

Online Education amidst Pernicious Covid Scourge: Altering Traditional Educational System and Implementation of Arts-Friendly Distance Education Strategies

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ABSTRACT: The year 2020 continues to be nerve-racking for each of us with unaccomplished promises, dubious challenges and frustrating milieu in the wake of novel COVID-19 rife. The current scenario impels us to attune a new lifestyle which seems to be common among the rich and the poor despite the varying social standards. This pandemic has a deep impact on our lives at the individual and communal level; including the educational sector, agricultural sector, business, industry, tourism, medical sphere, government and non-governmental organizations. With the increasing Corona reports, our country remains shut since the month of March, affecting the lives of millions of students and teachers. As the saying goes, “Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education. The human mind is our fundamental resource.” (John F. Kennedy); education is the key to unlock the enthralling future. Hence, the education system cannot stay frozen until everything becomes run-of-the-mill as it may take a long period for the virus to be immobilized globally. Thus, the education experts came up with the proposal to incorporate distance education mode into proximate education system, which is quite appreciable, but challenging at the same time. This paper shall decode the stand of different methodologies like mind-mapping, instructional design, adaptive learning, classroom-flipping, situational language teaching, task-based language teaching, multiple intelligence, content and language integrated learning (CLIL), self-learning, and how these techniques can be integrated to enhance online learning without hampering cognitive learning styles: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic; in a way useful, multi-sensory, friendly, effective and interesting especially for the Arts stream, thereby discussing how we can solve the ramifications of online-learning to a great extent, provided both learner and teacher autonomy are encouraged. Besides, this paper shall discuss the integration of learning and teaching strategies as per the global trends of education system curtailing rote learning.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19 rife, Mind-mapping, Instructional design, Adaptive learning, Classroom-flipping, Situational language teaching, Task-based language teaching, Multiple intelligence, CLIL, Self-learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

As the saying goes, “Necessity is the mother of innovation,” pandemic Covid-19 has reformed remote learning as a requisite over traditional mode of learning by establishing an outlet for educating students with innovative methods and approaches using digital advancements in the education sector, which was highly neglected in the past by teachers and students is gaining gravitas. Digital education platforms enhance imparting immense knowledge in full swing as numerous resources can be provided to the students, moreover its highly reliable as not restricted to time-bound. At the same time, sudden transition from traditional classroom to online class is unwelcoming and challenging, as most of the students and teachers remain ignorant of much of the technical and technological aspects of online platform or digital world, as it had no relevance in traditional classroom set up. Addition to that, teachers may find it difficult to reach their students because it is scientifically proven, free flow of thoughts and great ideas arise automatically and spontaneously when we are attended by audiences in a physical environment rather than in an online platform despite its video-conferencing specs. Considering remote learning strategies, teachers won't be able to study student's mind nor give them individual attention in an online class and most of the time classes can be only handled through one-way communication.

There is alarmingly a possibility for online classes to be more teacher-centered rather than learner-centered. The deductive approach followed by institutions becomes an impediment in expressing free thoughts and ideas creatively. Considering all this shortcoming the stand of Arts academicians and students in distance education or online learning and the obstacles they face in rendering multi-sensory, creative, intellectual, vibrant sessions virtually, and how these flaws can be tackled to a certain extent is the need of the hour. These limitations can be overcome by using digital tools, educational approaches and methods suggested by linguistics and psychology experts. Our paper focuses on the possibility of promoting online education among Arts streams, especially focusing on the language and literature students despite the above-mentioned shortcomings and challenges.

The objective of this paper is to enhance Arts-friendly remote learning in a more creative and student-orient manner without hampering cognitive learning skills namely, visual, auditory, and kinesthetic by integrating methods and approaches of teaching like CLIL, mind-mapping, instructional design, adaptive learning, classroom-slipping, situational language teaching, task-based language teaching, multiple intelligence, self-learning, where students learn at their own pace in accordance to teacher and learner autonomy.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

History of remote learning is not too long as the essentials of internet were reinforced in 1969; moreover technology began to transmogrify distance education from 1980s, hitherto. Account of accessing courses by not attending physical campus or learning from home concept was in effect since 1770s, but at insignificant scale. Early formats of distance learning prior to internet included letter-writing, telephone, telecourses; radio broadcast and television broadcast. Demo of distance learning can be traced in 1728 for the very first time when Caleb Philipps, New Shorthand Method teacher rendered lessons to his students via exchanging letters ran as an ad in Boston Gazette; Isaac Pitman from England delivered lessons on scriptures to his pupils via postcards which later formulated into Sir Isaac Pitman Correspondence Colleges around 1840s; Anna Eliot Ticknor, daughter of a Harvard University professor, hailed as the "mother" of American correspondence study was the founder of Boston- based Society to Encourage Study at Home who supported teaching through exchanging letters around 1870s. From 1990s there was rapid expansion globally in the field of distance education with universities and institutions coming up with real-time and asynchronous mode of virtual learning with pilot programs under Computer Assisted Personalized Approach and standardized virtual course contents offered by various companies. 20th C witnessed sophisticated technological breakthroughs in the digital world like fax, World Wide Web, e-mail, audio recordings, video recordings, broadband, optic fiber, video conferencing, video calls, internet of things, cloud computing etc. herald wide variety of advancements in remote learning. Currently distance education has remarkably flourished with wide variety of online education platforms, apps and digital tools like CourseNotes.com, WebCT (Web Course Tools), YouTube EDU, iTunes U, MOOCs, Udemy, Virtual lab, Mindvalley, Udacity, Internshala, Byju's, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Zoom Meet, Telegram etc. Further in 20th C with internationalization and globalization of education along with the mushrooming of immigration and migration among people created demanding room for language teaching as a profession, and wide variety of language programs in academic scenario. Hitherto, Linguistics and Psychology experts came up with effectual schemes, both theoretically and practically sound ideologies, approaches, innovations and teaching methods for competing languages via different types of models and framework that keep on evolving with trends and developments which can be applied to interdisciplinary fields.

III. METHODOLOGY

E-learning has become inexorable under current conditions and with the surge in Covid-19 cases, learners and teachers are forced to adapt to this present teaching method. Cathy Moore, Kentucky based training designer explains that "The most important principle for designing lively e-Learning is to see e-Learning design not as information design but as designing an experience." It is extremely important that the pandemic should not affect quality of knowledge imparted. Virtual online classes find it difficult to replace or replicate the face-to-face learning experience in traditional classrooms. It is challenging and most teachers who are unaware of virtual classrooms might find it extremely strenuous. This can hinder the learning process, as a comfortable atmosphere is one of the pre-requisites in any mode of education. The main aim is to choose the finest methods and implement it the best way possible. As said by Socrates, one cannot teach anyone anything, they can only make them think. Methods that foster thought process would make online learning an informative yet enjoyable activity.

The various methods that deliver standard education through Course Management Systems (CMS) today assist teachers overcome the hurdles of online teaching. When used well these can be beneficial for the learners. Focusing on the methods that work well, more significance is given to those techniques that are engaging, supportive, active, flexible and motivating. These tend to eliminate the complexity of virtual classrooms.

A. MIND MAPPING

According to American-Austrian physicist Fritjof Capra, “patterns cannot be weighed or measured. Patterns must be mapped.” Mind mapping is an effective traditional classroom method where a visual representation of an idea is provided to enhance logical and creative thinking. The use of diagrams to combine a main concept and sub concepts or various ideas can be quite favorable even in online classrooms as these can grab the attention of learners easily. The level of concentration also increases when the topics are presented in an attractive manner. The structure of a mind map starts from the center and is linked by lines, symbols and words. This technique is extremely beneficial while dealing with hard-to-understand ideas. They provide learners key thoughts and guide the thought process. Mind mapping works as a potent tool in brainstorming where meanings and ideas keep progressing. Mind maps simplify concepts or ideas, retain in memory for a longer period, create solutions to existing problems, organize and structure information and improve critical thinking. It works as a combination of creativity, logic and visual representations engaging both hemispheres of the brain. This intellectual learning method thus improves memory and understanding in visual classrooms where explaining and memorizing difficult topics can be exhausting. Mind maps aid in generating shortcuts which are easy to remember and time-saving as tutors are forced to deal with a large list of concepts within a specified time. Association of ideas through mind maps in virtual classrooms can be created using online whiteboard and marker or apps that support drawing flowchart, diagram and visual canvas. While teaching a complex literary work like “Hundred Years of Solitude”, a mind map helps learners understand the relationship of the characters with one another. The Spanish names are difficult to memorize for one who is not Latino. The mind map helps learners connect the characters, finding similarities in them, thus improving the learning process.

B. INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN AND ADAPTIVE LEARNING

Instructional design and adaptive learning are fundamental in online virtual classrooms as learners who are new to the online method of teaching find it hard to follow. Instructional systems design and adaptive learning follow a pattern of delivering education by sticking to pre-planned steps involved in teaching and learning process, thus breaking down the whole syllabus into chunks. This simplifies the whole concept of learning and provides a view of what the learners deal with. The difference in online and traditional classroom education demands learning content in former to be dealt precisely, in a detailed fashion. Steps to foster this can include micro-learning, personalization, retrieval, spaced learning and feedback. Micro-learning is a method where concepts are divided into several parts for stress free learning. This can include small notes of different ideas or short videos presenting one topic at a time. Since it is brief, the method can enhance attentiveness. Personalizing content based on the learning capacity and interest of each learner can improve the pace of learning. This can be in the form of providing written notes as well as audio and video notes, all at the same time so that students benefit from what they find the most useful. This can be preceded by a survey if needed so that the teachers can understand the method students find convenient. Asking questions or retrieval of information should not fail in online teaching. This can be carried out in the form of quiz, multiple choice questions or flashcards and boosts interaction between the teacher and learner. Spaced learning is a concept of repeating what is taught over time instead of repeating it immediately. This refreshes the memory of students and over time helps in longer retention. Providing feedback is crucial as students under the current system of assessment are forced to submit a number of assignments and projects. Providing a feedback on how to improve and where they went wrong develops their overall performance. The geography of India can be divided based on states and providing notes and video classes on each state, followed by an assessment would be favorable than a lecture on geography of India as a whole.

C. FLIPPED CLASSROOMS

Flipped classrooms ensure active student participation and even in traditional classrooms follow teaching through web-based activities. These include on class and off class activities whereby teachers on class use videos and visuals to teach concepts and the rest of the work that is learning is done by the students while at home. Implementing this as a method of web-based teaching requires identifying the on class and off class activities. Flip means a shift of focus from teachers to students. Thus, in online classes students can engage in activities to enhance understanding of a concept, its application and enter into higher outcomes. This student-oriented method can help in better interaction and thereby making learners self-reliant. Understanding basic concepts, doing more research and reaching a conclusion makes them understand concepts better and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. Aaron Sams, one of the developers of this model sees it as beneficial because “Flipping the classroom is more about a mindset: redirecting attention away from the teacher and putting attention on the learner and the learning.” In a flipped virtual classroom explaining Indian politics, teacher records video or takes live video class to which the students listen and prepare notes. Each student does individual research and later can discuss ideas with friends ensuring student-student participation. They can present their findings in form of assignments, projects or virtual seminars.

D. SITUATIONAL AND TASK BASED LEARNING

Situational and Task based learning are two most effective methods to teach language. At present, the methods can be applied to teach any subject whether it be history or politics, science or math. The focus is mainly on situations and tasks which will teach learners without much stress. Language teaching involves special focus on vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and tasks involving day-to-day use of language while tasks, activities and practical can be applied while teaching other courses. Online teaching requires students to put extra effort and this method would perfectly suit the need. Students are trained to use language or instances which are relatable to daily life as “Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced.” as opined by John Keats. Online teaching through this method can be carried out during live sessions where teachers act as a mediator enhancing student-to-student interaction. They can select students and ask them to share their views without controlling them. A language class can involve tasks or situations like conversation between a doctor and patient where one student acts as a doctor and another, a patient. Conducting a live mock parliament can be helpful while teaching political science. Students can enact the role of ministers, speaker and can discuss ideas dealt in real parliament session. This method proves to be extremely useful when compared to memorizing verbatim as students are exposed to reality and they are given a chance to observe and learn with tasks. This method improves retention capacity and can make learners self-reliant. As per Mike Long, Professor of SLA at the University of Maryland, College Park, USA,

“Tasks are the real-world activities people think of when planning, conducting, or recalling their day. That can mean things like brushing their teeth, preparing breakfast, reading a newspaper, taking a child to school, responding to e-mail messages, making a sales call, attending a lecture or a business meeting, having lunch with a colleague from work, helping a child with homework, coaching a soccer team, and watching a TV program. Some tasks are mundane, some complex.”

Hence, lessons derived through various tasks shall remain imprint in learners’ mindscape for a lifetime unlike the learning via parrot-fashion.

E. CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING

Content and Language Integrated Learning or CLIL is a pioneering approach of integrating the subject matter and rendering a foreign language. For example, when students are taught History, it could be taught in Chinese; philosophy in German; culinary arts in French; mathematics in Hindi and so on. In the beginning students will definitely have a disorienting experience, even the gestures and visual aids in the beginning will be out of their understanding but gradually they will start depending on foreign language dictionaries, researching, working on assignments and going through their coursework where they shall grasp with new linguistic competencies that rise to the surface. CLIL as a procedure of digital education becomes pivotal under current circumstances as the time and resource available provide ample opportunity to develop a child’s potential twofold. Acquiring a new skill or language unconsciously pertains until the end. Designing and learning video contents in target language and providing subtitle in mother tongue or native language can be applied in any course as over time students get accustomed to the target language and learn it. Applying visual aid and following an action with visual representation along with audio in target language can also enhance the pace of learning. Accurate implementation of CLIL while teaching online can ensure much more effectual and fruitful learning experience. This can be carried out through video classes which provide a better understanding as listening to it whenever they forget will guide them to develop further. It can also be improved through fun learning games and activities such as conducting pronunciation and vocabulary quiz, audio visual vocabulary exercises, matching words in native and target language and more. These can further improve efficiency in native as well as target language, provided our motto should attune to “Learn as we play” concept, as Diane Ackerman puts in, “Play is our brain’s favorite way of learning.”

F. MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCE

Multiple Intelligences (MI) is centered on learner-based, culture-free philosophy that denotes typical features of human intelligence evolving in multi-dimensions, moreover developing and acknowledging educational aspects in a holistic, smartest and cognitive complexity. The MI pedagogy give room for all learners despite the individuality as strengths, competencies and combinations of intelligences (known as personal MI profiles) vary from person to person. It accepts the universality of uniqueness and differences among individuals when coming to the notion of intelligence(s) and rejects the biased traditional ideas and practices revolving around IQ testing models. In MI class setup lessons are dealt in a multi-sensory manner coalescing nine forms of intelligences as mentioned by Howard Gardner (Professor of Harvard Graduate School of Education) namely, linguistic (“word smart”), logical or mathematical (“number/reasoning smart”), visual or spatial (“picture smart”), bodily or kinesthetic (“body smart”), musical (“music smart”), interpersonal (“people smart”), intrapersonal (“self-smart”), naturalist (“nature smart”), existentialist (“existence smart”); concerns philosophical issues involving state of mankind in relation to universal existence). Therefore, all the faculties come into play awakening and amplifying learners’ intelligences in multi-faceted angle, making him or her connoisseur of their own learning experiences despite undervalued intelligences each one possesses. This self-evolving process enables a student

to identify his or her dominant and incompetent intelligences which pave way for self-polishing strengths, self-improving weaknesses and fostering hidden, novel talents simultaneously. In current scenario remote learning is only possible; hence learners should be self-sufficient with concrete resources that are essential for a class if multi-sensory experiences are to be met. In addition to this, students are made to think out-of-the box by relating learning experiences to issues and challenges in the out-of-class world. For example, in a Poetry class, imagine the teacher is dealing with Robert Frost's Mending Wall. The class can be made interesting by playing audio where the poet himself is reciting the poem. The background of the poem revolves around First World War, which can be revealed to students indirectly via metacognitive assignments, article-writing, drawings, power-point presentations, video-clips etc. Poetry analysis can be done through live group-discussions, presentations, brain-storming sessions etc. Moreover, students can share their thoughts, interpretations, views in live discussions by drawing connections from real-world problems; there can be room for live literary debates too when contradictory ideas arise, thus utilizing online platform in a more amusing way. Each student differs in their pattern of learning, hence there is a possibility for the teachers to come up with different strategies to reach certain students and this become challenging when considering virtual classes, but with MI pedagogies learning obstacles are mended to a certain extend; because in the end what matters the most is, as in Gardner's words, "It's not how smart you are, it's how you are smart", mouthpieces the very purpose of education.

IV. DEMERITS

American journalist Ian Lamont's observation suggests that

"The most effective learning takes place in the classroom, where you can easily raise your hand, engage in spontaneous discussions with classmates and faculty, turn to the person next to you to ask for clarification, or approach the professor after class or during office hours to ask questions or exchange viewpoints in a way that practically guarantees an instant response and is not constrained by typing, software interfaces, or waiting for a response."

Thus, incorporating digital learning has its own drawbacks. Students can be easily misled by the entangling world of internet. Spending hours in front of a computer screen can also cause mental stress and physical strain. But, considering the solemnity of current situation one has to adapt and adjust with whatever is available. Thus, limiting learning time, reducing academics workload and elders' supervision can help bridle these problems. The quality of online education is also affected by other technical factors like bug issues, poor bandwidth and internet coverage, power failure etc. Both Learners and teachers should also be made aware of shortcomings in virtual classrooms, digital crimes and cyber security. Training students and teachers to beneficially use technology becomes fundamental as the world experiences quotidian technological acceleration.

V. CONCLUSION

Current contagious COVID-19 scourge has made virtual learning a necessity in the education field and there are no other alternatives for remote learning, the only choice remains is to cope up with the challenging times. In fact, one-on-one interaction, spontaneous flow of thoughts, studying the minds of learners and providing individual attention to students which is highly achievable in a physical environment cannot be implemented in digital classes yet the classes can be made more effective with inter-disciplinary learning methods and models like mind-mapping, instructional design, adaptive learning, classroom-flipping, situational language teaching, task-based language teaching, multiple intelligence, CLIL and how these techniques can be integrated to enhance online learning without hampering cognitive skills and multi-intelligences as discussed in the paper. Another plus point of the online class unlike the traditional classroom setups is no voice shall go unheard as students could create their own space in a virtual room and express themselves out freely, no students shall be ignored undeservedly. Addition to that online classes can be made more creative unlike the rote mode of learning as in traditional classrooms provided teacher-student autonomy should be maintained where teachers act as facilitator and students learn things at their own pace, maybe by their own learning strategies. Self-learning has a greater role to play in digital classrooms with plenty of choices, decision-making opportunities and flexible time.

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