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## **English language acquisition through online mode of teaching during COVID-19 pandemic in India**

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**Abstract**--Education and learning hitherto has undergone huge changes from the kind of teaching provided to Gen Y . One major differentiator is the rise of technology and the spread of internet. It has moved ahead from the ‘analog’ methods to the ‘digital’ methods. The unprecedented Covid-19 crisis which swept across the globes causing loss of human lives and forced people to stay indoors accelerated the process of seeking education through online modes. Thus, learning a language in such an advanced ecosystem is one of the most crucial components in terms of education. In developing countries such as India where English (used as a second language) is learnt not merely to communicate but as a tool for empowerment, the methods used to acquire the language needs to be assessed , helping the quality of language learning especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. The observations are based on various data collected using surveys etc during the lockdown imposed due to the COVID 19 pandemic in India. The aim of this paper is to provide a clear picture about the online or virtual mode of teaching and how it can be re modified to make English language learning easier. This paper tries to analyse the influence of online education in the field of language learning , the privileges, the present scenario and the problems faced in acquiring a command over the language through technology.

**Keywords**--education, learning, empowerment, COVID-19, English language, lockdown, technology.

## **Introduction**

Teaching has always been working towards individualising and adapting to students' needs. This process has been facilitated by technological advancements and the widespread use of the internet. Language learning has also made the move from face-to-face instruction to online instruction. Language is defined as "a natural object, a component of the human mind, physically represented in the brain and part of the biological endowment of the species" (Chomsky 1) As a result, changing the surroundings while learning a global language like English will have both beneficial and negative consequences. The emphasis of Online Education is inevitable whether it is a boon or bane. English language In India is considered as a foreign language which is a edutech market is on the rise to make way for new age learning in India. When Covid-19 was proclaimed a "global pandemic" by the World Health Organization on March 12 2021 , the emergence of edutech took a significant step ahead. Schools colleges, technical institutes ,coaching centres and universities rapidly switched to online education to foster the needs of students. However, the quality of education has been expedited in some circumstances while language instruction, particularly English, has been impaired.

## **Language Learning before and after the Covid 19 pandemic**

Before the Covid-19 epidemic, language learning in schools and other institutions in India, particularly English, was usually taught in classrooms using textbooks and blackboards with the physical presence of a tutor . However, learners in schools of communicate their ideas and other feelings in their mother tongue and often use English only when they are forced to by their tutors or when it is necessary. Hence, it is seen that the fluency of English language is hampered and learners often find trouble to communicate what they feel with fluency and accuracy. Due to the usage of mother tongue in home and in surroundings, the transition from L1(mother tongue) to L2(English) If they don't practise English and can connect the language to circumstances where they would need to express themselves in regular life, it will be tough for them. However, due to the physical presence of the teacher and the activities conducted by the teacher to engage and encourage the students could help them cope up with the fear of using English language and hence English language was easier. Due to the closure of schools, colleges, and other educational institutions as a result of the increase in Covid cases and the following lockdown, students were forced to pursue their academic goals through online communication. Though the relocation was welcomed, it came with its own set of benefits and drawbacks. Without having to rely on anyone, one might study the language at his own pace using gadgets and an internet connection.. Various edutech startups such as BYJU's etc have flourished in India after the shutting down of schools and colleges making students accessible with online educators and lessons through innovation in teaching modules seeking constant feedback from students. However, this change from learning English from classes to learning English virtually could not be spontaneous and had many problems. However, since education cannot be avoided as it helps in shaping the future of an individual, one has to acclimatise to the present day requirements which has its own benefits.

### **Online Education as a method of speaking Fluent English**

English is merely learnt as a subject rather than as a language. Thus the quality of English learnt through this process might lack fluency and there can be a strong mother tongue influence which also can differ from place to place. “There is a strong tendency to ascribe many elements of human culture to the influence of the environment in which sharers of that culture are placed” (Sapir 226), environment plays a huge role in determining the fluency of English spoken. In India, where English is primarily used as a second language, mainly to acquire lucrative and white collar jobs, the standard and quality of English taught in the common classroom may lack quality. Due to online education, one can learn English language from top English tutors which helps them to get an exposure to the different kind of culture and environment associated with the language rather than learning a language with a native and a regional culture and approach. However, this kind of luxury is limited to students who can afford gadgets and a stable internet connection.

### **Availability of Teaching and Learning Materials**

One important advantage of online education is the access to the materials needed for teaching and learning English Language. Cai(2012) gives the example of online resources such as Google, Baidu etc which helps us provide information and language exercises as well as videos facilitating our knowledge and usage of English Language. It also provides teaching materials for ELT tutors to analyse and apply various pedagogies to improve the linguistic proficiencies of the students. The sudden closure of educational institution has opened up ways which goes beyond the teacher- learning process to keep the passion of learning alive through interactive modules and topics which keeps the learner more involved improving his L2 proficiency. There are various MOOCs (Massively Open Online Courses) which offer free language courses to improve the usage and can be enrolled by anybody. Students can take the help of technology to improve their linguistic skills anytime and anywhere with the help of an electronic gadget such as a mobile phone or a laptop and a stable internet connection

### **Changing of Language Teaching from Teacher Oriented to Student Oriented**

Teaching of English Language in India has been teacher oriented where the teacher explains a concept and gives some exercises for students to follow. The result of this can be getting a good score and certificate. Whereas, if teachers change their pedagogies and give more emphasis on students and focus more on what they bring to the table, it may help students to get a command over the language as well as improve their confidence while trying to study English.

### **Independence in Learning**

Lots of people have commitments such as jobs, household chores etc. The working population of India in 2019 was around 136.6 crores (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation) .Hence, it might be difficult for them to follow the routine . After the Covid-19 lockdown, these figures have increased. E-learning provides the opportunity to learn whenever they are free by listening to

pre-recorded lectures and learning according to their comfort so that they are fully attentive when studying a language.

### **Digital Divide**

Many students, especially from the poor household find it extremely difficult to learn due to unavailability of resources. The cost to meet the expenses to meet with the current demands is itself a huge challenge. Lack of digital access to these households makes it impossible to learn English. A survey conducted by the Delhi University campus media platform among 12,214 students from more than 35 colleges found that 75.6 per cent did not have a laptop to use for classes or examinations, while 79.5 per cent did not have a broadband connection. Nearly 65 per cent said they did not have a stable mobile internet connection. (India Today, June 1 2020).

### **Role of Parents**

When conducted online classes, it was found that some students were found to be lethargic and inattentive switching off their microphones and webcams so that they could not be noticed especially school going children who are particularly shy. Rose and Gallup (2001) addresses education as a major issue and that the involvement of parents in their child's education is vital for student's success. Parents must be timely informed and well aware about the day-to-day activities assigned in online classes and must assist students in their homework. Teachers have to main better relationships with parents and to ensure that there is better parental support and a healthy environment to facilitate child's learning. Parents must constantly talk to the students in English so that the child is able to grasp and is able to convey his/her messages in English improving his language skills. This also helps the student to keep his interest maintained in the language rather than studying what is taught without applying it in everyday lives. Parents must initiate this process by providing him with real life situations which actually improves his language skills.

### **Case Study**

A survey was among 32 school and college students studying English as their second language. The survey was conducted using Google Forms to know the impact of English learning and teaching during COVID-19 pandemic. The questions based on the availability of resources, their comfort in learning English at homes, their proficiency, student and parent involvement in online teaching etc.

### **Findings**

It was seen that 63.6 %of children were already accustomed to online modes of education before the pandemic and more than 96% of children had electronic gadgets to attend to classes. However, only 58% students had a stable net connection. It was also seen that only 33% children were comfortable with online education. The data however shows a positive report regarding students understanding English as a medium of instruction. The students involvement

during classes is also 42.4% which is not significant as learning should be two dimensional. Majority of students were able to improve their language proficiency(73%) but lacked confidence to communicate with the teacher. Over 42% students faced difficulty in getting certain words while writing examinations and giving presentations etc. Only close to 50 % student have parents' help in improving their English proficiency.

## Conclusion

The paper analyses how online modes of education proved to be a lifesaver for the education sector amidst the pandemic. Its emergence was inevitable as pupils had no means to attend schools and colleges. However, with respect to its merits, it's infrastructure must be improved so that the digital divide could be minimised many more students have access to this form of education. The role of parents is also important for students in bridging the gap between students' English proficiency skills and the outside world. Parents should interact in English so as to improve the confidence and communication of students and help them in their academic exercises. Teaching a foreign language such as English should also be evaluated involving students in their own teaching process. Teachers should have a cordial relationship with school students and should encourage them to speak in English language even if they make mistakes. If such things are taken care of, the quality of English language teaching can certainly be improved from online classes.

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