



Perception and Preference Towards English Language Learning and Teaching Through Virtual Mode: A Study on English Language Learners and Teachers

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Abstract: The paper intends to discuss English Language teachers' and students' perceptions and preferences toward English Language Teaching and Learning through online or virtual classes. The COVID 19 outbreak and the nationwide lockdown created a new set of environments for all. All educational institutions were closed down to prevent the widespread of the virus as a result the teaching and learning activities were disrupted extensively. All sorts of activities, including teaching and learning, were being carried out through online mode. Traditional classroom teachings shifted to online classroom teaching in order to continue with teaching and learning practices. The online mode of teaching became an effective strategy to continue the teaching and learning process without any interruption. The closure of educational institutions affected a large number of students. The abrupt change in teaching and learning methods impacted both the teachers as well as students. The main purpose of the study was to examine the perception and preferences of learners and teachers towards online learning and teaching. The study adopted the questionnaire method, and the data were collected from undergraduate students (Currently in B.A Third Semester) of Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Madhya Pradesh by sending a questionnaire to participants' email ids. The English language teachers and students were selected for the present study. English language course is taught at this university as a compulsory subject for first-semester undergraduate students. Two questionnaires, one for the teachers' group and another for the students' group, were prepared to know the opinion of both the participant groups. The study reveals that students are more satisfied with face-to-face teaching than the online mode. All learners believe that learning and speaking English is an advantage, but they prefer classroom teaching over online. Similarly, the teachers' group also showed their preferences for offline teaching over online teaching. The present paper elaborates on the findings of the present study.

Keywords: English, Learning, Teaching, Virtual, Perception

Introduction

English as stated by Timoty J. Scrase "English is not only important in getting a better job, it is everywhere in social interaction. If you cannot speak it then you are nobody". Since the days of British rule, English language remained the language of domination, static and privileged in India. Learning English language and becoming a proficient speaker of the language is always a subject of great interest for all educated people. Speaking English language is a status symbol in India, and it would not be wrong to say that many educated people still carry the impression that a person, who is a fluent speaker of English, is undeniably intelligent. What many of them fail to understand is that language is not a mere indicator of intelligence. It is primarily a medium of communication and to become competent in any language, particularly in any second language, one needs to have better exposure to it. Knowing a language is always an advantage as it helps us to communicate proficiently. English language as a global language plays an important role in India and its receiving great significance in every field from academic to business. It has become an effective source of empowerment that pave the way for holistic development in one's life. All Indian universities and institutions aim to provide English communication courses at the basic level to facilitate



their learners to acquire some competency in the language. Many central universities in India have introduced remedial English classes to help the students to attain some level of English proficiency. The English Language is taught as a compulsory subject to all first-semester undergraduate students of Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Madhya Pradesh, and student participants for the present study were selected from this university.

All schools, colleges and universities were closed globally due to COVID 19, which left one in five students out of school. The closure of educational institutions affected a large number of students. According to UNESCO by the end of April 2020, 186 countries have implemented nationwide closures affecting about 73.8% of the total enrolled learners (UNESCO, 2020). During Lockdown time and afterwards, the online mode was the only option left for all educational institutions to carry out teaching and learning activities.

The government of India closed down all educational institutions as a result of the teaching-learning activities being affected hugely. Education Institutions of India made a transition to an online teaching environment soon after the Union government decided to impose a nationwide lockdown for 21 days from 25th March to 2020, which was later extended for 19 more days. During COVID 19 time all universities shifted to online mode using Google classroom, Zoom, Google Meet etc. to perform teaching and learning processes. The COVID 19 outbreak and the nationwide lockdown created a new set of environments for all. All educational institutions adopted the online teaching method which was later found as an effective strategy to continue the teaching and learning process without any interruption. Various studies explored perceptions of online learning experiences vs conventional classroom experiences. But to the best of my knowledge, study on this line has not been attempted in the field of English Language Teaching and Learning.

Therefore, an attempt was made to understand students' and teacher attitude toward the online mode of learning and teaching and how effectively it worked in providing a better learning environment to stakeholders. The study was undertaken to understand English Teachers' and students' perceptions of English Learning through virtual mode. Perception and preference play an important role and it is important to consider the perception and preference of learners while designing the course structure to make learning effective and productive. The paper is divided into five sections. After introducing the main theme in section 1, section 2 presented a brief review of the literature followed by section 3 on methodology. Section 4 is devoted to the data analysis and discussion and section 5 deals with the conclusions and recommendations emanating from the findings and analysis.

Review of Literature

The sudden outbreak of Covid-19, a novel coronavirus disease spreading all over the world compels many countries including India to complete the closure of all educational institutions. To protect the students from virus exposure, closing all educational institutions was the only preventive measure. The closure of educational institutions affected a large number of students globally.

Due to the shutdown of academic institutions, a massive transformation took place in teaching-learning methods worldwide. The universities, colleges and other institutes of higher education switch to online teaching methods (Amita, 2020). The Government of India started various online learning platforms like the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), Free and Open Source for Education (FOSSEE), National Repository of Open Educational Resources, (NROER), Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM), E-pathshala, Diksha and other IT initiatives. The lockdown impacted the students' learning, examination schedule, and placement scenario which lead to increased stress among students. The online teaching approach was adopted to minimize the loss of students (Amita, 2020).

In India, approximately 400m learners used the Internet for online education (Arora, 2017). This prevailing situation leads to the adoption of e-learning methods worldwide. The majority of educational institutions are exploring online resource-based learning to achieve academic excellence. In this light, it is important to have an analysis of students' viewpoints toward online classes. The implementation of online class methods gained popularity in recent years. Several universities in India provided online or distance courses to the students (Beatty and Ulasewicz, 2006). Blackmon and Major (2012) highlighted that e-learning is important for teaching-learning practices. In their qualitative studies, they explored students' experience with online learning and mentioned that some students were satisfied with online classes because enrolling in an online program has been very beneficial to carry out their routine



jobs simultaneously. However, some of the students were not satisfied because of low self-motivation and lack of communication skills among the students. Dhawan (2020) examined the SWOC (strength, weakness, opportunities and challenges) analysis of modes of e-learning during the period of the COVID-19 crisis. The study outlined that online learning became the need of the hour at this time and with more focus on the use of technology, it will be a successful method and can facilitate the educational process effectively. Thomas *et al.*, (2020) conducted a study on students during the COVID-19 lockdown in India and the study revealed that the students did not favour online classes. The main reasons were network issues, less interaction between teachers and students, fatigue and lesser data availability. It was suggested by the participants that to lessen the fatigue and to improve interactions, short intervals must be given. Agha (2020), Lewis (2020) and Awasthi (2020) also stated several other problems faced by the students like network connectivity problems, data limits, e-resources storage problems and lack of interactions among teachers and students. Mishra *et al.*, (2000) highlighted the perception of both teachers and students on online teaching-learning methods amid COVID-19. Online teaching mode became the need of the hour that brought both institutions as well as individuals to the unfreezing stage. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, it is quite difficult to teach the classes in the regular mode by maintaining the rule of social distancing. The teachers are putting efforts to teach the students online by adopting multimodal approaches effectively. Ray and Srivastava (2020) favoured online study mode for the students in situations of lockdown and quarantine during the pandemic. This study focused on the concept of virtual laboratories, video demonstration and simulation. It would help the students to use the e-resources well and also facilitate critical thinking among students. Fatonia *et al.*, (2020) mentioned that students preferred the online classes during this outbreak. Even though the online teaching-learning method offers convenience, a comfortable environment and full support from the teachers, students still prefer to join the regular classes after the pandemic. Another study conducted on Faculty and Students' Perception of online learning during COVID -19 revealed that although both faculty and students agreed on the usefulness of online education during a pandemic, the efficacy is less effective than face-to-face learning and teaching (Almahasees *et al.*, 2021). From, all these studies, it has been observed that there is a future need to explore the factors that impact online education from the viewpoint of students as well as teachers

Aims and Objectives

The main aim of the study was to investigate English Language teachers' and students' perceptions of English Language Teaching and Learning through online or virtual classes. The study also aimed to discover learner expectations from learning the English Language and the role of online teaching in enhancing communication skills.

Methodology

The present study is quantitative and has adopted the questionnaire method for data collection purposes. Two questionnaires, one for the teachers' group and another for the students' group, were prepared to know the opinion of both the respondent groups. The first questionnaire consisted of 10 questions, prepared for the English Language Teachers group, who taught the compulsory paper –English Communication to undergraduate students for the session 2021. Another questionnaire was prepared for students that included 10 questions. All data were collected online (sending the questionnaire to the personal email id of each participant. The link to the Google form was sent to the participants through email. The students from whom the data were collected are currently pursuing B. A 3rd Semester at Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Madhya Pradesh. English Communication course is taught at this university as a compulsory subject for first-semester undergraduate students. The syllabus is based on per UGC CBCS pattern. The questionnaires were designed to obtain the students' and teachers' experiences and attitudes toward learning and teaching through online mode. The questionnaire consisted of the following questions.

For teachers: The questions were designed to investigate the following-

- (a) to understand teachers' attitudes towards online teaching and
- (b) to examine the opinion on the role of online classes in enhancing communication skills.



The questions that were put forward -

1. In your opinion what are the advantages and disadvantages of an online class?
2. Do you prefer online teaching over offline or classroom teaching?
3. Do you think that online classes enhance comfort and engagement in dialogue?
4. Do you think that online teaching plays a significant role in enhancing communication skills?
5. Do you believe that it is possible to develop the four language skills through virtual class?

For Students: For students, two types of questions were designed.

- These are -
1. Yes/No question or Close-ended questions
 2. Open-ended questions (Table 1).

Table 1. Types of Questions designed for Students

Yes/ No Questions	Open-ended Questions
Do you enjoy English language learning through online mode?	Why do you want to learn English Language?
Do you think virtual classes or online classes enhance comfort and engagement in dialogue	Do you intend to take up English in your M.A? If yes why?
Do you think that online classes enhance comfort and engagement in dialogue?	
Do you believe that it is possible to develop the four language skills through virtual class?	
Are you satisfied with online English language classes in B.A I Semester?	
Are you happy and satisfied with the progress you have made in your English Language skills?	
Are you happy and satisfied with your speaking skill?	
Do you think speaking English is an advantage?	

Data Analysis and Discussion

The study was designed to elicit responses from students and teachers, who have experienced using online classroom teaching and learning practices. The elicited perception and opinions of both teachers and learners' groups are discussed below-

Teachers' Perception and attitude towards online/virtual classes:

The table 2 presents the opinion of teacher group on the advantages and disadvantages of virtual teaching.

In response to the question on the advantage and disadvantages of an online class, the following points were put forward by the teachers' group. All the points are discussed in detail.



Table 2. Opinion on Virtual Teaching

Question	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
In your opinion what are the advantages and disadvantages of an online class?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Flexible time slot 2. More Convenient, Comfortable and Affordable 3. Use of software/ tools/ techniques 4. Removing the geographical barrier 5. More focused and engaging. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of face-to-face learning environment 2. Unable to establish friendly relationship 3. No means of transforming the value of education 4. Develop a sense of isolation. 5. Lack of connectivity / Network disruption negatively affect the class 6. Poor learning Environment

Advantages of Online Classes

1. Flexible time slot/schedule:

Flexibility and convenience are major reasons behind the demand for online education. Teachers may schedule class time as per their convenience. Both teachers and students may agree to a timeslot that is suitable for their convenience.

2. More Convenient, Comfortable and Affordable:

It is viewed that learning and teaching both are possible in online mode and it is quite affordable for learners. A teacher in an opinion that it removes the travel costs if there is a need to arrange guest lectures from abroad or from distant places. Many of them believe that the online method of teaching is a unique and comfortable process of teaching-learning environment where the pupils and teachers both are having unconditional benefits of accessing the virtual learning process without being travelled. Thus, it is believed that online teaching is quite an advantage for both groups.

3. Use of software/tools/techniques:

Online teaching permits the use of various presentation software, tools and techniques. Many teachers viewed that teaching through PowerPoint Presentation is a quite useful and popular method of teaching. Besides, they expressed that in the online mode of teaching materials can be made available to learners online i.e email, WhatsApp etc. It also provides the facility to record and scope to revisit lectures and make them available to the students whenever it is required.

4. Removing the geographical barrier:

Many students commute daily to attend classes in traditional classroom teaching mode. The problem of commuting daily gets eliminated with the online teaching method. Students can sit at home and can attend classes online regularly. It also saves time for students and they can utilize quality time in their studies. Those students who fail to attend classes regularly due to geographical distance can also follow teachers' classes regularly and actively.

5. More focused and engaging:

Some teachers in the opinion that students' engagements and focuses are more in online teaching.

Disadvantages of Online Classes

1. Lack of face-to-face learning environment:

It is viewed that online or virtual learning environment does not provide face-to-face interaction or direct interaction; hence it is difficult to determine learners' level of understanding of a particular topic. It is also experienced that it is very hard to find out if a student is listening to the teacher or not.



2. Unable to establish a friendly relationship:

Due to the absence of face-to-face interaction, online teaching fails to build the teacher-student friendly relationship and enthusiasm find missing. Discussion after a class among students is quite crucial. Many students hesitate to ask a question or clarify their doubts and they feel more comfortable in peer groups. Many things which do not get clarified from teaching can be better understood when discuss with peer groups. Peer group discussion hardly finds a place in online teaching mode.

3. No means of transforming the value of education:

It is viewed that online classes cannot be the alternative way to get the proper value of education. Moreover, education is directly related to our psychological development. A traditional classroom environment can facilitate better in all-round development of a student.

4. Develop a sense of isolation:

It is opinioned that students may feel a sense of isolation in an online mode of the learning environment. In a face-to-face learning environment, they can interact directly with the teacher which has a direct psychological impact on a student.

5. Online learning demands self-discipline:

In an online learning environment student have to connect themselves to the class online on time and are required to follow all updates related to the course strictly. It is the total students' responsibility to carry out.

6. Lack of Connectivity/Network disruption negatively affects the class:

Lack of connectivity or network disruption is a very common problem in online teaching. It is a major hindrance in virtual learning. Frequent disruptions due to network failure, affect the class at large and distract the attention of the students and the situation is worse for those who try to connect from remote areas.

7. Poor learning environment:

Many a time, online education fails to provide a proper learning environment to students. A home environment is also often not suitable for all due to disturbance from children at home as well as relatives or guests.

Teachers' Perception and attitude towards online/virtual classes

Thus, the above discussion shows that although online teaching has lots of advantages, it has many disadvantages too.

The teachers' group responded that due to the absence of face-to-face learning the teacher-student-friendly relationship cannot be established. Teacher-student interaction and friendliness are needed for the all-round development of students in all aspects.

In response to the query on the preference of online teaching over offline teaching, only 20% responded affirmatively, while 80% of teachers responded in favour of offline or face-to-face teaching (Table 3 and Figure 1). In inquiry about the role of an online class in enhancing communication skills, 60% of participants believe that online teaching plays a significant role in enhancing communication skills, while 40% of participants were not satisfied with the role of online teaching in enhancing communication skills. Contrary to this, a majority of the participants think that online classes enhance comfort and engagement in dialogue. The analysis result shows that 40% of the respondents do not think that online classes enhance comfort and engagement in dialogue while 60% of respondents believe that online classes have a role to play in enhancing comfort and engagement in dialogue.

Table 3. Preference of teachers for mode of Education

Preferences	
Online class	Offline class
20%	80%



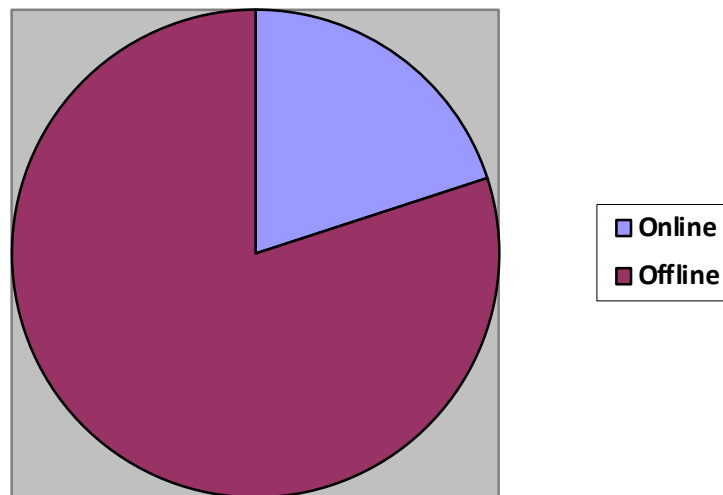


Figure 1. Mode of education preferred by teachers.

Regarding the development of four language skills through online classes, many participants viewed that, it is possible but certainly has many limitations. It is viewed that in offline class, it is possible to arrange reading, speaking and writing sessions in a better way and correction can be done immediately. It is opined that the physical environment has an important role to play in the development of all four language skills. The online or virtual class is not capable to provide the physical surrounding that is required for the healthy development of a student.

Students' Perception and attitude towards online teaching

The second questionnaire was designed for students to examine the followings-

1. Students' attitude towards online teaching.
2. Students' opinion on the role of online classes in enhancing communication skills.
3. Students' attitude towards English Language and AECC Course

While analyzing the responses of the student's group, it is found that the majority of the students enjoy online classes because of flexible scheduled and convenience and these are found to be major benefits of online learning. There is a total of 31 students participated in the study. 74 % of students responded that they like online teaching while 29% of students expressed that they do not enjoy online classes. They are numerous reasons among students to opt for offline classes i.e lack of connectivity, lack of device, poor learning environment, insufficient data package, and expensive data package. Not all students have the privilege of interacting with broadband connections and laptops. Besides, poor signal strength hugely disturbs online classroom learning. Some students also believe that their learning efficiency has been reduced extensively due to the online method of teaching and it has a huge impact on their mental and psychological state.

In response to the query on why they want to learn the English Language, the students' group expressed various reasons for learning the language. The responses of the student group are presented in the table below-

Table 4: Students responses to Reasons for learning English Language

Question	Students Responses
2. Why do you want to learn English?	For achieving goal.
	To pursue further study (BA in English Literature)
	Connected to the world and people
	For a successful future or better future.
	For the development of speaking skills and earning knowledge

	It helps to see things from a perspective or get a deeper understanding of another culture. It helps to become a better listener.
	Likeness for English
	Second most interesting subject.
	For better opportunities and communication.
	To sharpen oneself and future generation in the English language.
	Become an English professor or English teacher.
	Improve international communication, and then use for different states language. It allows one to communicate with new people
	It is a common way of communication. It helps to connect to people throughout the world and helps us to get a good job and makes our personality more attractive.
	Have a keen interest in English and always want to become a master in English speaking

In the analysis of the student group, the result shows that the majority of the students enjoy online classes. 74.% of students responded that they are happy with online classes while 26% of students showed their dissatisfaction with the online mode of teaching. In response to the query on why do they want to learn English, the students express their reasons for learning English language. While many of them viewed that they want to learn English Language as they aspire for a successful future and it is possible through learning the language perfectly by becoming a fluent speaker of it. Many of them want to learn the language as it is an international language or global language now and for higher studies, English is an essential language. Many of them viewed that they are keen to learn the language and want to become an English teacher or Professor, which is certainly encouraging. To the query whether online classes enhance comfort and engagement in dialogue, the majority, 64.5% of respondents viewed that online classes are found to be useful in enhancing comfort and engagement in dialogue. On the other hand, 35.5% of participants disagreed with the role of online classes in enhancing comfort and engagement. They also viewed that it is not possible to develop four language skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) through online classes and disagreed with the significant role of online classes in enhancing students' communication skills. 57.2% of students denied the role of an online class in the development of their communication skills while 42.8% of students believe that online classes do have some role to play in enhancing their English communication skills.

To examine students' attitudes towards the AECC course 52% of students viewed that they are satisfied with online English language classes in BA I Semester while 48% of students viewed that they are not happy with the online English classes in BA I Semester. 81% of participants are happy and satisfied with the progress they have made in English Language skills while only 19% of participants are unsatisfied with their progress. Regarding their improvement in English speaking skills, 55% of participants said that they are not much satisfied with their level of speaking skills and only 39% of participants showed their satisfaction with their level of speaking skills. Only 7% of participants said that they are not happy and satisfied with their speaking skills.

To examine students' attitudes towards their interest in pursuing Master degree in English Literature, 60% of students responded that they will not do Master's in English literature while the rest, want to continue their study of English Literature for further improvement in English speaking skills and due to growing importance of English Language.

Conclusion

The study has revealed that students are more satisfied with the traditional classroom teaching method than the online mode. All learners believe that learning and speaking English is an advantage, but they prefer classroom teaching over online. Although, they believe that a flexible schedule is the most desirable benefit of online learning but offline education has other advantages too. Based on the analysis result, it can be concluded that the teachers'



group showed their preference for offline teaching over online teaching. Only 20% of teachers responded affirmatively. 80% of teachers responded in favor of offline or face-to-face teaching. It is believed that online classes cannot be the alternative to face-to-face classroom teaching as it fails to deliver the value of education. For the overall growth and development of a student, the physical classroom is a need. In the student group, 50% of students responded affirmatively and the rest showed their preference for offline teaching. It is found that online classes will be succeeded only if all the students have access to the internet and sufficient data pack to access the materials or attend the class regularly. Not all rural students have the privilege of internet and laptop/ poor signal strength.

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Does this article screened for similarity?

Yes.

Conflict of interest

The Author has no conflicts of interest to declare that they are relevant to the content of this article.

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