GMRIT, JNT University Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh

Abstract:

English teachers, all over the world, have always preferred face-to-face mode of teaching to online teaching. With the advent of the Covid 19, however, a reversal has taken place. As the medium becomes the message in online teaching, the major challenges for the traditional Indian English teachers surfaced: (1) Neo phobia, (2) Technophobia, (3) Internet connectivity, (4) Materials preparation, (5) Lack of visibility of class as a whole at a time, (6) Monitoring, (7) Non-cooperation from some students, Overdependence on Paralanguage, (9) Innovation with pedagogical tools, and (10) Assessment. This study used telephonic survey and convenient sampling method focused on a questionnaire that was designed to elicit data. Data was collected from 300 respondents from 100 Engineering colleges spread across five Indian states of India--Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. The final data for study takes into consideration 100 faculty members based on region (each state 20 participants and urban and rural), age group (fresher: 1-3 years, mid-career: 4-9 years, seniors: 10 years and above), gender (50 male, 50 female), teaching experience, etc. This study finds that the English faculty in Engineering colleges have adequately adapted to teaching English beyond the classroom although the young and female teachers are ahead of senior and male teachers. It is concluded that the journey of teaching English online has gone from anxiety to comfortable to excitement phase during the Covid-19 period.

Keywords: Covid-19, Digital teaching, Engineering college, Teaching English, Teaching English online

1. Introduction

With the belief that prevention is better than cure for Covid-19, India declared lockdown of schools and colleges on 24 March 2020 which is in force at the time of writing this article. Digital teaching or online teaching remained the only alternative to the traditional face-to-face teaching. Engineering colleges adopted teaching online. Consequently, online teaching emerged to be an

unavoidable challenge for both tech-savvy as well as tech-shy teachers who must teach in virtual classrooms. As a Cambridge University study reveals, ever since the advent internet in the 1990s, the relationship between English teachers and technology can be at best described as “difficult relationship” (Harrison, 2020). English language teachers have felt that they have not been properly trained to use technology (Clark, 2018; Harrison, 2020). Despite having more than 500 million people using internet in India, teaching online has remained a challenge for teachers in general and English teachers in particular (Norman, 2015). The greatest challenge faced by English teachers in Engineering colleges in India during the Covid-19 has been upskilling in terms of technology. With educational institutes providing little or negligible training to English faculty members as to how to teach online, the experts in traditional mode of teaching (offline) are left to train themselves to perform or perish with online teaching. Hence the Eliotic phrase „tradition versus individual talent“.

As the medium becomes the message in online teaching, the major challenges for the traditional Indian English teachers surfaced: (1) Neo phobia, (2) Technophobia, (3) Internet connectivity, (4) Materials preparation, (5) Lack of visibility of class as a whole at a time, (6) Monitoring, (7) Non-cooperation from some students, (8) Overdependence on Paralanguage, (8) Innovation with pedagogical tools, and (10) Assessment. The objective of this study is to find out how the English teachers have adapted to online teaching in technical educational institutes in the five southern states of India.

Research Questions:

- 1) Are younger faculty members more effective than their senior counterparts in teaching English online?
- 2) Are male faculty more efficient in handling ICT tools for teaching than their female counterparts?
- 3) Are teachers located in urban areas really more effective in teaching online than faculty who are stationed or operate in urban / rural areas?
- 4) Is internet connectivity an intervening factor that has influenced the process and outcome of teaching?

2. Method, Discussion and Result of the Study

This study used telephonic survey and convenient sampling method focused on a questionnaire that was designed to elicit data. Data was collected from 300 respondents from 100 Engineering colleges spread across five Indian states of India-- Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. The final data for study takes into consideration 100 faculty members based on region (each state 20 participants and urban and rural), age group (freshers: 1-3 years, mid-career: 4-9 years, seniors:10 years and above), gender (50 males, 50 female), teaching experience, etc. The questionnaire which guided this study with 10 questions will be discussed pointwise.

2.1 Demographic data of respondents:

The data that was complete in all respects and aligned with objectives of the study was derived from final 100 respondents (20 respondents; 10 male and 10 female teachers) from the five southern states of India.

Table 1: Contextual information about the present study	
Total No. of respondents studied	100
Gender	Male 50, Female 50
Position of Faculty	Assistant Professors-75, Associate Professors: 15, Professors-10
Educational qualification	PhD: 50, MA: 50
Age group	Young (50 respondents in the age group of 25-45; 50 respondents in the Senior age group of 46-60)
Regional distribution	Faculty from Urban area: 70; Faculty from Semi-urban area: 30
Online teaching Platforms used	Zoom: 21, Webex: 20, Google classroom 23; Google Meet 25, Microsoft Teams 11
Broadband used for Internet	BSNL: 13, AIRTEL:38, IDEA: 11, JIO:38,

2.2 Questions and attributes or prompts given to respondents:

Question No	The Question	Attributes
1	Do you think Face-to-face mode of teaching is the only successful mode of Teaching English language?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No
2	Were you anxious regarding the shifting of teaching to online mode?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No
3a	Did you need training to engage online classes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No
3b	Did your institute provide you any training as to how to take classes online?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No
4 a	Did you face internet connectivity issues during teaching your students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always • Frequently • Sometimes • Never
4b	Have you been able to fix online connectivity related issues during your teaching sessions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No • Not sure
5	Have you been good at preparing e-content (Teaching and Learning Material) for your online teaching?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No • I customize readymade material from the internet
6a	Did you face non-cooperation from students during online lectures?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always • Often • Rarely • Never
6b	How did you handle mischievous students online?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I ignored them • I shouted at them • I muted them

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I quit the class
7a	Did you come across a lot of noise and disturbance during your online English teaching sessions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No
7b	Were you able to control the noise during online sessions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No • Can't say
7c	Do you think you have used appropriate body language for your online lectures?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No • I don't know • I don't care
8	How will you state your experience regarding conducting assessment of your students via online?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier than face-to-face mode • More complicated than face-to-face mode • I avoid doing any assessment online
9	How do you think about teaching English online?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wonderful experience • An impractical idea • A necessary evil
10	How will you assess the impact of ICT and online tools made to your teaching?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More effective • Less effective • Not sure

2.3 Data response and Analysis

Question No. 1: *Do you think Face-to-face mode of teaching is the only successful mode of Teaching English language?*

1 * Age Crosstabulation

			Age		Total
			25-45	46-60	
1	yes	Count	35	50	85
		% within Age	70.0%	100.0%	85.0%
	no	Count	15	0	15
		% within Age	30.0%	0.0%	15.0%
	Total	Count	50	50	100
		% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Nearly 85% of respondents believe that face-to-face mode of teaching is the only successful mode of Teaching English language. 100% of senior faculty felt online mode of teaching way inferior to traditional mode of teaching English. However, the young faculty were in favour of online teaching. All young female teachers liked both the modes of teaching.

Question No. 2: *Were you anxious regarding the shifting of teaching to online mode?*

2 * Age Crosstabulation

			Age		Total
			25-45	46-60	
2	yes	Count	50	40	90
		% within Age	100.0%	80.0%	90.0%
	no	Count	0	10	10
		% within Age	0.0%	20.0%	10.0%
	Total	Count	50	50	100
		% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Nearly 85% of respondents believe that face-to-face mode of teaching is the only successful mode of Teaching English language. 100% of senior faculty felt online mode of teaching way inferior to traditional mode of teaching English. However, the young faculty were in favour of online teaching. All young female teachers liked both the modes of teaching.

Question No. 2: *Were you anxious regarding the shifting of teaching to online mode?*

			Age		Total
			25-45	46-60	
2	yes	Count	50	40	90
		% within Age	100.0%	80.0%	90.0%
	no	Count	0	10	10
		% within Age	0.0%	20.0%	10.0%
	Total	Count	50	50	100
		% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

90% of the respondents agreed that they were anxious regarding the shifting mode of teaching—to online mode. 80% of the senior age group faculty, who had no experience of teaching online ever, clearly expressed they were anxious about the shift.

Question No. 3a: *Did you need training to engage online classes?*

3a * Age * GENDER Crosstabulation

GENDER				Age		Total
				25-45	46-60	
MALE	3a	Yes	Count	16	22	38
			% within Age	72.7%	78.6%	76.0%
	No	Count	6	6	12	
			% within Age	27.3%	21.4%	24.0%
	Total	Count	22	28	50	
			% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
FEMALE	3a	Yes	Count	26	16	42
			% within Age	92.9%	72.7%	84.0%
	No	Count	2	6	8	
			% within Age	7.1%	27.3%	16.0%
	Total	Count	28	22	50	
			% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total	3a	Yes	Count	42	38	80
			% within Age	84.0%	76.0%	80.0%
	No	Count	8	12	20	
			% within Age	16.0%	24.0%	20.0%
	Total	Count	50	50	100	
			% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Overall, 80% of the respondents felt that they needed training to teach fully online. Among them 78.6% of the senior male faculty members felt the need of training.

Question No. 3b: *Did your institute provide you any training as to how to take classes online?***3b * GENDER Crosstabulation**

			GENDER		Total
			MALE	FEMALE	
3b	yes	Count	46	45	91
		% within GENDER	92.0%	90.0%	91.0%
	no	Count	4	5	9
		% within GENDER	8.0%	10.0%	9.0%
Total	Count		50	50	100
	% within GENDER		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

91% of the faculty were getting training from their institute for conducting online classes.

Question No. 4a: *Did you face internet connectivity issues during teaching your students?***4a * BROADBAND Crosstabulation**

			BROADBAND				Total
			BSNL	AIRTEL	IDEA	JIO	
4a	Always	Count	13	38	11	37	99
		% within BROADBAND	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	97.4%	99.0%
	Sometimes	Count	0	0	0	1	1
		% within BROADBAND	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.6%	1.0%
Total	Count		13	38	11	38	100
	% within BROADBAND		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

99% of the faculty complained they suffered internet interruption during their class hours. It was reported across all network connects. The state-owned BSNL was no exception.

Question No. 4b: *Have you been able to fix online connectivity related issues during your teaching sessions?***4b * AREA Crosstabulation**

			AREA		Total
			Urban Area	Semi Urban area	
4b	Yes	Count	40	20	60
		% within AREA	57.1%	66.7%	60.0%
	Count		30	10	40

Total	No			
	% within AREA	42.9%	33.3%	40.0%
	Count	70	30	100
	% within AREA	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

40% of the faculty members felt helpless when faced with online connectivity issues.

Question No. 5: *Have you been good at preparing e-content (Teaching and Learning Material) for your online teaching?*

5 * Age Crosstabulation

			Age		Total
			25-45	46-60	
5	Yes	Count	0	20	20
		% within Age	0.0%	40.0%	20.0%
	No	Count	27	18	45
		% within Age	54.0%	36.0%	45.0%
	I customize readymade material from the internet	Count	23	12	35
		% within Age	46.0%	24.0%	35.0%
	Total	Count	50	50	100
		% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

70% faculty across spectrum downloaded readymade materials from internet sources and modified/customized content as per need. 40% of senior faculty prepared materials on their own.

Question No. 6a: *Did you face non-cooperation from students during online lectures?*

6a * Age * GENDER Crosstabulation

GENDER				Age		Total
				25-45	46-60	
MALE	6a	Often	Count	0	12	12
			% within Age	0.0%	42.9%	24.0%
	Rarely	Count	22	16	38	
		% within Age	100.0%	57.1%	76.0%	
	Total	Count	22	28	50	
		% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
FEMALE	6a	Rarely	Count	28	22	50
			% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Total	Total	Count	28	22	50
		% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Often	Count	0	12	12
		% within Age	0.0%	24.0%	12.0%
	Rarely	Count	50	38	88
		% within Age	100.0%	76.0%	88.0%
	Total	Count	50	50	100
		% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

88% faculty members stated they did not face any non-cooperation from students. Some senior male faculty members felt students should have shown better behaviour.

Question No. 6b: *How did you handle mischievous students online?*

6b * Age * GENDER Crosstabulation

GENDER			Age		Total
			25-45	46-60	
MALE	I ignored them	Count	16	25	41
		% within Age	72.7%	89.3%	82.0%
	I shouted at them	Count	0	3	3
		% within Age	0.0%	10.7%	6.0%
	I muted at them	Count	6	0	6
		% within Age	27.3%	0.0%	12.0%
	Total	Count	22	28	50
		% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
FEMALE	I ignored them	Count	25	14	39
		% within Age	89.3%	63.6%	78.0%
	I muted at them	Count	3	6	9
		% within Age	10.7%	27.3%	18.0%
	I quit the class	Count	0	2	2
		% within Age	0.0%	9.1%	4.0%
	Total	Count	28	22	50
		% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total	I ignored them	Count	41	39	80
		% within Age	82.0%	78.0%	80.0%
	I shouted at them	Count	0	3	3
		% within Age	0.0%	6.0%	3.0%

I muted at them	Count	9	6	15
	% within Age	18.0%	12.0%	15.0%
I quit the class	Count	0	2	2
	% within Age	0.0%	4.0%	2.0%
Total	Count	50	50	100
	% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

80% of the faculty members felt there were mischievous elements in their class. The young faculty were in control of their classes, whereas more difficulty was faced by senior faculty members. 4% of senior faculty quit their classes, whereas 11% senior male faculty had to shout their students down.

Question No. 7a: *Did you come across a lot of noise and disturbance during your online English teaching sessions?*

7a * Age Crosstabulation

			Age		Total
			25-45	46-60	
7a	Yes	Count	0	5	5
		% within Age	0.0%	10.0%	5.0%
	No	Count	50	45	95
		% within Age	100.0%	90.0%	95.0%
Total	Count		50	50	100
	% within Age		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Only 10% of senior faculty stated they faced noise and disturbance on the platform all the time,

Question No. 7b: *Were you able to control the noise during online sessions?*

7b * Age Crosstabulation

			Age		Total
			25-45	46-60	
7b	Yes	Count	49	6	55
		% within Age	98.0%	12.0%	55.0%
	No	Count	1	44	45
		% within Age	2.0%	88.0%	45.0%
Total		Count	50	50	100

% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
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88% of senior faculty did not handle tech glitches noise. Young faculty did manage the noise.

Question No. 7c: *Do you think you have used appropriate body language for your online lectures?*

7c * Age * GENDER Crosstabulation

GENDER				Age		Total
				25-45	46-60	
MALE	7c	Yes	Count	22	0	22
			% within Age	100.0%	0.0%	44.0%
	No	Count	0	8	8	8
			% within Age	0.0%	28.6%	16.0%
	I don't care	Count	0	20	20	20
			% within Age	0.0%	71.4%	40.0%
FEMALE	Total	Count	22	28	50	50
			% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	7c	Yes	Count	28	0	28
			% within Age	100.0%	0.0%	56.0%
	No	Count	0	12	12	12
			% within Age	0.0%	54.5%	24.0%
Total	I don't care	Count	0	10	10	10
			% within Age	0.0%	45.5%	20.0%
	Total	Count	28	22	50	50
			% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	7c	Yes	Count	50	0	50
			% within Age	100.0%	0.0%	50.0%
Total	No	Count	0	20	20	20
			% within Age	0.0%	40.0%	20.0%
	I don't care	Count	0	30	30	30
			% within Age	0.0%	60.0%	30.0%
	Total	Count	50	50	100	100
			% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

60% of senior faculty did not bother with their body language online as they felt it did not matter online. 100% of young faculty cared their online presence and displayed positive body language online. 72% senior male faculty did not bother with their body language.

Question No. 8: *How will you state your experience regarding conducting assessment of your students via online?*

8 * Age Crosstabulation

		Age		Total	
		25-45	46-60		
8	Easier than face-to-face mode	Count	43	4	47
		% within Age	86.0%	8.0%	47.0%
	More complicated than face-to-face mode	Count	6	45	51
		% within Age	12.0%	90.0%	51.0%
	I avoid doing any assessment online	Count	1	1	2
		% within Age	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%
	Total	Count	50	50	100
		% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

86% of young faculty claimed online teaching was easier than face-to-face mode teaching. 90% of senior faculty felt online teaching more complicated than face-to-face mode assessment. 2% people stated they avoided doing any assessment online.

Question No. 9: *How do you think about teaching English online?*

9 * Age Crosstabulation

			Age		Total
			25-45	46-60	
9	A wonderful experience	Count	50	37	87
		% within Age	100.0%	74.0%	87.0%
	An impractical idea	Count	0	7	7
		% within Age	0.0%	14.0%	7.0%
	A necessary evil	Count	0	6	6
		% within Age	0.0%	12.0%	6.0%
Total		Count	50	50	100
		% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

87% of faculty stated teaching English online has been a wonderful experience for them. 14% senior faculty felt it was an impractical idea. 12% faculty, mostly senior, dubbed online teaching a necessary evil.

Question No. 10: *How will you assess the impact of ICT and online tools made to your teaching?*

10 * Age Crosstabulation

			Age		Total
			25-45	46-60	
10	More effective	Count	46	39	85
		% within Age	92.0%	78.0%	85.0%
	Less effective	Count	3	9	12
		% within Age	6.0%	18.0%	12.0%
	Not sure	Count	1	2	3
		% within Age	2.0%	4.0%	3.0%
	Total	Count	50	50	100
		% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

85% of faculty claimed the use of ICT and online tools made their English teaching more effective. 18% of the senior faculty believed these made their teaching English less effective. A meagre 3% of faculty were unable to determine.

3. Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are many: it is limited to South India, which has a natural love for English. Besides, the study is more indicative than conclusive.

4. Conclusions & Recommendation

Neo phobia was reported among teachers of English in general as the shift to online mode of teaching became the order of the day. It is further observed that teaching English online suffers from generation gap even as the elderly faculty members are tech-shy, nay, tech-phobic. Older people felt they should have been trained by their institutes that could help their nervousness or lack of diffidence with technology. Nonetheless, all faced the challenge and emerged winners. Almost all faculty members faced internet network disruption in the process of teaching. Interestingly, most of the faculty encountered no problem in content development: Internet made this easier.

Coming to interaction, tech-savvy young faculty had experience of better interaction with their students and vice versa; they received cooperation from their students. Whenever problem persisted, the young faculty knew how to handle the troublemaker better than senior faculty who are usually more effective in traditional offline classes. Women faculty have been as successful in their teaching in terms of discipline in class as compared to their traditional classes.

Insofar as technical glitches are concerned, senior faculty faced more difficulty in handling technical difficulties as compared to the younger faculty. Young faculty, both male and female, took care of their online presence and senior female faculty also took care of their looks and body language. However, majority of senior male faculty were indifferent to their online presence and body language. Majority of people believed ICT and online tools made their teaching more effective. Most faculty members termed online teaching as a wonderful experience despite initial hesitation, anxiety, and fear of teaching online. This has been partly due to self-training rather than institutional training.

It is highly recommended that technical educational institutes interacted with their faculty, especially the senior faculty members, and provide them with necessary training to enhance their effectiveness with teaching English online.

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