Navigating Technophobia: Need for Upskilling and Reskilling English Teachers

Dr. R Latha Devi[1], Maheshwari Suresh[2], Mily Elizebeth[3], Dr. R Subhashini[4]

[1] Assistant Professor of English, University College of Engineering, Nagercoil (Anna University Constituent College). E-mail: lathadevigiri@gmail.com

[2] Lecturer, English Studies Department, Bayan College, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman. E-mail: maheshwari@bayancollege.edu.om

[3] Lecturer, General Foundation Program, Bayan College, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman. Email: mily@bayancollege.edu.om

[4] Assistant Professor, Department of English, Saveetha Engineering College, Chennai. Email: subhashinir@saveetha.ac.in

Correspondence: Dr. R Latha Devi, Assistant Professor of English, University College of Engineering, Nagercoil (Anna University Constituent College). E-mail: lathadevigiri@gmail.com

Abstract

The Pandemic which brought forth unforeseen circumstances in the field of education saw a rapid change in the methodology of the teaching and learning process, which transformed conventional classroom education into a new realm dominated by technology. This sudden change, with its newness, has attracted all the stakeholders of the educational institutions. However, teachers who have crossed the 40s or 50s find difficulty in coping with the present situation. Their confidence level worsens due to their inability to handle online classes independently. The present paper analyses the problems faced by the language teaching community towards the execution of their academic duties during the pandemic. The study found that women English teachers above 50 encountered several psychological and emotional distress in the teaching process during online classes. Some of the teachers even feel technologically unequipped to navigate the tech-centric era of education because of which they are worried about continuing teaching in case of a similar scenario.

Keywords: digital natives, technocrats, digital emigrants, cyberphobia, reskilling, technophobia

1. Introduction

Technology has taken over the education sector and is rapidly permeating into all its aspects creating a paradigm shift. Even before the pandemic, gradual incorporation of technology, including smartphones, laptops and computers had already set the stage for this educational reformation. The modern generation with its extensive knowledge of digital technology has confidently embraced this methodology shift. Technological know how has become a must for English teachers to prepare student course materials, conducting quiz and for assessing student performance. The digitalworld entices students who have the know-how of technology and might have the unique capability of using it to leverage the full potential. Researchers have already proved the success rate of ICT in education and the modern era renders challenging moments to teachers due to the changing nature of education.

Technology with its integration to education has exceptionally transformed the entire landscape of education. Despite the ubiquity of technology, a significant number of teachers panic thereby reinforcing negative thoughts which instill fear and anxiety. This underlying fear and digital inefficiency generated sleepless nights causing daymares and nightmares. The lockdown period saw a blooming technology when the students readily welcomed the new concept. Teaching community especially those who crossed 40s and 50s approached it with hesitation. They lacked digital knowledge and were technophobe. Hence, they unknowingly attempted to revert in the process of online teaching. Online teaching has become a challenge for such teaching community during the yesteryears and today. The teachers, who are the digital emigrants, are forced to teach the digital natives of today.

1.1 Technology and English Teachers

Women English Teachers who have crossed their 40s or 50s delved into the state of a dual pandemic due to the compulsion to use technology during these unprecedented times. The unconventional situation and the compulsion to use technology are the dual challenges they faced. Managing online classes took them to the extremities of forgetting their revered state in the past and with much hesitation, sought either the help of their children or their own students-(the technocrats of this century) to 'successfully' conduct the online classes. It is true that the teaching and learning habits had a paradigm shift during these online classes. The youth of today felt comfortable with the virtual world while the elderly teaching community were scared of using computers and remained dependent.

1.2 Teachers as Learners

The teachers are the repositories of knowledge and the students are its receivers. The pandemic attempted to rewrite this conventional

notion because of the teachers' lack of computer knowledge. When the world was reeling under COVID-19, the education field tried to maintain a fine balance between academics and challenges. Yet, for the elderly teaching community, the online teaching seemed to be a bolt from the blue and in fact, the pandemic period brought turmoil in their lives. An expertise of the digital learning system was mandatory for online education. Platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom, Webex were the much sought-after digitall at forms for on line learning. The teachers were forced to use any one of the digital platforms for the extension oflearning activities. But were they happy? This was the question that rose and still rises in the millions of minds of those who really care about the teaching community. The reasons may include their ignorance of the technology, fear for the new teaching method, and fear of failure. During the pandemic period, there was no stoppage for the learning process and hence the teachers, though technically sound or not, were forced to disperse their duties. To escape from the present state, such teachers ran from pillar to post to get help from other sources and finally the helping hands wereextended by their own students/children. Some of them posted their happiness in the social media claiming that theirchildren or students helped them to conduct the online classes successfully.

The mode of education has been slowly shifted to online after the pandemic. A similar situation can arise in the upcoming future too and the education field is preparatory enough to tackle such occurrences in future. But the teachers, who are going to execute the task should be technocrats. Seeking clarification from their students regarding internet, is not recommended at any point. In this pretext, the question arises whether the present trend i.e. students' helping the teachers will have a positive effect on teaching in future. The psychologists warn the present practice is a sign of danger. Because, the concept of teaching his/her teachers inculcates a sort of superiority consciousness in students which may affect their learning.

2. Review of Literature

Digital learning brings drastic changes in the field of education. The studies related to online education indicate the effectiveness of the digital tools. The teaching and learning process was the only activity which did not have a barricade but ran smoothly. The process was running but the teachers who play the key roles stood some where between the devil and the deep sea. The young teachers who are the technocrats managed the situation but the condition of the elderly teachers was in a pathetic situation due to lack of digital knowledge. According to Zhao and Cziko (2001), the teachers while using the technology should believe in the effectiveness of technology too. Moreover, they should have confident in using technology. Newhouse (2001) recommends the art of integrating the computer into the teaching practices in an effective manner. Calvo-Porral and Pesqueira-Sanchez (2020), comment that those who were born between 1965 and 1979 used technology only for gaining information till the pandemic period. According to Samifanni and Gumanit (2021), the youngsters could manage the situation with ease, but the elderly teachers who were earlier accustomed to chalk piece and textbooks received a great shock as they were not already familiar with the internet. MacIntyre (2020) found that during the pandemic period, the elderly teachers face psychological and biological issues. Cruz, et.al. (2020) determines in a study that some of the teachers have never used the technology before the pandemic except PowerPoint.

Fauzi (2023) ascertains that by exploring the use of digital technology, teachers can create more engaging lesson plans for the subjects they teach. These lessons can be entirely online or blend online and in-person classroom instruction. Given that digital learning is a method or means of communication that can offer major advantages for the interests of instructors and students, teachers must understand the features or potential of digital learning in order to make the greatest use of it for the benefit of students in learning. The world has grown increasingly competitive, entangled, and complex. People need to have information literacy, a creative attitude, and problem-solving abilities in order to survive and prosper in the age of globalization and digitization. The citizens of the twenty-first century cannot be sufficiently educated by traditional methods of instruction. A person must thus continuously improve his or her knowledge and abilities because society as a whole is changing on a regular basis. Before teachers can have a significant impact on students' critical thinking and learning, however, they must first change their outdated teaching techniques and ideas. The ease with which one can click to access a plethora of information and resources has challenged the traditional position of teachers as the only reliable source of knowledge and skills.

Amin (2016) states that teachers working in this digital era should understand the difference between "learning about" and "learning to be" and should follow the method of how "learning to be" would achieve an effective learning outcome among the learners. A student enrolled in a teacher education program should be directly exposed to teaching techniques in order to ensure that they are properly involved in the discipline in which they are supposed to be learning. The teacher's involvement will be critical in moving from the technical to the teaching point as the digital peripheral can accommodate learners for subject discovery to figure out lessons in a digital form. A teacher with digital literacy skills can help pupils develop scientific temper, critical thinking, and creativity to becomelifelong learners and innovators. The teacher's job is tointroduce students to higher levels of knowledge and expertise through blended learning, expert lectures, seminars, workshops, and other events. Ateacher'srole is crucial in creating a comprehensive database that includes information about the academic, personal, and psycho-socialsupport and guidance services, professional counselling, mentorship, and academic advising that students receive. Teachers should enhance the teaching-learning process by utilizinge-library resources.

Srivastava and Dey (2018) observed the problems teachers face when integrating digital technology into their lessons. Their research revealed that teachers have average views about the use of digital tools in the classroom, but they also face significant difficulties when it comes to time, resources, and technical support. Similarly, Garcia-Perez, et.al. (2016) examined that many education instructors had a moderate level of digital literacy while using the digital tools and social networks. Rakenes and Krumsvik (2016) in their research with teachers came to a conclusion that the reception of new methods and approaches in the teaching field, collaborative learning are important

for the teacher's digital literacy growth.

Pawar (2021) states that Digital Literacy is one of the essential competencies of a modern Indian in both urban and rural societies, and gaining knowledge and skills in the field of ICT is one of the criteria for effective social integration in contemporary society and the labour market in urban India. Consequently, these two ideas have been included in the framework of the national educational system in order to attain quality education.

Salam, et.al. (2023) found in their research study that EFL teachers with prior experience in digital media faced challenges such as inadequate technological expertise, difficulty in lesson planning, and technical skills. These issues led to insufficient time and student discipline in online learning activities. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated creativity, provided necessary resources, and sought assistance from skilled colleagues.

3. Methodology

To provide a comprehensive overview of the digital literacy rate among women English teachers, the study involved a mixed methodology of both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

The researchers have conducted a pilot study to validate the clarity and reliability of the survey which would effectively represent the target population. The questionnaire was designed to ensure the accurate assessment of various aspects of the digital literacy rate of the teachers.

The questionnaires were administered online and the responses were received using Google Forms. The questionnaire comprised 21 questions including demographics, familiarity with digital tools during the pandemic, frequency of internet usage, usage of social media platforms, digital dependency, challenges faced, stress factors and comfort level in using digital tools.

Interview with students:

The students were instructed to assemble in a hall for face-to-face interviews which approximately lasted for about 30 minutes. All the interviews were audio recorded with the consent of student participants. Subsequently, the recordings were transcribed verbatim to generate textual data for analysis.

4. Discussion

The present paper presents a study in which the researchers intend to explain English teachers' perceptions regarding the operationalization of digital gadgets during the pandemic in Indian higher education setup. It also studies the hapless condition of the teachers due to their inefficiency in handling digital gadgets. Survey method was used for the distribution of the questionnaire. Survey response scales like dichotomous, multiple, single choices and ordinal are followed to get responses from the participants. It tries to address the challenges and solutions to the existing problem so that they can be the primary authority during online classes. Experts from various fields of education were consulted and pilot tests were carried out to validate the data collection and the survey was later reformulated to the final version. To get the effectiveness of the study, we have conducted interviews with the students who attended online classes during the period and have selected 30 students for this research. For the current study, the researchers have adopted questionnaire and interview method. The present study is limited to the female teachers in English, working in Engineering Colleges in the south of Tamil Nadu, India and 30 teachers were taken for the study. The findings of the current study were purely based on the responses given by the respondents.
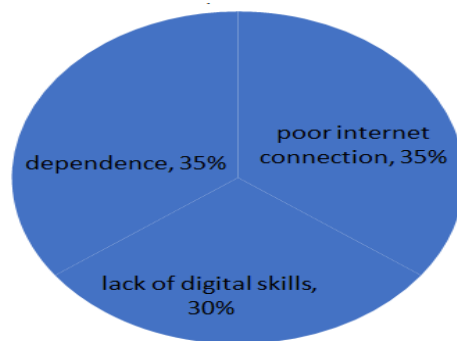

Figure 1. Challenges in the Virtual World

The study tries to reveal the problems faced by elderly teachers who have crossed their 40s and50s during the online teaching process. They were forced to handle the classes using the technology, which was an unknown history for them. To retain their job, they began to use technology with anxiety. The sudden shift from chalk to tab, notes to notepad made their career and mental health more problematic. The overwhelming fear of technology affected the course of the teaching process. This state of Cyber phobia developed despair, anxiety, stress and other negative traits among the elderly teachers. The above figure based on the present study validates the plight of the female teachers during the pandemic period. Nearly 35 percent of teachers were excessively dependent on their family members, their children or their

students and another 35 percent struck down with poor internet connection and almost 30% of the teachers felt guilty of their state due to their dependent state and the guiltis still fresh in their memory.

4.1 Challenges Faced by the Teachers

The findings indicate that the percentage of the female participants who couldn't operate the smartphone is 29%. They stated that they borrowed the phones for teaching either from their children or husbands and were afraid of using them fearing that they might mishandle them. Notably, the fear evolved out of their ignorance towards the usage of the entity. Nearly 55% of the teachers opine that their confidence level vanished as the online classes took the lead substituting the offline classes.
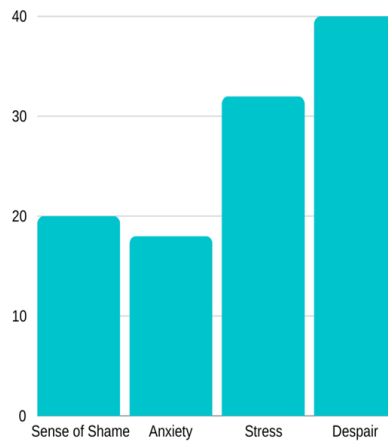

Figure 2. Mental State of Teachers during Pandemic Period

The table above shows the mental state of the faculty members during the pandemic. During the online classes, there were instances where students made fun of the teachers when the latter sought clarification on digital tools usage. In addition to that, the teachers had to depend on their technical assistants even for basic device navigation and the rendition was often not voluntary which provoked a sense of shame. Further, the act of dependence made them guilty and they became anxious about their inability and they underestimated their talent thereby concluding that they were unfit to handle online classes. According to the table, online classes caused despair for 40 percent of teachers. The next prominent category in the mental state of the teachers is stress followed by a sense of shame and 20 percent of the teachers suffer from a sense of shame. Anxiety too had a role in determining the mental state of the teacher.
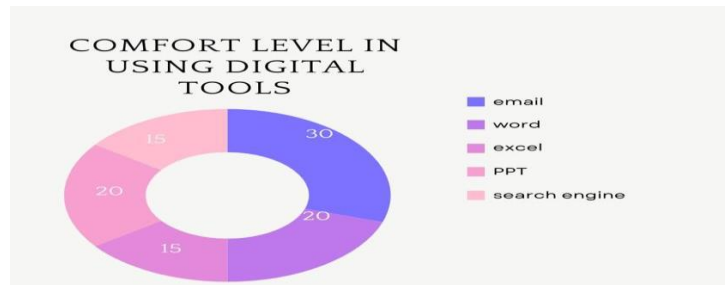

Figure 3. Comfort Level in Using Digital Tools

From the above table, it is inferred that emails are used by 30% of the respondents. Approximately, 20 percent of respondents show aptitude in using Word and Excel, and PPTs are used by 10 percent of the respondents. It is noted that the users of email are slightly higher than the users of other digital applications. The study shows that approximately 66% of teachers do not possess basic computer skills. 80% of the teachers felt exhausted at the end of their day after teaching online. 70% felt tired due to the exposure of more screen time. 10% of the teachers felt embarrassed to sit in front of the camera for a long time and 20% of the teachers felt rejected over the poor internet connection. About 30% of the teachers do not want to retain their journey in the teaching field if another pandemic occurs.

4.2 Students Feedback on the Online Classes during the Lockdown

The students are the target points of the online classes. To bring effective outcomes in online education, the study has been conducted. The feedback of the students is collected to strengthen the course ofthe study. About 72 % of the students opine that their teachers struggled to reach them during the pandemic. The comments of the students are furnished below:

- We wished our teachers were more interactive and engaging.
- I wanted to get more online support from our teachers regarding the online resources.
- I wanted to watch the recorded lecture of my teachers but I couldn't get it as my teachers didn't know how to record the online session.

- Most of the teachers could not even turn on their cameras. Hence, we remained silent and did some other work which gave no scope for interaction or discussion.

- Online classes could have been so much more engaging if our teachers knew how to use the digital tools properly.

- We spent more time trouble shooting technical issues and hence our learning time was minimized which sometimes led to frustration.

- Our teachers, sometimes, really struggled to use the online platforms. Sometimes, classes would be delayed because they could not figure out how to start a video call or share their screen properly.

- During a class, when a teacher asked for clarification regarding a digital tool, one of my classmates misguided her and made fun of her too.

- The teachers who were very much friendly with us during the offline class, sometimes felt nervous and appeared to be serious.

- Our teachers tried their level best to come out of the unexampled situation. One day, one of our teachers forgot to turn on the mike and conducted the class.

- Teachers suffered a lot towards taking attendance and I used to share the screenshots.

- In one of the classes, someone with fake ID entered the meet and sang songs and disturbed the entire class. As the teacher did not know how to remove the boy from the meet, he stayed there throughout the class and made the class messy.

4.3 Need for Reskilling

English has been accepted as the global language which connects people throughout the world. The status as a global language brings the necessity of simplifying the learning procedures and this aspiration has resulted in diverse English language practices. English language teaching before the 2020 pandemic, were monotonous and dull for the students. The English language learning classes with its traditional inputs, predominantly focused on getting mastery over grammatical structures rather than on the development of communicative proficiency of the language. Hence, the students were tempted to memorize the essays, paragraphs and even the grammar portions and their English knowledge was tested during their examinations. However, some limited institutions in India were exceptions in executing the learning tasks in compliance to the online mode which is more popular in foreign universities. Researchers have already proved the success rate of ICT in education and the contemporary era renders challenges to the teachers because of technological acceleration.

The English teachers should be equipped with knowledge on fast-changing online tools and techniques. Redesigning their present role becomes the need of the hour. The classroom practices are to be modified in terms of the present situation. The fear of online classes is associated with their lack of familiarity with the digital tools. Hence, colleges may conduct workshops and seminars to impart these digital skills among the teachers. The teachers who are not so familiar with technology can collaborate and learn from other tech-savvy teachers. Furthermore, the digital knowledge may be enhanced by attending more online courses. The teachers while developing their digital knowledge are further expected to adhere to the following foran effective digital experience.

4.3.1 Familiarize with Teaching and Learning Tools

The teachers can be trained to use the key tools such as chat, screen sharing, raise hands, work in groups etc. If the teacher is a first-time user of the online platform, try with friends and relatives in advance. Even prior sharing of the meeting link with them will improve the teachers' level of confidence and will help them to relax and focus more on effective online sessions.

4.3.2 Seek Students' Feedback

Feedback may be collected related to students' perspectives, preferences, and level of difficulty to access the class. It will help in measuring the students' level of understanding in response to the class.

4.3.3 Be Constant Learners

It is essential to enroll in workshops, and MOOC courses on ICT which in turn will help them to leverage digital technology in their teaching practices.

4.3.4 Focus on Activities Based Learning

The online environment is quite contrary to the live classes due to the absence of eye contact and non-verbal cues and their inability to discuss with their friends. Hence, the students may feel bored during the online classes and too vercome this issue, the teachers may employa variety of activities such as quiz, role play etc. For Group discussions, the teachers may assign students to go to the "Breakout Rooms" to give them time to prepare. The teachers should ensure that these kinds of activities create anticipation, interest and motivation among the students.

5. Conclusion

After the pandemic, it is evident that online education has become an inexorable criterion and it is imperative to take steps to enrich the digital knowledge of the teachers. The teachers play a crucial role in making this new teaching forum a successful one. Hence reskilling the teachers has become vital. They should be self-motivated to develop the knowledge and ability to utilize computers and related technology. The findings of the study give an alarming message regarding the digital literacy of the teachers and their mental state and it is the need of

the hour to impart the digital skills among the teachers in order to alleviate technophobia among them. The educational authorities and college administrators need to devise strategies that combat the issues related to improving digital proficiency among the teachers.

Authors' contributions

Dr. R. Latha Devi conceptualized the study, designed the methodology, analysed the data, and wrote the manuscript (excluding the literature review). Ms. Maheshwari Suresh contributed to the literature review, reviewed the manuscript and provided technical support. Ms. Mily Elizabeth reviewed the manuscript provided critical feedback on the experimental design and provided technical support. DR. R. Subhashini assisted in the conclusion and guided the overall research direction.

Competing interests

NA

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhereto the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer-reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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Appendix

Survey Questions

General questions

1. What is your age?

2. Did you own any of the following devices during pandemic?

    a. Desktop

    b. Laptop

    c. Smartphone

    d. Tablet

    e. None of the above

3. Before the pandemic, I used internet

    a. Daily

    b. Once a week

    c. Often

    d. Rarely

Statements with ordinal scale questions:

4. Please rate your comfort level with the following during the pandemic period

	Basic	Intermediate	Advance	No Knowledge
Word	•	•	•	•
Excel	•	•	•	•
PPT	•	•	•	•
email	•	•	•	•
Search engine	•	•	•	•

Dichotomous type questions

5. Did you have an account in the social media before the pandemic period?

6. If "Yes", in which platforms?

    a. Twitter

    b. Instagram

    c. Facebook

    d. Linkedin

    e. Other

7. Have you received any training sessions/workshops on the use of digital tools before the pandemic?

8. Have you received any ICT training in recent times?

9. Have you attended any MOOCs (MassiveOpenOnlineCourse)?

10. If "Yes", name the course.

11. Did you seek assistance from family members, your children, or from your students in using digital tools during the lockdown?

12. When seeking assistance from family members, your children, or from your students in using digital tools
during the lockdown, did you feel a sense of shame or embarrassment?

13. Did your students take advantage towards your lack of digital awareness?

14. Have you ever faced stress and anxiety for not having enough computer skills during the pandemic period?

15. If any pandemic situation occurs, I will

    a. Quit the job

    b. Develop digital skills

    c. I will do the best of my ability

16. What were the challenges you faced during the online teaching

    a. Poor internetconnection

    b. dependence

    c. Less digital skills

    d. All the above

17. During the pandemic period, my confidence in teaching was

    a. Low

    b. High

    c. Moderate