

The Impact of Covid-19 Lockdown on English Language Teaching & Learning in India

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Abstract

Every misfortune gives some fresh thought, and this usually changes the lives of the leaners, leaders, and common folk. In the evolution of human race countless obstacles, viz., poverty, famine, maladies, fraudulent politics, insecure economics, irresponsible leadership, agonizing wars and such have arisen; unfold generations have passed through such inexpressible experiences, but man with his 'never say die' attitude has never stopped learning. Learning from difficulties, dangers, disasters, and diseases has transformed learners into good men. Unimaginably, significant changes have happened in the realm of English Language Teaching and learning during Covid-19 lock down period. This paper mirrors the actual changes occurred in the lives and careers of English teachers of India.

Keywords: ELT in India, Covid19, obstacles, changes, English Language, Teaching and Learning.

Cruel Wings of Covid-19

Covid-19 has spread like wildfire, silently sometimes, rattling other times, into all the spheres of human life viz. health, economy, travel, entertainment, agriculture, and trade. From the public to national leaders, from farmers to industrialists all have experienced and still experiencing bitterness, fear, anxiety, uncertainty of their existence. With the Government's inevitable announcement of lockdown, lives have been strictly confined to homes. Poor lives have been crumpled unimaginably. The old have been jolted as they are vulnerable, the youth have felt sad about the strict restrictions imposed on them to stay home. Amid these bitter situations, a summer shower is that one of the least ill-affected areas is education. Closing gates of the institutes have led to the opening of boundless teaching-learning opportunities though it comes with its own package of limitations.

ELTAI, the Pioneer

Comparatively, English Language teaching-learning has a better claim than any other learning area during this lockdown period. The principal reason is that language learning is not complex like technical and professional subjects such as Engineering, Architecture, and Pharmacy. In the field of education in India, one of the swift responding organisations is ELTAI (English Language Teachers' Association of India). This largest and purely professional organisation, even though not adequately equipped with advance technological efficiency, quickly grasping the situation, has taken first step with a fresh perspective. ELTAI National committee has organised and I still organising a series of webinars for the teachers and learners of English on a plethora of beneficial topics. Taking cue from this, fifty-two ELTAI Chapters from all the corners of India have become more active and have started hosting different online activities. Useful and innovative topics have been chosen. Both in number and innovation theirs is a bold lead. For instance, ELTAI Visakhapatnam Chapter, organised two workshops for English teachers in two years' time before lockdown. Within the past two months it organised half of a half dozen webinars. One webinar on the dictionaries organised by ELTAI Visakhapatnam was quite interesting and new. Solapur chapter organised a webinar on English for competitive exams which is fairly useful to both teachers and students. These are just a few representations of a wide variety of topics on which a lot of webinars and online workshops have been organised.

As stated earlier, emerging online activities have created new opportunities to skillful teachers. Irrefutably, it has exceeded, in innovation, quality and number, internationally reputed programmes and could reach majority of English teaching fraternity of all the corners of India. The Heads of the Department of English in many institutes, majority in collaboration with ELTAI and a few on their own, too inspired by the leading step of ELTAI have started online activities like quizzes in Language and literature, Faculty Development Programmes, Panel discussions, etc.

Teachers' & Learners' Autonomy

Coming to individuals, teachers have begun to focus on improving their technological skills by joining Moodle courses offered by globally famed ELT experts and reputed universities like Cambridge, California, Yale etc. Individual learners have started to concentrate on different aspects of English language - grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation and have tried to utilise numerous online resources which they neglected when regular offline classrooms were in progress. Some started polishing their skills taking a promise to utilise the unexpected leisure. Majority of the English teachers, as there is no additional work like designing activities & competitions, invigilation, paper valuation, usually done in organisations, started utilising the spare time focusing on the difficult area.

Lockdown has introduced language teachers and learners a wider world and resources. The focus of both teachers and students was/is only the class. Both have now started understanding and

utilising the vast material available. Sufficient leisure time has made them explore the world through sources like social media, website, online courses, and digital libraries of the globe from their own nest. After all, language learning happens when good exposure exists. Undoubtedly Covid-19 lockdown created this required environment which has quickened the learners to learn with joy and teachers to go that extra mile.

The Dark Side of the Brightness

There is always another side to brightness. The above is only, of course majority, for those who have sufficient and good internet facilities and devices like laptop, mobile phone etc. In our country there are numerous villages which do not have internet connectivity. For learners from these areas going to school is the only source of learning. The lockdown has brought definably a break in their learning in general and language learning in specific.

Role of Educational Institutes

Understanding the current scenario, the educational institutions have to consider this as a transitional period and have to provide moral, economical, technological support to teachers and learners to use the available resources to continue the never-ending teaching learning process effectively. It is the high time to prove that the objective of educational institute is not gaining monetary benefits but to help the society through education.

Government's Responsibilities

Both state and central governments should come up with new policies suitable to the present scenario. It is good to know that MHRD directed UGC, the highest governing institute for higher education in India, constituted committees to study and submit a report. Government must allocate adequate amount of money for online learning equipment as halt in the education is the halt of the progress of the country.

As Pradeep Sahu insightfully states, “It is the right time for faculty, students, and administrators to learn from this critical situation and to overcome these challenges. Online learning could be a greater opportunity because of this crisis. Students are young and energetic, and they are capable of learning through the online platform. Faculty can motivate the younger minds and draw them into active participation. University authorities should encourage students and faculty to stay connected through the online or any social media platform and move forward together during this extremely difficult time” (2020).

Conclusion

Teachers are always in the front row in understanding difficulties and serving the society. In the tough times of Covid-19, teachers too are playing their role as fighters along with doctors, police and sanitary workers. Many social organisations are providing food to the needy likewise

ELTAI is doing in its own sector. One should not forget that ELTAI and the teachers of English are doing commendable job. Many more professional organisations like ELTAI are the need of the hour for the betterment of society.

References

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