

Exploring Digital Resources to Maximise Students' Engagement for Facilitating Effective Learning in Remote Classroom

MEENA SEHRAWAT* AND M. M. ROY**

Abstract

The pandemic of COVID-19 has had an impact on every aspect of society, including education. A significant shift has occurred with the adoption of online teaching and learning. We are moving towards the blended teaching approach. Teachers are experimenting with and adapting digital resources that they have never used before. But a major concern that disturbed us as teachers during pandemic was:

How can we engage our students actively in online teaching learning process? How to assess their work and also give them feedback during online classes? Is there any scope of creating opportunities of self-reflection, peer review or group discussion or feedback during online teaching?

To achieve this, we must shift our thinking and see the current circumstance as a magnificent chance and try to capacitate teachers with the use of online tools. The paper explores some ways where teachers can use the digital resources, and engage students to enhance their learning by taking an active role in their own learning using digital resources.

INTRODUCTION

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on every aspect of life, including schooling. It was the worst

hit, with schools and universities shut down for several months.

Online learning evolved into a type of alternate learning, resulting

*Assistant Professor, Curriculum and Pedagogy Department DIET Ghumanhera, SCERT, Delhi

**Assistant Professor, Curriculum and Pedagogy Department DIET Ghumanhera, SCERT, Delhi

in a paradigm shift in the process of providing and sustaining teaching and learning, particularly in the area of knowledge transmission (Marupova, 2006). Tripti (2020) utilised various online classes and discourse apps, including Zoom, Cisco WebEx, Google Classrooms, Microsoft Teams, Teach Online, and BYJU's. The use of these tools was emphasised, but was it enough?

However, by arranging online classes we were not going to benefit much unless we addressed some basic issues. The first was our mindset. We were so used to regular face-to-face mode of teaching that we resisted any attempt to change it. We were considering face-to-face classroom transaction as the best option because the bonding that was developed between the teacher and the taught did not seem possible in virtual mode of transaction. Online learning is not only different for learners but also carries varied responsibilities and challenges for teachers.

The online teaching-learning process places different demands on content delivery, feedback measures, and teacher knowledge and skills than the face-to-face modality (Alvarez et al., 2009). However, this is an unexpected situation and we have to think out of the box about teaching our students in odd measures and deliver quality education as well. For this, we need to change our mindset and look upon the current situation as an excellent opportunity for online transformation and internet as the overwhelming

choice for the transport of content. We have to prepare ourselves gradually for the blended learning approach, as the educational activity will no longer be exclusively either face-to-face or online but a blend of the two. We have to prepare ourselves to move from one to another immediately, fluidly and continually.

Historically speaking, online education was earlier seen as a low-priority experiment for institutions. But due to COVID-19, schools had no option left than to go online. Both teachers and students had to adapt to this new model of online teaching. Alvarez, et al. (2009) observed that the face-to-face teaching competencies such as knowledge of content, context and pedagogy do transfer to online contexts but still one cannot deny the fact that some special competencies are required for online teaching to be a success.

Need for Improved Engagement in Online Classes

Teachers must rethink all of their teaching methods and prepare for this new mixed learning environment. If a teacher believes that online classes are simply optional and temporary, that is to reach learners in difficult times like pandemic or so then we as teachers will miss the chances of learning and using digital resources in our classrooms. It will no longer be possible to avoid using technology. But a major cause of concern is the accessibility of online resources in remote areas. During the pandemic,

many families were grappling with financial worries, COVID-19 or other illnesses, food and shelter insecurity, etc. In these circumstances, learners may not have a device to attend online classes or an internet connection to explore digital resources. Even if some of them had access to online resources, it takes time to establish habits and practices common place with a new system—especially when it involves technology. It is hard to ensure engagement when learners are struggling with the new systems in online teaching and learning. But a pandemic like COVID-19 or so taught us that we must incorporate technology into our lessons and adapt to changing expectations. As a teacher, we must create and offer online content that caters to a wide range of learning styles and preferences in an interactive manner.

One of the main goals of blended learning is to improve pedagogy by combining the advantages of face-to-face learning with the advantages of computer-assisted learning (Horn and Staker, 2015). It will be more successful if we provide abundant opportunities for interaction among classmates, teachers, and course content in online classes. So, to engage students, we must increase teachers' capacity to incorporate active learning possibilities through the use of diverse digital tools and techniques. Nehra (2020) provided effective learning experiences during COVID-19 through online tools and applications, including audio-video clips, weekly assignments,

and self-learning sharing on WhatsApp and Google Drive. Face-to-face learning, combined with online learning, appears simple but takes a great deal of depth, knowledge, and abilities (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004). The lack of interaction between student-student and student-teacher is a significant challenge to online teaching-learning.

In comparison to face-to-face teaching, online classes have a greater dropout rate (O'Brien, B, 2002). All of these circumstances may cause a student's interest in the class to wane, resulting in disappointing learning outcomes (Rosenbaum, D. B, 2001). Teachers used WhatsApp during COVID-19 for online teaching and found it interactive but faced challenges like internet availability, speed, and student motivation (Rana and Kumari, 2021). Teachers must now be trained and motivated to investigate and implement new tools.

Modifying syllabi, evaluating them, and understanding the role of each component in this new environment with new learning processes are all things that must be attempted to achieve our goal. We need to encourage teachers and empower them with the tools to integrate technology into every part of the teaching-learning process. Only then can we expect a rise in the quality of resources offered at all levels of education.

We must understand that online learning requires discipline. As we have observed that the learners who have access to devices and good internet connectivity are involved in

playing video games or so and have increased their screen time. We know that this generation is GenX and techno-friendly, so we need to channelise their energy to use digital resources in a meaningful way. As teachers, we need to plan for projects and assignments that can help them explore and learn beyond the classroom. The synchronous mode of the hybrid learning environment concentrates on self-discipline on the part of students pursuing online classes (Wiles and Ball, 2013). As the teacher is not physically present to motivate and scaffold, there is less learners' engagement. There is also a need for the institutions to shed off their old biases regarding education. They have to understand that in this new context, some ways of teaching no longer make sense.

Some Techniques of Meaningful Engagement for Learners

First thing we as teachers need to think for our smooth transition is to avoid seeing online teaching through a face-to-face lens. Second important aspect is to focus on what we can do rather than what we cannot. We need to change our mindset; online teaching-learning is neither better nor worse than face-to-face, it's just different. We need to think of the ways in which we can actively involve our students during online classes and the first condition that facilitates in maximising student's engagement is learning relationships. Dev (2022) reported that IGNOU provided a single

platform of online Google Groups for support services and educational needs of newly registered learners. Students successfully accessed hyperlinked documents, teleconferences, and interactive radio counselling sessions. After just two weeks of practice, students engaged in studies, peer and group learning activities, and participated in discussion forums. This successful experiment during the COVID-19 pandemic served as a wake-up call for programme coordinators to include online Google Groups more heavily in future transactions. Deshmukh (2020) utilised Google Doc as an asynchronous peer-learning environment for doubt-solving in courses. He created a document with clear instructions, allowing students to post and answer questions, and provided guidance and corrections. This comprehensive asynchronous environment fostered a collaborative learning environment.

Let us share some more real online teaching practice used by teachers during this pandemic while teaching subjects like language and science.

Process Writing in Online Class—Answer Garden

We all agree that instead of having our students jump into the vast sea of writing all at once, we need to strengthen their process of writing and improve their foundational skills. Process writing is an approach that gives the opportunities to students to go through the various processes before coming to a final product.

We need to teach them the skill of building their writing around what they already know. This is done in the pre-writing stage where students are generally divided in pairs and groups, and get the chance to work collaboratively.

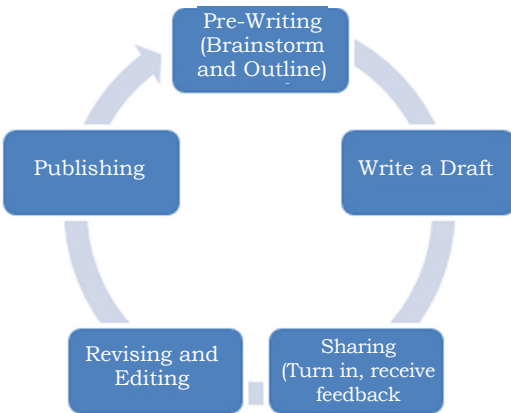


Fig. 1: Process Approach to Writing

Generally, in this stage, we brain-storm ideas using graphic organiser, word webs, flowchart and discussion to gather the ideas they would like to include in their text. But the question is how to execute this online. Students can share their ideas using answer garden. Teacher gives them a topic to brainstorm and then shares a link of answer garden in the chat box, for example, to write a paragraph, the teacher shares a link: answergarden.ch/3017809 and asks students to type their ideas on in the answer garden which they can see on the screen shared by their teacher. In this way, they gather a lot of ideas in their online classes then they organise them and select the ideas which they would like to be incorporated in their text.

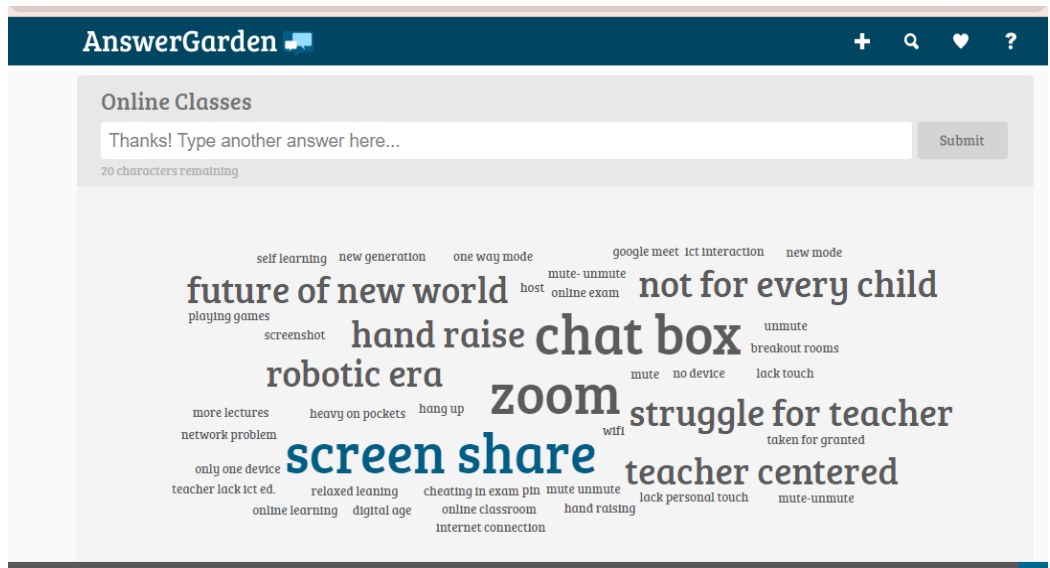


Fig. 2: Using Answer Garden for Gathering Ideas

Writing Stage

In this stage, students compose their first draft. At this point of time their major focus is on expressing their ideas around the given topic and composing it instead of focusing on the accuracy of language as they get the chance to revise and edit their texts later. Here, we generally focus on how they move from one paragraph to other using transition words that show order; spatial relationships or logic in their writing piece. They were asked to write their draft in a Google doc so that it may be shared with their peers and the teacher for their feedback. Once they have written their first draft, they are asked to swap their writing text with their peers for feedback. As feedback has an essential role in this stage, the peers, comment on each other's work will help them to improve their writing piece through Google doc. In Google doc, you have to go to the menu and in that, go to the editing mode. In this mode, you can find the option of editing, suggesting and add comments, insert or delete a comment.

Initially, the teacher has to explain to the learners how to work on Track Change Mode and later on establish norm and practice to use it for writing pieces. While working in word document in the 'Tool Bar', there is an 'Option-Review' used to give feedback. For this you need to go to 'Review > New Comment'. Here, you will not make any changes in the text but will give your suggestions in the 'Comment Box'. A box will appear where you can write your feedback. If you feel like making

some changes to your own comments made earlier, you may go back and edit them. Suppose a peer has given you some feedback in the comment box then you may click on 'Reply' and answer it. In this way, even during online classes, we may correct their errors, give them feedback and help them in their learning journey.

Track Change Mode also helps to keep a track on the changes made in a document. You may send the same document to your peers and then look forward for their feedback. If they delete something from your text, it will be shown by 'striketrough' and any addition with an underline. Suppose you have shared your document with two or three of your peers for feedback, then their feedback will be marked with different colours and when you bring the cursor on that sentence, it will also show the name of the person or device who had made those changes. Suppose you are turning off the computer or sharing that file with someone else, the tracked changes remove are not removed until and unless you accept or reject them. So, it is the choice of the writer to accept or reject the changes made by their peers. Swapping their writing piece with their peer to review and provide feedback not only helps reviewers to learn from the process, but also the person who is being evaluated gets the opportunity to improve.

Revising and Editing

At this stage, students get the opportunity to look back at their texts and reorganise their ideas, by adding,

deleting or changing their sentences as per the feedback they received from their peers that is the time for them to self-assess their work. While revising learners need to focus on clarity of thoughts, word choice, sentence fluency and organisation of the paragraph. After writing the second draft, it is time to proofread, check grammar, spelling and punctuation before submitting it to the teacher. For this purpose 'Write and Improve' tool is also very helpful.

Write and Improve

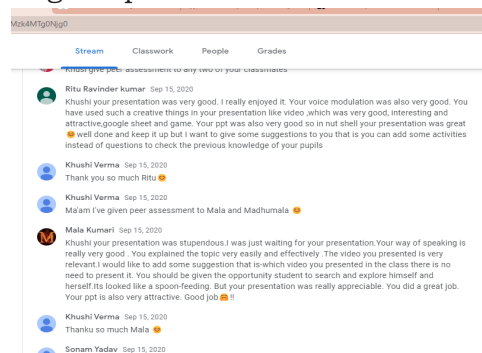
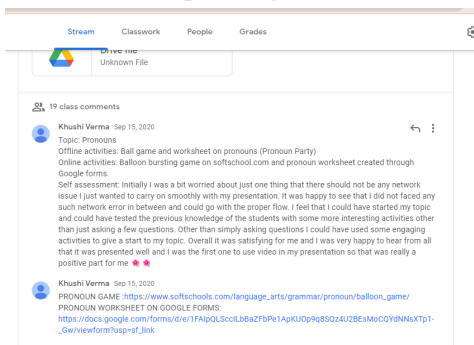
Write and Improve is a free online tool that helps learners to practice their writing and get valuable feedback instantly on their writing. This is a tool which helps checking it for automatic feedback. It doesn't correct your writing for spelling and grammatical errors. It provides you with three forms of levels: Beginner, Intermediate or Advanced. A learner has to choose any one level and then start using and practicing it. Inside each level, a text box is given to write your content with some word limit. A learner is supposed to either write or paste the text for feedback. This won't fix the text but will guide where to correct and what's wrong. Write and Improve gives the feedback

in certain colours and codes for you to see your errors.

Google Classroom

Google Classroom makes it easy for learners and teachers to connect inside and outside of schools. It is simple to create and gather assignments, share notes, and save time and paper. It also helps teachers quickly see who has or hasn't completed the work, and provide direct, real-time feedback to individual students.

During the pandemic, after the completion of the topic via the online platform, the learners were given a project. In the project, they have to make the presentation using PowerPoint, involve learners in an online activity, and also suggest an offline activity. After their presentation, they were asked to upload it to Google Classroom along with their online and offline activities. Besides self assessing their work and presentation, they also did peer assessments of any two of their classmates. The sample snapshots given below will provide a more analytical view of how they assessed themselves and their peers during the pandemic time.



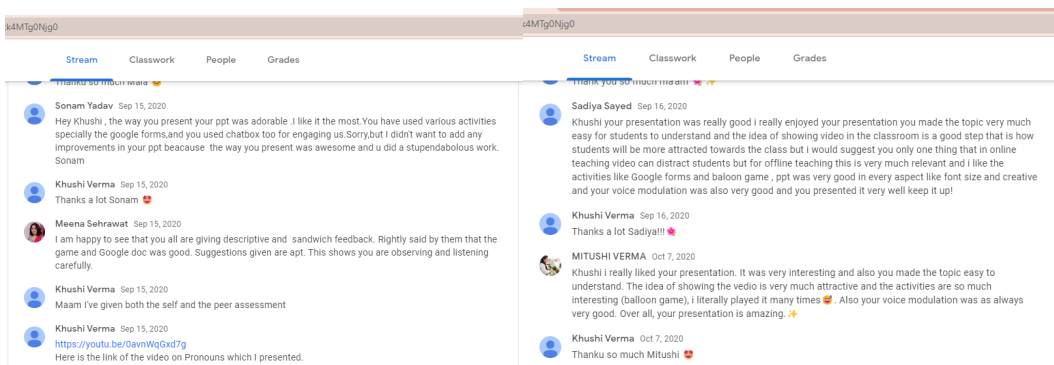


Fig. 3: Artifacts of Students Self-assessment and Peer-assessment

Google Classroom is a Learning Management System (LMS) that simplifies virtual platform functioning by facilitating classroom creation, student and teacher collaboration, and sending study materials, assignments, videos, and quizzes. It also simplifies assessment and provides a convenient system for sharing resources. However, it lacks parental participation as a key stakeholder, which is essential for effective learning (Deshmukh, 2020).

Listenwise.com

We all know that listening is a hard skill to learn and is generally overlooked, even in face-to-face teaching. Listenwise assists you in focusing on improving your listening skills. It's a website-based tool that provides both written and audio radio programming in one convenient location for teachers and students. It is available for both free and premium accounts. It is possible for teachers to design

lesson-based listening assignments that can be distributed to students, even in the free edition. To get started, teachers must register. Teachers who have accounts can search for content by entering particular terms or by browsing the different categories.

Students benefit greatly from the listening supports, and after completing the task, they can immediately see which questions they answered incorrectly, allowing them to individually reflect on their areas for improvement.

Listenwise embeds formative listening assessments with the lesson and makes it easy to gather insights on various listening strands like the literal, main idea, inference or vocabulary. This is a useful tool in the classroom but could be even more helpful as a remote learning system that allows students to further their learning in certain areas, when outside of the classroom.

DEVELOPING READING SKILL USING GOOGLE DOC

Pre-reading Task

One Minute Free Write: Free-write Brainstorm—Teacher shares a Google doc link to the students. Students write everything they already know about the topic to be introduced, followed by discussion. Teacher gathers information about the previous knowledge of the students and build further on that.

Reading Comprehension

We all know that during COVID-19 students were reading the lesson or chapter on their own, some of them may be taking the help of their parents or siblings. So before starting a chapter, we need to tell them how they are going to read—I mean is it for an intensive reading or extensive reading. If it's for pleasure reading, i.e., for extensive, what are the elements they are going to focus on. Suppose if it's for intensive reading, then ask them to observe both the form and meaning while reading the text and then discuss it in the online classes. Share some of the signs with students and ask them to mark them up while reading such as:

! – Anything that surprised them.

? – Anything that comes to your mind while reading

ABC – Any new word

– Any new structure while reading, etc.

You may make your own signs and ask them to mark them up in their book

while reading, and then in the online class they can share it with you.

Any Online Platform with Breakout Room Facilities (Reciprocal Teaching)

Another thing we can do in online classes to promote student's reading comprehension is reciprocal teaching. You may ask students to read the text before coming to class or have them read a few paragraphs in the class. In a breakout room, make a group of four as Predictor, Questioner, Clarifier and Summariser and ask them to take turns participating in their role.

Predictor

Predictor will make prediction before they read the text. Things that help to make a prediction are:

- Title, headings, sub-headings, illustrations, etc.
- The questions posed by the author.
- Making use of schema.
- Skimming, scanning the text.

Questioner

Asking questions about a text helps to have a purpose or reason for reading and deepens the understanding. Encourage students to ask themselves questions while reading and then make them to read to elicit the answers for those questions. Ask questions like:

- What is going on ... ?
- When is this happening?

Clarifier

Clarifying helps to recognise when you don't understand parts of a text. This

technique helps learners to clarify. You have no idea what a word or phrase means, clarifying or Fix-it up strategies could be helpful:

- Ask students to re-read the text they have not understood.
- Read forward and backward.
- If it's a word you don't understand, guess the meaning in the given context.
- Ask students to look up the meaning of such words in the dictionary.

Summariser

Summarising helps readers to look for the main ideas as they read and can give 'the gist' of what they have read in their own words. How to summarise what you read?

- Look at the topic sentences.
- Look at the concluding sentence.
- Answer the—Who?, What?, When?, Where?, Why?, How? of the text.
- Focus on key details.
- Use keywords and phrases.
- Leaving out little details that aren't important.

Reciprocal teaching helps students to learn actively and also encourages them to think about their own progress while reading. In a group when they work together, they develop reading comprehension skills and helps students' transition from guided reader to independent readers.

Developing Speaking Skills with Vocaroo.com

Vocaroo.com is a free online tool that can be used by the students to record their voice, share it, and download voice messages. It is a good tool that can be used by teachers and learners in different activities. Vocaroo.com is simple and user-friendly. The tool can be accessed directly without logging or creating any account. The audio files created on Vocaroo.com can be shared as a link on Google Classroom, websites, and social networking sites. This site is free and can be accessed from any place in the world through an online browser.

Students are generally hesitant of speaking in front of others as they feel that if they make any mistake people might laugh at them. This tool hides the appearance as its audio only and shares what they say with others. Students can record their voice and then can share with teacher and peers for feedback. In the beginning, we may ask them to retell stories as it helps learners to improve comprehension, make inferences and develop thinking skill. Students may not become fluent speakers of English but they can probably speak more than they do now and they can easily be made to feel more comfortable.



Plotagon

Plotagon is a free animation app that makes students stories come to life. This app helps them to express in an animated movie and share it with the world. Teacher may use this app for dialogue completion, story making, etc. They create their own 3D characters and avatars. It provides you with a huge collection of accessories, outfits and hairstyles for the user to choose. It also offers different locations over 200 unique and colourful 3D scenes. Students were asked to write dialogues and play those in plotagon, they may give their voice to their characters. They can share their movies as MP4 files with peers, teachers and other social media apps.



Think Pair Share in Breakout Rooms: Pair and Group Work Through Online Platform

In the English language classroom, a lot of activities can be done in pair and groups. After working in groups, students present their work in front of the whole class. After the presentation of each group, they can be asked to self-assess themselves and then other groups are asked to assess their peers and give feedback and at last, the teacher gives her feedback. Self and peer assessment encourages students to become independent learners and can increase their motivation. After every task, students are asked to write their reflection in their observation journal.

StoryMap

StoryMap JS is an online free tool to create stories by the teachers on any concept. For creating stories there should be a strong location narrative. For example, you can develop a story on conservation of forests for Class VIII Science in which the various biosphere reserves present in our country located in various places can be interestingly told to the students. In the story map, you can add concept related videos, texts taken from online or offline sources. From the story map, students can learn at their own pace. Students at their home may learn the concept and ask teachers online about their doubts.

Padlet

Padlet is an online tool which can be used by the teachers and the students as an online board where teachers

and students can post their work on the board with links for videos, audio images and document files. It is easy to use, supports collaboration and makes content beautiful by using different themes.

Suppose a teacher chooses a theme of KWL chart from the list shared by Padlet and uses it for the teaching of Class VII acid, base and salt where K stands for what I know, W stands for what I want to know and L stands for what I learned. The link of KWL will be shared with the students where students will write about what I know about acid, base and salt; and in the second column they will write what I want to know, and when the class is over they can write what they have learnt. It is a very good online tool where collaboration can be done in a group work.



WhatsApp, Mindmap and Concept Map

Mind map is a visual diagram where the main concept is connected to various important keywords or sub-concepts learnt by the students. Sub-concepts radiate out from the main concept. In this way, it represents the parts connected to the whole or showing relationship among whole to parts. Similarly, concept map represents the connection between the various branches of sub-concepts through arrows and connectors.

Various ideas can be connected to each other depending upon the meaningful connections among them. Teachers may draw both the maps using online free software like Freeplane or Creately or may draw on a paper and share with students to assess their learning on any concepts learnt. During the pandemic, teachers used this strategy to assess and enhance collaboration among students.

Sign of Understanding

This technique was used during the online classes to assess the current status of learning of the students by only asking students to show their thumb response. To get understanding of the concept, students used to show the upright thumb in the chat box; for partial understanding of concept, 45 degree tilted anti-clock direction thumb sign; and in case of nothing understood by the students, upside down sign of the thumb was used.

Bandicam

Bandicam is a lightweight windows screen capturing application that efficiently converts PPTs into videos with audio. It offers an interactive experience (Deshmukh, 2020).

Socrative

Socrative is a formative assessment tool that can be accessed on any device, providing immediate feedback to students. It is interactive and engaging, offering various question types for assessment. However, it requires time and effort for teachers to analyse individual student data.

Pixton App

Pixton App allows students to create comic strips, and enhance learning and creativity. However, the free version has limited characters and background scenes, and users must upgrade for additional features (Tripathi, 2020).

Quizzes

Quizzes is an online tool for formative assessments, allowing teachers to engage students of all ages. It can be used in instructional design, evaluation, and revision of topics. Students receive unique codes to start quizzes in live classes or as homework. After the quiz, both teachers and students can review performance and download detailed reports on answers and accuracy. The report measures student attendance and time spent on quizzes, reducing cheating. Quizzes is integrated with Google Classroom and features redemption questions, encouraging students to reflect and learn from their mistakes. The tool's randomised questions and time limits make it a valuable tool for class participation (Rosaline, S. 2020).



Limitations of Using Digital Resources in Remote Classroom

Using digital resources in a remote classroom offers numerous advantages

such as accessibility, interactivity, and flexibility. However, it also comes with certain limitations. Some of these limitations and ways to overcome them in a remote classroom setting are:

- **Answer Garden limitations**

Answer Garden primarily relies on short text responses, which may not fully capture the complexity of students' thoughts or ideas. To overcome this, teachers can use a combination of tools and platforms that support diverse response types, such as drawings, audio, or video responses. For example, using platforms like Padlet alongside Answer Garden can provide more options for students to express themselves.

- **Write and improve limitations**

While, Write and Improve provides automated feedback on writing tasks, it lacks real-time interaction and conversation, which is vital for language learning. To address this limitation, teachers should encourage students to use Write and Improve as an additional tool for feedback and provide personalised feedback on writing assignments to address specific areas of improvement.

- **Google Classroom connectivity issues**

Google Classroom heavily relies on an internet connection, which can be problematic for students with limited access to the internet or during connectivity issues. To overcome this, teachers can encourage students to download

materials and assignments when they have internet access so they can work offline when needed. Additionally, using Google Workspace tools like Google Docs, which have offline capabilities, can be helpful. While Google Classroom allows collaboration on documents, it might not offer real-time synchronous interaction like some other tools. To address this, teachers can complement Google Classroom with video conferencing tools like Google Meet or other platforms that enable real-time collaboration, discussion, and group work. Technical glitches is also a problem like software malfunctions, website downtime, or incompatible file formats can disrupt the learning process.

- **Digital Divide**

Socioeconomic disparities may result in unequal access to technology and digital resources among students. To mitigate the digital divide, teachers can work with school administrators and local organisations to secure devices and internet access for students who need them. Creating community technology centres can also help bridge the gap.

- **Limited Engagement**

Digital resources may not always offer the same level of engagement as face-to-face classroom activities. To enhance engagement, teachers should incorporate interactive elements into digital resources,

such as quizzes, polls or multimedia content. Encouraging real-time discussions through video conferencing or online forums can also foster student participation.

Digital resources can be valuable for remote classrooms but it's essential to be aware of their limitations. By using a combination of tools, providing personalised feedback, and being prepared for technical challenges, teachers can create a more engaging and interactive learning environment for their students. Consider the specific needs of students and the learning objectives when selecting and using any educational technology tool.

CONCLUSION

By marking student work and providing feedback, technology can also add value, but it cannot replace the depth that a teacher can provide to their students. As a result, in post COVID-19, we anticipate a blended teaching-learning environment in which students can become better learners by deliberating about what they are, learning and how they are learning it, i.e., learning to learn. It is also necessary for institutions to reject their traditional educational notions. They must accept that some teaching methods are no longer acceptable in this new context, and that learners cannot be meaningfully engaged. This means that online learning is more than just turning a knob while students learn independently. On the contrary, it necessitates teachers

planning and designing activities that actively and meaningfully engage learners, thus, creating new trends. Because our students are members of an online learning community, we should involve them as active participants in their education and

provide feedback at various times and in various ways, even while they are learning online. In the future, the use of technology in education will usher in a new era in which students will have access to the top teachers from across the globe.

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