DIGITAL TRAINING FOR LANGUAGE TEACHERS: AN EXPLORATION INTO ONLINE WRITING TUTORIALS

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Abstract - Use of technology in education has increased and it aims at transforming the delivery of knowledge to the learners by empowering the teachers. However, majority of language teachers who have been given access to the online tools of language teaching and learning feel helpless in absence of proper training and exposure before experimenting it with the students. The present paper deals with teaching of writing skills. While discussing this, the paper also sheds light on how in-service teachers need to be given an exposure to effective implementation of online writing tutorials. The paper also discusses how face to face writing tutorials differ from online tutorials. While providing digital training the teachers will be trained in proper planning of the tasks and circulating precise instruction sheets to the students. Moreover, to make the tutorial standardised, the efficacy of the tasks and rubrics to be measured through proper validity and reliability tests. One pilot study has been conducted among teachers to ascertain the efficiency of this new mode of instruction. The paper also discusses the results of the findings for ascertaining the effectiveness of this exposure.

Index Terms - Online language teaching and learning, Online collaborative writing, Teacher training, Writing tutorials.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education systems all over the world are facing tremendous challenge of cutting down cost while improving the learning outcome of the students who are considered to be digital natives due to their early exposure to technology. In fact use of technology in education has made it possible to achieve both of these objectives. Technology has created a "new educational culture" [1]. Even educators and policy makers have felt that the traditional teaching is unable to meet the increased demand due to the limitation of resources [2] and the sole use of traditional teaching does not really cater to the changed needs and aptitude of the learners of today. The largest struggle for teachers is not only to know but also to learn the new approaches to teaching which may result in better learning outcomes. The reason traditional professional teacher development remains ineffective is mainly because it does not support teachers during the stage of learning with the steepest learning curve implementation: in the same way that riding a bike is more difficult than learning about riding a bike, employing a teaching strategy in the classroom is more difficult than learning the strategy itself [3].several case studies, even experienced teachers struggled with a new instructional technique in the beginning [4], [5]. In order to use in -service professional development as a vehicle for improvement among teachers the administration needs to recognize how teachers may learn new teaching skills and implement them. Most teachers only experience traditional, workshop-based professional development which research shows, is quite ineffective. Based on their research Darling-Hammond et al. have stated that over 90 percent of the teachers who usually participate in workshop-style training sessions during a school year found it to be less productive and effectual [6]. Other research studies related to the impact of such training on student learning outcome also states that short one-shot workshops often don't change teacher practice and have no effect on student achievement [7],[8].

On the other hand, even though the language teachers are well acquainted with the available online tools, but they do not have adequate know-how of the ways to integrate them with language teaching and learning purposes. Therefore, the present paper focuses on the potentials of online tools in facilitating writing skills tutorials and imparting Digital Training to Language Teachers on planning and using online writing tutorials in classrooms through web supported collaborative learning.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Online learning systems are bourgeoning rapidly both in school and university education systems all over the world. Recent estimates in US suggest that 1.5 million elementary and secondary students participated in some form of online learning in 2010 [9]. In India also as the use of computers and high tech mobile phones has been steadily increasing, the teachers have started realising the need to bring a significant relevant change in their pedagogy. Within last one decade it has been witnessed that almost every teacher is going online due to the sweeping changes brought in by the smartphone revolution in India. If the teachers are educated on how well and meaningfully to incorporate technology in pedagogy, there will be significant change in students' interest for learning and considerable improvement in their performance. Thus, to cater to the changed educational needs of society, in- service teacher training is required in using computer technology and internet in teaching.

A. Teacher education is of tremendous importance for two reasons: One it marks the entry of the prospective teacher into the profession and hence has the potential to imbue the students with motivation, knowledge, skills and attitudes [10]. Two, the transaction of the teacher education curriculum is likely to have an imprint on the student-teacher's mind as it raises crucial issues about teaching-learning not by virtue of its content but due to the pedagogy that is adopted in transaction of the content [11]. Government of India has looked into the issue of teacher education and has come up with various Policies from time- to- time pointing out the various facets of the teacher education programmes. Some of these are as following:

A. ☐ The Education Commission (1964-66)
B. ☐ The National Commission on Teachers (1983-85),
C. ☐ The National Policy on Education (NPE) (1986, 1992)
D. ☐ The position paper on Teacher Education (NCERT, 2005)
E. ☐ The National Framework for Teacher Education 2009 (NCFTE) and
F. ☐ National Curriculum Framework for Teachers 2009.

Though pre- service teacher education programmes are extremely important, yet it is also critical to engage in inquiry into the discourse of classrooms after they are inducted into real classroom teaching where they actually use their knowledge and skills to realize their objective of being teachers.

In one of the major studies by The British Council titled ELT Partnerships in India found that if their endeavour to establish sustainable collaboration does succeed, the results will be most rewarding. As the British Council online study has established, the impact on the ELT practitioner would manifest itself in terms of academic and professional development while the impact on the institution would be demonstrated in terms of capacity building, professional networking, and increased understanding of different cultures [12].

When it comes to Teacher educators, the term online learning is used to refer to a wide range of programs that use of the Internet is to provide instructional materials and facilitate interactions between teachers and students and in some cases among students as well. Online learning can be fully online, with all instructions taking place through the Internet, or online elements can be combined with face-to-face interactions in what is known as blended learning [13]. In order to bring a change and keep the teaching practices updated, the professional development should be conducted over a period of time. Studies show that effective professional development programs require anywhere from 50 to 80 hours of instruction, practice, and coaching before teachers

arrive at mastery [14], [15], [7]. University Grants Commission, India also insists on a minimum seven -day workshop or a month long refresher courses. The NCERT, India also emphasizes on a longer duration training.

The literature review on teachers' training also reflects a shift in the nature of training. Mentoring is being increasingly advocated for better ongoing professional development. Especially in case of making the teachers learn a new skill, mentoring is found to be highly effective as in mentoring / coaching, teachers work with a master educator before, during and after a lesson, getting feedback on their implementation of a newly learned teaching skill. Several studies have shown coaching to be successful at changing teacher practice and improving student learning [65],[17],[18],[19],[20]. Effective professional learning communities also change teacher practice which consequently increases student achievement which is the focal target of the entire education. Mentoring helps the teachers make a successful transition into teaching with new technologies or ways by getting expertise of already experienced teachers. Ultimately, these studies make us realise that having effective professional development, the kind of professional development in technology use which the present paper proposes, really changes the way teachers teach and leads to more student learning. It holds a great possibility of bringing a desirable change in the present day pedagogy.

III. METHODOLOGY- ONLINE WRITING TUTORIAL INTEGRATION MODULE FOR TEACHERS AND THE SUPPORTING STUDY

A novice as well as an in-service teacher needs to undergo the required training on the integration of online tools in a writing classroom. After attending RELO Webinar and an ICT International conference the researcher used the training that she received for using online writing tutorials for better leaning outcomes. The paper highlights some basic concerns that every teacher needs to analyse before beginning with the integration process. The paper outlines a 6 step integration module to be discussed with language teachers while imparting digital training to them regarding facilitation of online writing tutorials. The module has also been supported with an educational intervention performed in BITS Pilani. Since the supporting study for the module was an educational intervention, it became essential to understand that it must not affect the regular classroom activities. So, being aware of all the activities and assignments involved, the study was conducted as an evaluative component of the course. The course chosen for the module implementation was Effective Public Speaking where speech writing is an important component. It is a genre of writing which has a considerable scope for
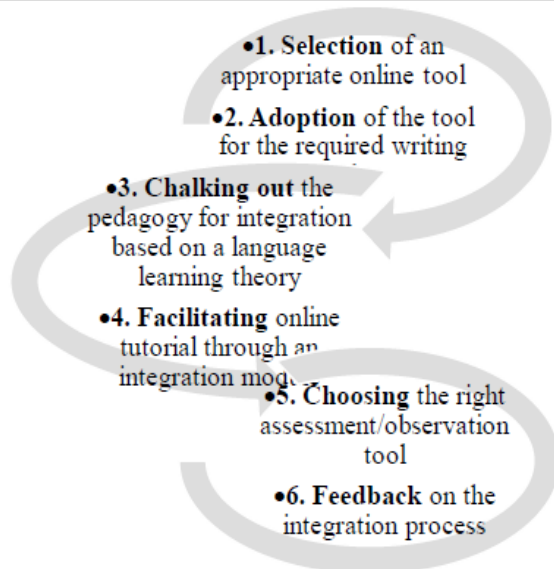
Fig. 1: Six- step integration module for online writing tutorials

assertive, argumentative and persuasive writing and thus can work upon higher order thinking skills of the students, which is one of the main aims of higher education. The proposed six- step integration module involves- identifying and adapting the online tool, deciding the pedagogy, tutorial in action, assessment and feedback (fig. 1)

Selection and Adoption of the Appropriate Online Tool

The first concern that a language teacher faces is the identification of the right online tool to be used for a particular writing task. The in- service teacher needs to understand that the choice of an appropriate online tool to be used in a writing course depends on-
• the writing component
• the aim of introducing the writing genre and
• the expected learning outcome

These three concerns need to be analysed properly before the integration. In the supporting study, the component of Speech writing was chosen as it requires development of arguments after a proper research and it also demands the skill to analyse, criticize and synthesize the given arguments. So, an online platform that facilitates indefinite and equal scope of collaborative writing was to be selected. New forms of online communication such as online forums and blogs are a medium of written talk and could be incorporated for developing a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) for language learners [21]. The final selection of the tool of 'Online Forums' on LMS was made after a detailed literature review of its features and its comparison with other online tools. As the online forums offer unlimited written interaction, there is a potential in the environment which needs to be explored more regarding acquisition of writing skills. Online forums were integrated with the classroom teaching to extend interaction among learners and the instructor beyond the classroom so that the ZPD for students could be extended as s part of

collaborative learning process and make the learners go beyond the prescribed learning zone. Pauley [22]suggested that online discussion forums provide an authenticity in writing and therefore serve as a meaningful supplement to the writing curriculum. Sutherland, Watts, Garcia-Carbonell, Montero &Eidsmo[23] concluded that participation in discussion forums in a topic-oriented discussion helps students identify and solve problems related with their work, which can become a stimulus for the acquisition of the linguistic and communicative skills which the learner needs for his/her specific purposes. According to Godwin-Jones[24], in addition to writing done on blogs and wikis, language teachers have found that students benefit from the extra writing done in discussion forums and from its use to communicate meaningfully in real contexts. Kuteeva[25] integrated online forums in the course English for Business and Accounting and came with the results that it helped in developing students' linguistic competence, augmenting cognitive development, collaborative construction of knowledge etc. Yang & Lin [26] examined the interplay between learners' internet perceptions and their online participation in an online writing exchange program for nursing students. It was noted that students with more participation were more likely to make progress in writing fluency. Students could share their ideas and opinions in order to produce better quality writing as compared to if the tasks were to be completed independently. Krish, Hussin&Sivapuniam, [27] have emphasised that Platforms like web forums, webinars, and bulletin boards in most Learner Management Systems (LMS) provide the additional platform for learning but are seldom utilized effectively to promote student interaction in language learning and acquisition. Online forums- where equality of participation and unlimited interaction are facilitated- make them the most appropriate online media to be utilised for online writing tutorials of Speech Writing.

Chalking out the pedagogy for integration based on a language learning theory and Facilitating online tutorial through an Integration Module

Cheung [28] suggests, "Students' writing behaviour will not change unless the writing teachers show a change in their pedagogy." After selecting and adapting the online tool for the required writing component in a course, the appropriate pedagogy needs to be chalked out by the language teacher. This will include the considerations of-
• a theoretical base
• an activity
• the instructional material

With the above mentioned supporting study involving component of Speech Writing, the concept of Scaffolding was chosen by the teacher as it encompasses collaborative dialogue among learners of equal competence appropriating new knowledge. Scaffolding has also been operationally defined by

Baleghizad, Hossein and Memar[29] as using supportive templates by which guidance is offered to the students through a semiotically
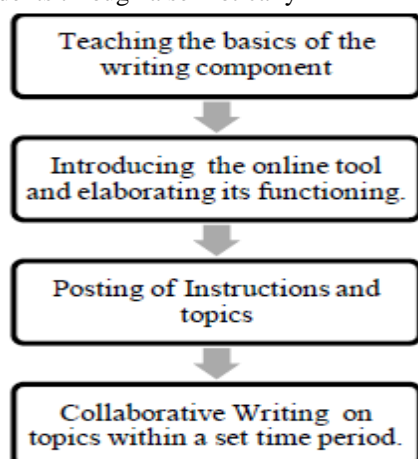

Fig. 2 Scaffolding Process for Facilitating Online Writing Tutorials

mediated situation to achieve higher level competence and regulation. The supportive environment for the students is created (fig. 2) on the lines of – teaching basics of a writing component, introducing the online writing tool and familiarising students with its functioning, posting the instructions related to the writing task and engaging students in the online collaborative writing till they achieve the appropriation within the time frame.The total span of the supporting study runs up to 5 weeks. These did not disturb the regular class work. The online assignment of writing tutorials over LMS was incorporated as a supplement with the regular classroom activities. Choosing the right assessment/observation tool and Getting Feedback of the integration process The final but a very crucial task for a teacher is to choose an assessment tool and to get the students feedback that can give the clear picture of the successful integration of the online collaborative writing in a language classroom. The parameters of assessment depend on the genre of writing chosen. Like article writing will have entirely different parameters from story writing. Once the students start moving towards appropriation in the genre of writing, the level of progression of each student needs to be assessed with the help of certain standardised assessment tools. A teacher, after selecting the genre of writing and facilitating online writing tutorials, can assess the online collaborative writing done by the students through observation. The students can also be provided with some online rubrics to self-assess the progress in their understanding of the writing component. The supporting study conducted involves the component of speech writing. A nine-point assessment analytical rubric was designed and standardised after certain validity and reliability checks. An already standardised tool can also be chosen for the assessment. The rubric involved in the study involved the parameters of- attention grabber, speaker's credibility statement, thesis statement, internal preview, organization and development,

support for ideas, style, use of connectives (transitions and signposts) and conclusion. The proficiency over each parameter was gauged at three Table I. Frequency shift of students for each component of speech writing skill

	Beginner level (1)	Intermediate level (2)	Advanced level (3)
Attention Grabber	+	-	+
Speaker's credibility	+	+	+
Thesis Statement	-	+	+
Internal preview	+	+	+
Organisation and content development	-	+	+
Support for ideas	-	+	+
Style	N	N	N
connectives	-	+	+
conclusion	-	+	+

- = decrease, + = Increase, N = no change

levels- beginner, intermediate and advanced. The results compiled show a clear picture of the shift in proficiency level for each parameter (table 1). This analysis gives a clear picture to the teacher about the areas where more scaffolding is required.

After the assessment of students' appropriation in a writing component, the integration of online writing tutorials can be further strengthened through students' feedback. It can be obtained by designing a questionnaire with both open ended and closed ended questions. The feedback of the students is a very crucial link for a teacher to move reinforced from one integration process to the next cycle of the teaching -learning process. In the present context feedback was obtained from the students regarding the use of online line forum for writing speeches as earlier than this they were never exposed to the kind of use of online forum for educational purpose. A Google feedback form was created and shared with the students. The results were really encouraging as the 82.72% of the respondents were of the opinion that online writing tutorial as part of pedagogy was instrumental in their using critical thinking by analysing and criticizing their peers' post, synthesizing the information given by different members of the group and using their creativity which they could come up with during discussion. The 42.6 % of the students strongly felt that they could finally draft their opening of the speech rather creatively. On the other hand 24.8% students strongly felt that as they were not constantly watched and observed they could express themselves without any hesitation. It can be inferred from the above results that collaborative language learning fostered learner's autonomy and students are able to acquire language naturally in comparison to the formal classroom learning.

The observations made during the integration process also brought some challenges to the researcher's notice that, in fact, helped the researcher to reflect on strengthening the integration in future and suggest some improvements in the teacher training as well.

The major challenges such as reduced conformity and convergence, information overload, students' distraction from the tasks involved need to be carefully dealt with and overcome with teacher's increased participation and moderation [19]. Creating awareness among students about the nuances of writing process is required in order to optimise the benefits.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the digital training the present paper has proposed six- step integration module involving- identifying and adapting the online tool, deciding the pedagogy, tutorial in action, assessment and feedback. The study ascertained the fact that with the digital training the in-service teachers can effectively use the available online resources for their teaching without any inhibition. Furthermore, the students who are more comfortable in using technology, also feel more interested and focused for learning through the digital medium. Much to the surprise of the researchers they also discovered that this kind of pedagogical integration and intervention also improved the student- teacher relationship.

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