

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 11 : 9 September 2011

ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.

S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

G. Baskaran, Ph.D.

L. Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.

Role of Virtual Technology in Teaching English

V. Rajesh M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate

J. Jaya Parveen M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate

Abstract

Virtual classrooms facilitate the delivery of knowledge and skill development through Internet in a cost-effective and efficient manner. With a descriptive research design, an evaluative study was conducted in SKP Institute of Technology, Tiruvannamalai, where both the authors worked before they moved to the present college. 200 students and 20 teachers were involved in the study. Prior training on how to use virtual classrooms was given to the students and teachers. During the study, different ESL tasks were used to develop the reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills of the students. At the end of the course, teachers and students filled in a few questionnaires.

The quantitative findings showed the students and teachers' understanding of virtual classroom tools and features. They also revealed the students' understanding of use and relevance of ESL tasks in virtual classroom. In addition, they showed the teachers' views on the role of virtual technology in ESL classroom management. This was done as a part of formative evaluation to improve the ongoing process of using virtual technology in ESL classrooms or language labs.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 9 September 2011

V. Rajesh M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate and J. Jaya Parveen M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate

Role of Virtual Technology in Teaching English

118

1. Introduction

Virtual technology has become popular because of its easy access and affordable cost. Its effective usage has led to significant changes in educational models. The traditional classroom has shifted to virtual classroom creating the most radical transformation in higher education. Using virtual technology has become as easy as communicating with a teacher and students through chat or email, students utilizing an interactive CD-ROM for learning, etc. (Salmon, 2004).

Language learning theories and instructional design models are combined to form virtual course content. Traditional lectures and grammar lessons are replaced by PowerPoint Presentations, Flash animations, Java games, etc. Group chat, email, blogs, forums, podcasts, etc. are initiated to enhance language learning. Teachers are more like facilitators, and students are encouraged to do self-directed learning (Thompson, Simonsen, & Hargrave, 1996). Crossing all the boundaries like nationality, race, religion, caste, age, etc., virtual education promotes language learning in a full-fledged manner. The 21st century witnesses the wide-spread use of virtual technology or virtualization technology in Teaching English as Second Language.

2. Background of the Study

The word ‘virtual’ means ‘created, simulated, or carried on by means of a computer or computer network’. When the word was first introduced, it was applied to things simulated by the computer like virtual memory (memory that is not actually built into the processor). Later on, the word is applied to many things that are created or carried on by means of computers (Ally, 2004). The concept of virtualization is very broad. It can be applied to devices, servers, operating systems, applications, networks, etc.

From entertainment to education, virtual technology is rapidly transforming the way people live and work around the globe (Paulsen, 2003). Virtual conversations take place between people from different localities over the computer networks. Virtual communities are social groups which socialise through blogs, forums, email, chat, etc. Virtual education is the type of education provided using the Internet. Virtual classroom aims to simulate the experience of attending a class over the web.

Virtual technology is essentially about educational improvement, school reform, and improving academic performance. With a little more work on technology infrastructure such as Internet access, laptop or computers in classrooms, and proper professional development to convert more certified teachers into facilitators of online learning, virtual technology can work well in education sector. It enables teachers and students to access computers on centralized servers in the data centre (Kock, 2005).

Virtual technology simplifies compliance along with remote connectivity and allows academic organizations to manage physical and virtual desktops from a single console in the data

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 9 September 2011

V. Rajesh M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate and J. Jaya Parveen M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate
Role of Virtual Technology in Teaching English

centre. It provides teachers with new tools to engage and educate the students in more meaningful ways. Nowadays teachers and students are using virtual technology to support more multifaceted learning (Naidu, 2003). All over the world, virtual technology or virtualization technology is used successfully in Teaching English as Second Language.

3. Location of the Study

SKP Institute of Technology is an engineering college with four departments (Mechanical, Civil, Electronics and Communication, and Computer Science) in it. It is located in the outskirts of Tiruvannamalai district. Nearly 900 students are studying in this college. The college has a language lab which contains 100 computers with in-built speakers and microphones. Different software are used in the systems for ESL teaching. The college with its advanced language lab is taken as the location of the study. Both the authors of this paper had worked in this college before they moved to their present college.

4. Samples of the Study

Students and teachers from SKP Institute of Technology are the participants of this research. 200 students who learn English as Second Language are chosen as samples. 20 teachers who have teaching experience are involved in the study.

5. Data Collection

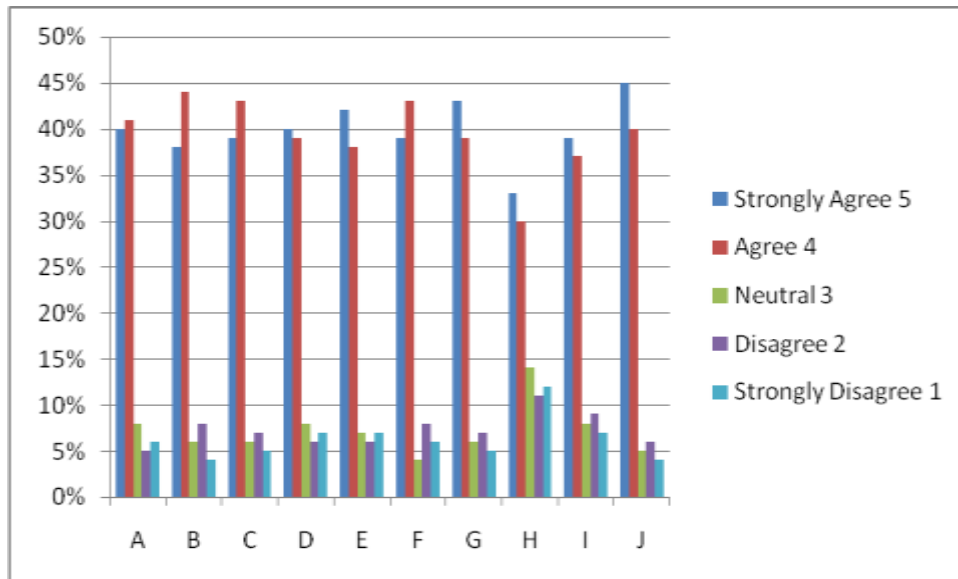
The survey questionnaires were given to the research samples (200 students and 20 teachers) in person. Instructions on how to fill in the questionnaires were given. The samples filled in the questionnaires within one hour's time. The questionnaires contained Likert type questions which contributed to the quantitative data collection. Some teachers and students filled in the comments column providing qualitative data on the advantages or problems in virtual classrooms.

6. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 6.1 Students' Understanding of Virtual Classroom Tools and Features:

Students' Understanding of Virtual Classroom (n = 200)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
	5	4	3	2	1			
1. The Virtual Classroom is easy to use.	40%	41%	8%	5%	6%	20	18.74833	351.5
2. Text chat is convenient and fast.	38%	44%	6%	8%	4%	20	19.33908	374
3. Phone and VoIP facilities are available.	39%	43%	6%	7%	5%	20	19.23538	370
4. The whiteboard is highly interactive.	40%	39%	8%	6%	7%	20	17.81853	317.5
5. PPT Presentations can be uploaded quickly.	42%	38%	7%	6%	7%	20	18.31666	335.5
6. Videos or flash animations can be uploaded easily.	39%	43%	4%	8%	6%	20	19.27434	371.5
7. Web browser can be shared easily.	43%	39%	6%	7%	5%	20	19.23538	370
8. Application sharing facility is available.	33%	30%	14%	11%	12%	20	10.6066	112.5
9. Team collaboration can be initiated.	39%	37%	8%	9%	7%	20	16.46208	271
10. Sessions can be recorded for future reference.	45%	40%	5%	6%	4%	20	20.62765	425.5

Graph 6.1 Students' Understanding of Virtual Classroom Tools and Features:



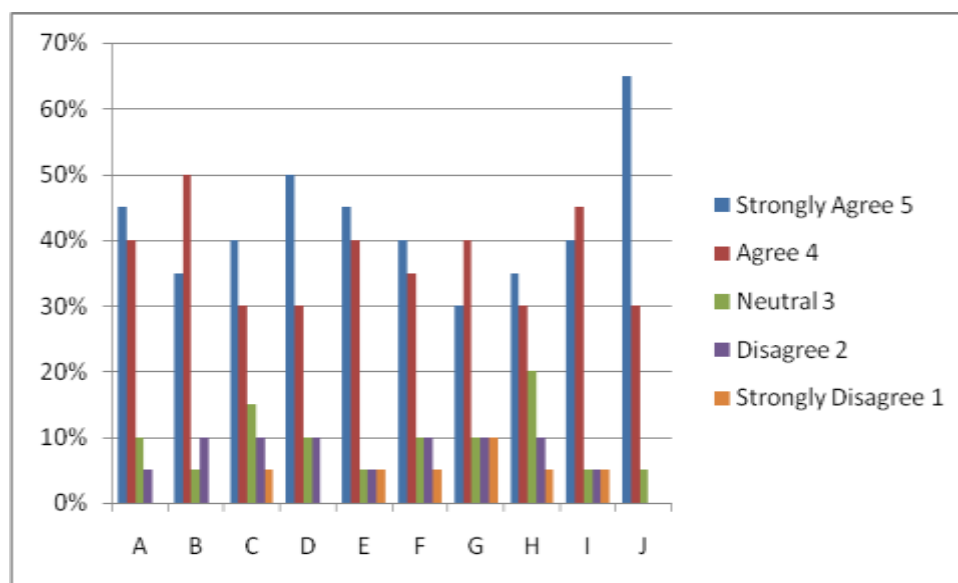
The Virtual Classroom is easy to use.

- A. Text chat is convenient and fast.
- B. Phone and VoIP facilities are available.
- C. The whiteboard is highly interactive.
- D. PPT Presentations can be uploaded quickly.
- E. Videos or flash animations can be uploaded easily.
- F. Web browser can be shared easily.
- G. Application sharing facility is available.
- H. Team collaboration can be initiated.
- I. Sessions can be recorded for future reference.

Table 6.2 Teachers' Understanding of Virtual Classroom Tools and Features:

Teachers' Understanding of Virtual Classroom (n = 20)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
	5	4	3	2	1			
1. The Virtual Classroom is easy to use.	45%	40%	10%	5%	0	25	20.41241	416.6667
2. Text chat is convenient and fast.	35%	50%	5%	10%	0	25	21.2132	450
3. Phone and VoIP facilities are available.	40%	30%	15%	10%	5%	20	14.57738	212.5
4. The whiteboard is highly interactive.	50%	30%	10%	10%	0	25	19.14854	366.6667
5. PPT Presentations can be uploaded quickly.	45%	40%	5%	5%	5%	20	20.61553	425
6. Videos or flash animations can be uploaded easily.	40%	35%	10%	10%	5%	20	16.20185	262.5
7. Web browser can be shared easily.	30%	40%	10%	10%	10%	20	14.14214	200
8. Application sharing facility is available.	35%	30%	20%	10%	5%	20	12.74755	162.5
9. Team collaboration can be initiated.	40%	45%	5%	5%	5%	20	20.61553	425
10. Sessions can be recorded for future reference.	65%	30%	5%	0	0	33.33333	30.13857	908.3333

Graph 6.2 Teachers' Understanding of Virtual Classroom Tools and Features:



- The Virtual Classroom is easy to use.
- A. Text chat is convenient and fast.
 - B. Phone and VoIP facilities are available.
 - C. The whiteboard is highly interactive.
 - D. PPT Presentations can be uploaded quickly.
 - E. Videos or flash animations can be uploaded easily.
 - F. Web browser can be shared easily.
 - G. Application sharing facility is available.
 - H. Team collaboration can be initiated.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 9 September 2011

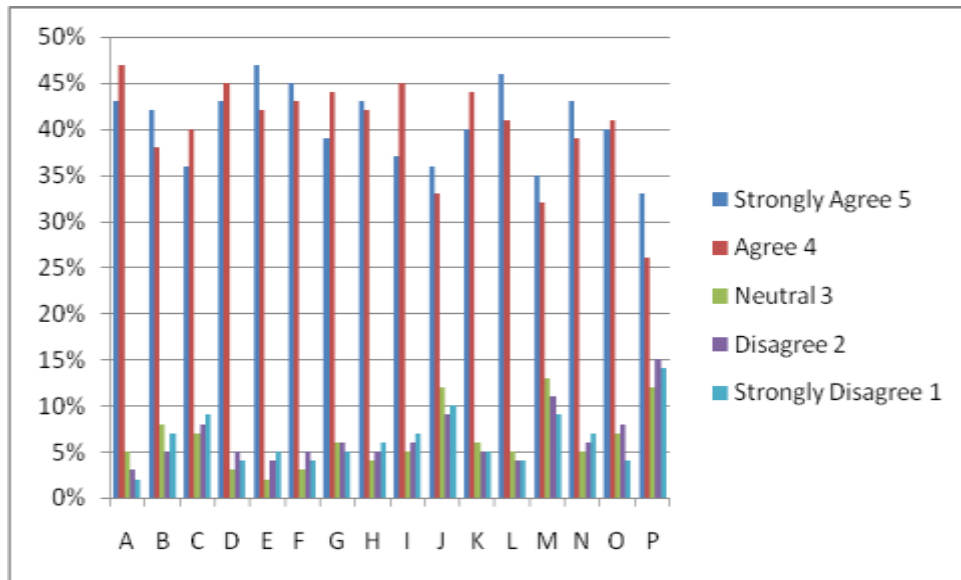
V. Rajesh M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate and J. Jaya Parveen M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate
Role of Virtual Technology in Teaching English

I. Sessions can be recorded for future reference.

Table 6.3 Students’ Understanding of the Use and Relevance of ESL Tasks in Virtual Classroom:

Students’ Understanding of the Use and Relevance of ESL Tasks in Virtual Classroom (n = 200)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variation
	5	4	3	2	1			
A. I use the text chat for asking doubts.	43%	47%	5%	3%	2%	20	22.89105	524
B. I use the whiteboard for taking / making notes.	42%	38%	8%	5%	7%	20	18.34394	336.5
C. Skimming and scanning are done using the whiteboard tools.	36%	40%	7%	8%	9%	20	16.50757	272.5
D. Teachers share websites for reading practice.	43%	45%	3%	5%	4%	20	21.93171	481
E. Teachers share PPT presentations to teach grammar concepts.	47%	42%	2%	4%	5%	20	22.46108	504.5
F. Teachers give flash or java games for vocabulary and grammar practice.	45%	43%	3%	5%	4%	20	21.93171	481
G. Teachers use video for listening practice.	39%	44%	6%	6%	5%	20	19.7104	388.5
H. Teachers share software application for pronunciation practice.	43%	42%	4%	5%	6%	20	20.5548	422.5
I. VoIP is used for speaking practice.	37%	45%	5%	6%	7%	20	19.39072	376
J. Teachers give task-based exercises and case-studies.	36%	33%	12%	9%	10%	20	13.32291	177.5
K. Email, blog, and forums are used to enhance writing skills.	40%	44%	6%	5%	5%	20	20.13703	405.5
L. The ESL tasks are important for my professional practice.	46%	41%	5%	4%	4%	20	21.52905	463.5
M. The tasks make me think critically about different issues.	35%	32%	13%	11%	9%	20	12.4499	155
N. I can interact with my teacher and other students.	43%	39%	5%	6%	7%	20	19.23538	370
O. The teacher encourages and motivates me.	40%	41%	7%	8%	4%	20	18.77498	352.5
P. Teachers and students give constructive feedback.	33%	26%	12%	15%	14%	20	9.08295	82.5

Graph 6.3 Students’ Understanding of the Use and Relevance of ESL Tasks in Virtual Classroom:

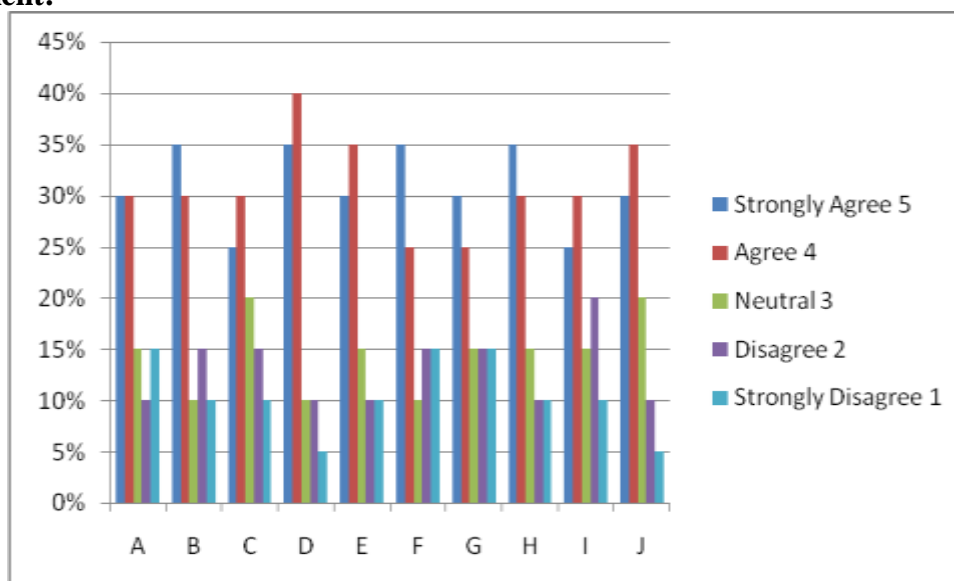


- A. I use the text chat for asking doubts.
- B. I use the whiteboard for taking / making notes.
- C. Skimming and scanning are done using the whiteboard tools.
- D. Teachers share websites for reading practice.
- E. Teachers share PPT presentations to teach grammar concepts.
- F. Teachers give flash or java games for vocabulary and grammar practice.
- G. Teachers use video for listening practice.
- H. Teachers share software application for pronunciation practice.
- I. VoIP is used for speaking practice.
- J. Teachers give task-based exercises and case-studies.
- K. Email, blog, and forums are used to enhance writing skills.
- L. The ESL tasks are important for my professional practice.
- M. The tasks make me think critically about different issues.
- N. I can interact with my teacher and other students.
- O. The teacher encourages and motivates me.
- P. Teachers and co-students give constructive feedback.

Table 6.4 Teachers' Views on the Role of Virtual Technology in ESL Classroom Management:

Teachers' Views on the Role of Virtual Technology in ESL Classroom Management (n = 20)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variation
	5	4	3	2	1			
A. It is easy to manage the students in a virtual classroom.	30%	30%	15%	10%	15%	20	9.35414	87.5
B. Students never make noise while in the virtual classroom.	35%	30%	10%	15%	10%	20	11.72604	137.5
C. Students never get diverted while in the virtual classroom.	25%	30%	20%	15%	10%	20	7.90569	62.5
D. Students never fall asleep while in the virtual classroom.	35%	40%	10%	10%	5%	20	16.20185	262.5
E. Students view the PPT or videos again and again for better understanding.	30%	35%	15%	10%	10%	20	11.72604	137.5
F. Students never go to other websites while in the virtual classroom.	35%	25%	10%	15%	15%	20	10	100
G. Students never use the chat for personal communication.	30%	25%	15%	15%	15%	20	7.07107	50
H. Students respond to emails regularly.	35%	30%	15%	10%	10%	20	11.72604	137.5
I. Students never miss the deadlines to post blogs.	25%	30%	15%	20%	10%	20	7.90569	62.5
J. Students accept the feedback or comments positively.	30%	35%	20%	10%	5%	20	12.74755	162.5

Graph 6.4 Teachers' Views on the Role of Virtual Technology in ESL Classroom Management:



- A. It is easy to manage the students in a virtual classroom.
- B. Students never make noise while in the virtual classroom.
- C. Students never get diverted while in the virtual classroom.
- D. Students never fall asleep while in the virtual classroom.
- E. Students view the PPT or videos again and again for better understanding.
- F. Students never go to other websites while in the virtual classroom.
- G. Students never use the chat for personal communication.
- H. Students respond to emails regularly.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 9 September 2011

V. Rajesh M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate and J. Jaya Parveen M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate
 Role of Virtual Technology in Teaching English

- I. Students never miss the deadlines to post blogs.
- J. Students accept the feedback or comments positively.

7. Findings

- 200 students involved in this study were asked about their understanding of virtual classroom. 79.2% of them gave positive comments. This showed that 79.2% of the students found the virtual classroom easy to use. They recognised the use of text chat, phone, VoIP, interactive whiteboard, PPT / video / animation upload, web-browser / application sharing, team collaboration, session-recording, etc. 13.6% of them gave negative comments and 7.2% of them gave no comments. This showed that 20.9% of the students were not clear about the tools, features, and facilities in the virtual classroom.
- 20 teachers involved in the study were asked about their understanding of virtual classroom. 79.5% of them gave positive comments. This showed that 79.5% of the teachers found the virtual classroom easy to use. They used the text chat, phone, VoIP, interactive whiteboard, PPT / video / animation upload, web-browser / application sharing, team collaboration, session-recording, etc. for different purposes in ESL classrooms. 9.5% of them gave negative comments and 11% of them gave no comments. This showed that 19.5% of the teachers did not use the tools, features, and facilities in the virtual classroom effectively.
- When the students were asked about their understanding of the use and relevance of ESL tasks in virtual classroom, 80.62% gave positive comments. This showed that 80.62% of them understood the importance of note-taking / note-making exercises, skimming and scanning tasks, shared websites, PPT presentations, flash or java games, video, software applications, task-based exercises, case-studies, email, blogs, forums, etc. in the ESL virtual classroom. They acknowledged that the ESL tasks promoted professional practice, enhance critical thinking, develop interaction, etc. They agreed that the teachers encouraged, motivated, and gave them constructive feedback. 12.94% of them gave negative comments and 6.44% gave no comments. This showed that 19.38% did not realise the use and relevance of ESL tasks in virtual classrooms.
- When the teachers were asked about the role of virtual technology in ESL classroom management, 62% of them gave positive comments. This showed that 62% of teachers found it easy to manage the students in a virtual classroom. Students never made noise, never got diverted, and never fell asleep while in the virtual classroom. They viewed the PPT or videos again and again for better understanding. They never went to other websites and never used the chat for personal communication. They responded to emails regularly and never missed the deadlines to post blogs. They accepted the feedback or comments positively. 23.5% of the teachers gave negative comments and 14.5% gave no comments. This showed that 38% of them found it difficult to manage the students in the virtual classroom due to various factors.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 9 September 2011

V. Rajesh M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate and J. Jaya Parveen M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate
Role of Virtual Technology in Teaching English

8. Conclusions

- Virtual technology can be best used in the ESL classrooms only if technical training is given more importance. During this study, technical training is given to all the students and teachers. In spite of it, 20.9% of the students and 19.5% of the teachers are not clear about the tools, features, and facilities in the virtual classroom. More rigorous training should be given to the students and teachers before using the virtual technology in ESL classrooms.
- Virtual technology can be used to do a lot of activities online: note-taking / note-making, skimming and scanning tasks, website sharing, PPT presentations, flash or java games, video, software applications, task-based exercises, case-studies, email, blogs, forums, etc. These activities help the students promote professional practice, enhance critical skills, develop interaction, etc. Teachers encourage, motivate, and give constructive feedback to the students. However, 19.38% of the students do not understand or follow the ESL activities in spite of the expert guidance given to them. Extra care and concentration is required to support the slow learners in virtual classrooms.
- Virtual technology plays an important role in ESL classroom management. As the ESL tasks in the virtual classroom are highly interactive, students are fully engaged in the lesson and never make noise, never get diverted, or never fall asleep. Unlike classroom lectures, students can view the PPT presentations, videos, and websites repeatedly for skill enhancement. They can use the chat, email, blogs, forums, etc. effectively for ESL development. However, 38% of the teachers find it difficult to manage the students in the virtual classroom. Students face technical problems which the teachers cannot solve by themselves. Power outage and Internet outage are the other reasons.
- Students who are new to computer and Internet usage call the teachers for technical clarifications which disturb the normal flow of the teachers' language tasks. Some students talk with their neighbours while others get involved in personal chat. Some students are not interested in doing interactive exercises, seeing the PPT or video repeatedly, responding to email, etc. Some of them feel nervous about sharing their ideas on blogs and getting feedback publicly. Teachers should sort out the problem and find solutions to make the use of virtual technology in teaching English as second language more effective.

9. Recommendations

Intensive training should be given to the students and teachers before using the virtual technology in ESL classrooms. Help should be provided while they use the virtual classroom for language study. Doubts and clarifications regarding the technicalities of virtual classroom should be cleared on a periodic basis.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 9 September 2011

V. Rajesh M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate and J. Jaya Parveen M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate
Role of Virtual Technology in Teaching English

Extra care and concentration is required to support the slow learners in virtual classrooms. Students who do the ESL tasks without knowing their use and relevance cannot use them efficaciously. Teachers should explain the ESL task before using it in the virtual classroom. The name of the task, skill it intends to enhance, methodology employed in it, its technical aspect, etc. should be explained in detail. Student's knowledge should be checked regularly using pre-tests and post-tests. Students should be allowed to give their comments or feedback on the effectiveness of ESL tasks on a regular basis. Corrective measures should be taken immediately to rectify the problems and enhance ESL learning in virtual classrooms.

Lab assistants should be there to help the teachers and students with technical problems. Power back-up should be made available all the time. The speed and bandwidth of the Internet should be maintained properly. Students who are new to computer and Internet usage should seek the help of lab assistants for technical clarifications. Students should be kept fully engaged and monitored closely to avoid them speaking with their neighbours. Chat logs should be checked by the teachers to prevent the students involving in personal chat. Students who are not interested in doing interactive exercises, seeing the PPT or video repeatedly, responding to email, etc. should be motivated and encouraged every now and then. Positive feedback and reinforcement should be provided by the teachers to help the students come out of their nervousness in sharing their ideas on blogs, forums, etc.

=====

WORKS CITED

- Ally, M. (2004) *Foundations of Educational Theory for Online Learning*. Athabasca: Athabasca University.
- Kock, Ned. (2005) "Media Richness or Media Naturalness - The Evolution of Our Biological Communication Apparatus and Its Influence on Our Behaviour Toward E-communication Tools," *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, 48(2).
- Naidu, S. (2003) "Designing Instruction for E-learning." *Handbook of Distance Education*, London: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates.
- Paulsen, M. F. (2003) *Online Education and Learning Management Systems - Global E-learning in a Scandinavian Perspective*. Bekkestua: NKI Forlaget.
- Salmon, G. (2004) *E-moderating: the Key to Teaching and Learning Online*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 9 September 2011

V. Rajesh M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate and J. Jaya Parveen M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate
Role of Virtual Technology in Teaching English

Thompson, A. D., Simonsen, M.R., and Hargrave, C. P. (1996). *Educational Technology A Review of the Research Association for Educational Communications and Technology*, Washington.

V. Rajesh M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate
Assistant Professor
Department of English
VV College of Engineering
Tisaiyanvilai 628 656
Tuticorin District
Tamilnadu, India
rajeshv.ph.d@gmail.com

J. Jaya Parveen M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate
Assistant Professor
Department of English
VV College of Engineering
Tisaiyanvilai 628 656
Tuticorin District
Tamilnadu, India
jayaparveen@gmail.com

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 9 September 2011

V. Rajesh M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate and J. Jaya Parveen M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate
Role of Virtual Technology in Teaching English