



# CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS OF USING VIRTUAL CLASS SPACES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

<sup>1</sup>Ishita Bose

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor of English

<sup>1</sup>Department of English,

<sup>1</sup>Haldia Institute of Management, Haldia, West Bengal.

**Abstract: Purpose of Study:** The aim of this study is to identify the challenges and implications of using virtual space in the English Language teaching and learning process. The present global scenario is in a dire necessity of teachers to be updated in new innovative methods of teaching learning processes. The teachers are encouraged to develop a virtual class space to harmonize their teaching process and the students are supposed to devote their learning hours in this virtual space where the teachers may render different sorts of activities to enhance their language learning.

**Methodology:** The study was conducted among twenty five English Language teachers using a background information questionnaire to capture the insights and perceptions of teachers about the virtual English classrooms.

**Main Findings:** This study identifies different challenges and implications of teachers towards the use of virtual space in English language teaching and learning process. The study reveals that the virtual learning space can be made an effective tool that facilitates the language learners to feel at ease and to create a stress free learning environment by following certain strategies to overcome the challenges.

**Application of this study:** Considering the various technological findings and their effectiveness as a learning platform, this study tries to provide an overview of the challenges of using the virtual platforms and strategies to overcome those challenges. The strategies to overcome the challenges can enhance both technical skills and language skills of not only the students but also the teaching fraternity.

**Novelty of the study:** The global education system has embarked upon the utilization of the traditional classrooms and also additional virtual classrooms to improve the quality of teaching learning process at all levels.

**Index Terms -** English Language Teaching, Language Learning, Virtual Class Space, Learning Platform, Innovative Teaching, Challenges.

## I. INTRODUCTION

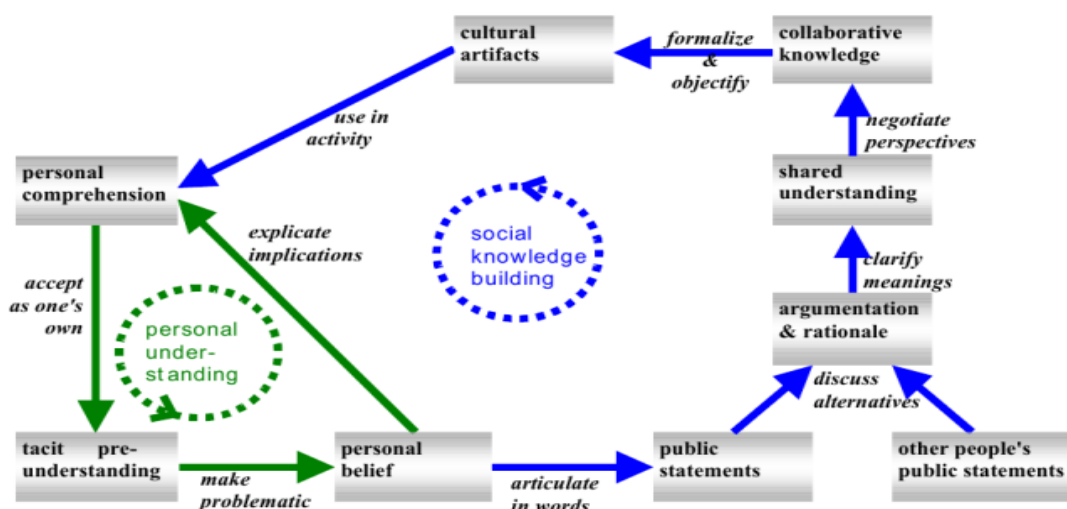
The technological innovations in the teaching learning process have a great impact on the students as well as the teachers but it has its own sophistications to replace the traditional face to face teaching context with a virtual learning space. The study of present technological developments in the field has triggered great interest among the researchers to explore further new innovative ways to use technology in the English language teaching and learning process. Technology integration enfolds all the regions and aspects of language learning and it opens a wide variety of creative techniques for the language classroom instruction. At the present scenario of pandemic, the learners and teachers are forced to develop their technical skills in order to incorporate the virtual learning methodologies into their regular custom of learning lessons.

Microsoft Teams has become the fundamental virtual learning platform which provides a vast range of learning methods to facilitate students’ learning like video conferencing and live stream presentation of information. It is one of the latest virtual classroom spaces that are being widely adopted by many academicians across the world as an online digital teaching learning platform. It has been increasingly utilized by many universities and higher education institutions all around the world to enhance the language skills of students under different streams of study. The virtual class space gives the opportunity to interact between the peer learners and also with their instructors during the course of study. Apart from this, the virtual class spaces create a teaching learning environment beyond the physical limitations imposed by the traditional face to face classrooms by permitting the accessibility of the virtual learning at the convenient pace of the students, round the clock. It makes the teaching learning process easier by giving it a chance to take place at a convenient place in order to eliminate the physical discomforts.

Many studies have been done to explore the use of technology in the virtual classrooms of English as a second language context. However, the studies conducted to examine the challenges of this virtual class spaces in a developing country as India are very few. Therefore, this study is being taken up to examine the challenges of virtual class spaces from the perception of teachers. The study reveals that the virtual class spaces can be made a very effective learning platform at this current situation to make the students global competitive. It offers a deep insight into the strategies for overcoming the challenges and also the method of collaborating virtual class spaces in enhancing English language teaching learning environment.

**Background of the Study**

Many investigations have been done by the researchers to find out the feasibility of using new learning platforms since the whole world is looking forward for digital classrooms. A virtual class space can be created in order to collaborate the language learning and social knowledge building processes. The use of virtual classrooms can be used as a collaborative knowledge building platform for the sustainability in the global competitive world. Collaborative knowledge building framework model (Figure 1) shows the key activities of collaborative learning such as personal understanding viewpoints, filling gaps, linking new knowledge into existing knowledge and so on. The computer based collaborative platforms like virtual classrooms can enhance the leaning process by supporting these collaborative key activities.



**Figure 1:** Collaborative Knowledge Building Framework Model

Most of the universities and higher education institutions in India impart education in various branches like medical, engineering, law, business, science and technology. The mode of instruction in all these professional courses is English language. It is a great challenge for both the teachers and students to use English as a medium of teaching learning process since English is a foreign language to the non native speakers. The universities and education boards have formed their curriculum, giving more important to the English language by including courses to improve the students' language skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing. At this scenario, the exploration for method of teaching English language in a collaborative knowledge framework is essential to blend the technology with language learning. The aim of this study is to identify what are the major challenges the teachers face when they use technology in their classrooms. The study also tries to quote some of the strategies to overcome these challenges in order to enhance the virtual spaces for English language teaching.

### **Literature Review**

The ability of computer networks to use the multimedia materials such as videos, images and text simultaneously into one single platform makes them the best instructional aides to facilitate language inputs (Ali Mohsen & Shafeeq, 2014). With a variety of opportunities offered by the internet, the educationalists and researchers are exploring theoretical and practical pathways in pedagogy and curriculum designs (Almalki, 2011). The education system has recognized the computer applications and the virtual learning as the most useful platform for educational purpose and introduced Learning Management System (LMS) to give online access to course materials, communicate with students and track their progress (Zumor et al., 2013). Introduction of LMS in the universities and higher education institutions reduced the physical strain of teachers and made it easier to deliver the content and access the students electronically. However, e-learning requires a considerable support as well as a holistic and well-planned approach to be effectively integrated across teaching and learning transactions within higher education institutions (Gamdi & Samarji, 2016, P.23). Many institutions have already adopted a blended approaches to learn English as a foreign language which mixes up the face to face teaching with online activities and computer based practice (Comas-Quinn, 2011; Compton, 2009).

Mosquera, L.H (2017:481) points out that virtual learning environment is a platform wherein teachers and students interact and share learning resources. The study proved that most of the teachers and students have found that the virtual learning is very useful and productive. The findings of another study done by Al Harbi proved that the teachers believe that the virtual class space is an effective teaching tool to deliver their lectures and course works online (Al Harbi M.A, 2016). Virtual learning space makes the students to equip with technological devices and applications as wells as paves the way for instructional innovations for the new generations, offering a wide range of learning platforms (Ceylan & Elitok Kesici, 2017:309). According to Gomleksiz, more research has to be carried out to investigate the effect of education technology in relation to curricular activities that derives more scientific basis for its use (GOMLEKSIZ, 2004).

Various researchers highlighted the significant influence of teachers on students to reduce the negative impacts of teaching and learning. If specific training is provided to the teachers to utilize the virtual class spaces effectively, it will strengthen the bond between the teachers and the learners.

### ***Enhancing Listening Skills in Virtual Classroom***

In virtual classrooms, students can apply their listening capacity while attending the classes through online, and they can actively participate in many activities to improve the listening skills. Listening to songs in L1 and translating it into the target language is an effective method to improve the listening skills and writing skills as well.

Students are asked to choose a favourite movie of their choice to listen to the dialogues and understand the story. Then they are asked about to talk about the movie or they are asked to write the review of the movie. Students can improve their listening skills while watching the movie and they learn to express their thoughts and ideas clearly while reviewing it (Ghanta, 2019).

### ***Enhancing Speaking Skills in Virtual Classroom***

Shreeja Ghanta in her research says that, it has been observed in the context of English Language Learning, that the students who learn English as second language are grammatically competent but are not able to communicate effectively. In order to overcome this problem speaking interaction is the only process to be involved (Ghanta, 2019). She also suggests the activities like self introduction, group discussions and role plays can improve the students' speaking skills. These activities should be performed with the support of technical gadgets in case of virtual classrooms.

### ***Enhancing Reading Skills in Virtual Classroom***

A reader with a specific articulation is more characteristic and the more undeniable the vastness of the text to the person who reads. This can progress the nature of reading (Ghanta, 2019). The reader can comprehend the context when he/she has deciphered the magnitude out of each and every articulation through its definition.

### ***Enhancing Writing Skills in Virtual Classroom***

Earlier studies have proved that many writing tasks that can improve the writing skills of the language learners have been used by the language teachers in the face to face traditional classrooms. In the same manner, a few activities can be implemented in the virtual classrooms in order to develop the writing skills of the students such as e-mail writing, writing blogs, note taking and review writing (Ghanta, 2019). All these activities are taken place using technical support and can be done through virtual learning platforms.

### **Research Questions**

The current study concentrates on the following questions:

- Do the English Language teachers find the virtual class space as an effective language learning platform?
- Are the English Language teachers academically trained to integrate the technology into the teaching methodology?
- Do the English Language teachers recognize the challenges in incorporating virtual classrooms in the teaching learning process?

- What are the strategies do the English Language teachers use to overcome these challenges?

## Methodology

A questionnaire was prepared to collect the views of teachers about the virtual classrooms. It was filled by the English Language teachers who work in a reputed engineering college in India. The teachers handle classes for the first year and second year engineering students of various branches. As the virtual classrooms become common in the present days, the questionnaire helped the teachers to share their views and to analyze the challenges they find in the language teaching using virtual class spaces. The teachers who are not aware of the virtual classes were suggested to undergo a basic technical literacy training session in the use of various technical gadgets to connect with their students while using virtual class spaces.

## Data Analysis

The participant teachers in the study exercised filling up questionnaire and analysis of this questionnaire in graphical format presents an overview of teachers' views.

Table 1: Training for using Technology (N=25)

Sl. No.	Question to be answered	The response of English Language Teachers			
		Attended	Percentage	Not Attended	Percentage
1.	Have you attended any training for using Virtual Classes?				
		18	72%	7	28%

Table1 shows that 72% of Language teachers attend training courses in using technical gadgets that enhances the utilization of virtual classrooms while 28% of the teachers do not have exposure in the use of technology in teaching learning process.

Table 2: Can virtual class rooms be used as an alternate for the traditional classrooms?(N=25)

Sl. No.	Question to be answered	The response of English Language Teachers			
		Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage
1.	Virtual class rooms can be used as an alternate for the traditional classrooms				
		15	60%	10	40%

Table 2 shows that 60% of teachers have the opinion that the virtual class rooms can be used as an alternate for the traditional classrooms yet 10% prefer face to face classrooms.

Table 3: Benefits of Virtual Class Spaces

(N=25)

Sl. No	Perceptions of Language Teachers
1.	It creates interest in learning
2.	It gives a stress free space of learning
3.	Fear of interaction can be eradicated
4.	More convenient and easier
5.	Possible at the flexible time and convenient place
6.	Technology integrated
7.	Students can be in relaxed in the class
8.	Variety of teaching learning sources are available
9.	Convenient to interact
10.	Possible to participate in various activities at a time

The data collected through the questionnaire indicates that most of the teachers are in the opinion that the virtual classrooms are beneficial to both the learners and teachers.

Table 4: Challenges and implications of Virtual Classrooms

(N=25)

Sl. No	Perceptions of Language Teachers
1.	Lack of Technical facility
2.	Lack of Teaching Resources
3.	Time constraints as the students concentrate on other subjects
4.	Liability while testing is missing
5.	Only a few students do their home assignments

Table 5: Strategies to overcome the Challenges

(N=25)

Sl. No	Perceptions of Language Teachers
1.	Familiarity of using technical gadgets should be achieved by both students and teachers
2.	The success of delivering lectures depends on the accessing potential of materials
3.	Interaction time should be increased
4.	Training sessions should be conducted for teachers to update their technical knowledge.

The participant teachers of the study pointed out some strategies that could be implemented in the system which can overcome the challenges.

### Discussions and Findings

The findings of the study revealed the answers for all the research questions as per the analysis of the data collected from the participant teachers.

1. *Do the English Language teachers find the virtual class spaces as an effective language learning platform?*

Most of the language teachers understand the benefits of virtual learning space during the present situation where the students are not able to present physically in their classroom. The findings of our study reveal the truth that the inequality of learning system can be wiped out to a certain extent by using these virtual classrooms.

2. *Are the English Language teachers academically trained to integrate the technology into the teaching methodology?*

The study shows that many teachers are passionate to gain knowledge besides their core subject; for instance, English Language teachers are interested to attain technical knowledge. Since the teachers are lifelong learners, it is necessary to give them training in order to update themselves. Early researches on reflective teaching prove that the teacher should be transformed to reflective practitioners for enhancing their teaching skills. Reflective teaching implies a systematic process of collecting, recording and analyzing the thoughts and observations of teachers as well as students (Thota, 2017). Teachers can make changes and also can be changed.

3. *Do the English Language teachers recognize the challenges in incorporating virtual classrooms in the teaching learning process?*

As per the responses of participant teachers in the study, they observed many challenges like lack of technical facility, lack of teaching resources, time constraints for students, missing of liability while testing, and less number of students doing home assignments.

4. *What are the strategies do the English Language teachers use to overcome these challenges?*

English Language teachers are in the initial stage of uncovering strategies to overcome the challenges they face during virtual teaching. It is observed that the languages teachers are eventually transferring the traditional method of lecturing to the virtual spaces where students can log into their user account to attend the classes. A few strategies suggested by the participant teachers are that the teachers should achieve the familiarity of using technical gadgets, interaction time for students should be increased and the teachers should attend the training sessions etc.

## **Conclusion**

Optimizing virtual learning space is a great challenge for the teachers who teach English as a second language. However, teacher training programmes with an aim of giving orientation to the teachers in using the innovative methods of teaching learning process could lead to productive learning space in a technology mediated classroom. The study proves that a blended approach using the face to face traditional classroom and also the virtual classroom would be more relevant to a context of English language teaching learning process. When the traditional aspect is more carefully taken into consideration and when the technology is integrated more effectively the challenges of virtual space for learning English can be conquered.

## REFERENCES

- [1]. Almalki, A. M. (2011). *Blended Learning in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia: A Study of Umm Al-Qura University* (Unpublished master's thesis). RMIT University. Retrieved March 29, 2018, from <https://researchbank.rmit.edu.au/eserv/rmit:14613/Almalki.pdf.,pp.5>.
- [2]. Comas-Quinn, A. (2011). *Learning to teach online or learning to become an online teacher: An exploration of teachers' experiences in a blended learning course*. *ReCALL Journal*, 23(3), pp.218-232
- [3]. Compton, L. K. L. (2009). *Preparing language teachers to teach language online: A look at skills, roles, and responsibilities*. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 22(1), 73-99.
- [4]. Ceylan, V. K., & Elitok Kesici, A. (2017). *Effect of blended learning to academic achievement*. *Journal of Human Sciences*, 14(1), 308-320. doi:10.14687/jhs.v14i1.4141.
- [5]. Gamdi, M. A., & Samarji, A. (2016). *Perceived Barriers towards e-Learning by Faculty Members at a Recently Established University in Saudi Arabia*. *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, 6(1), 23-28. doi:10.7763/ijiet.2016.v6.652
- [6]. Ghanta Shreeja, (2019). *Effective Writing Techniques for Engineering Students*, *International Journal of Innovative Technology and Exploring Engineering (IJITEE)*, ISSN: 2278-3075, Volume-8 Issue-9, pp.1139-1140
- [7]. Ghanta Shreeja, (2019). *Classroom Techniques to Stimulate Communication Skills in Engineering Students*, *International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering (IJRTE)* ISSN: 2277-3878, Volume-8, Issue-1, May 2019.
- [8]. Ghanta Shreeja, (2019). *Enhancing Reading Skills of Engineering Students*, *International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering (IJRTE)* ISSN: 2277-3878, Volume-8 Issue-4, pp.520-521.
- [9]. GÖMLEKSİZ, M. N. (2004). *Use of Education Technology in English Classes*. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 3(2), 71-77. Retrieved March 23, 2018. pp.76.
- [10]. Harbi, M. A. (2016). *Faculty Attitudes Toward and Motivation for Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) for Language Studies: A Cross-National Study in Saudi Arabian Universities*. *Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Science*, 4(2). doi:10.15640/jpbs.v4n2a9, Retrieved February 25, 2018, pp.110.
- [11]. Mathew, George N. (2019) *Challenges and Implications of Virtual E-Learning Platform in EFL Context: Perceptions Of Teachers*, *International Journal of English Language Teaching* Vol.7, No.2, pp.100-116.
- [12]. Mohsen, A., & Shafeeq, C.P (2014) *EFL Teachers' Perceptions on Blackboard Applications*. *English Language Teaching*, 7 (11), pp.108-118.
- [13]. Mosquera, L. H. (2017). *Impact of Implementing a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) in the EFL Classroom*. *Íkala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura*, 22(3), pp. 479-498.
- [14]. Thota Rajani, (2017). *Reflective Practice in Development of English Language Teachers*, *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)*, Vol.5, Issue 4. pp. 430-435.
- [15]. Zumor, A. W., Refaai, I. K., Eddin, E. A., & Al-Rahman, F. H. (2013). *EFL Students' Perceptions of a Blended Learning Environment: Advantages, Limitations and Suggestions for Improvement*. *English Language Teaching*, 6(10), 95-110. doi:10.5539/elt.v6n10, pp.95.