

A review of the challenges and merits of collaborative learning in online translation classes

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Abstract

Faced with the Covid-19 pandemic worldwide, instructors and learners had to turn to online learning and teaching instead of the traditional physical mode. With this shift to online education, the innovative pedagogical approaches play a key role in facilitating effective communication and teaching approaches. The purpose of this review paper was to explore the merits and challenges of Collaborative Learning approach in online mode of teaching. Using a review protocol, the most recent and relevant studies were identified by searching the keywords from reliable databases, and descriptions were provided. Problems such as accessibility, learner motivation, technical issues, digital skills, time management, and cost-efficiency were identified as some of the challenges in most of the studies reviewed. It was concluded that Collaborative Learning in teaching Translation is an effective and dynamic approach that could contribute to the autonomous learning. A mix of both online and face to face modes of teaching, i.e., blended (hybrid) learning, was recommended as effective for Translation students. Finally, instructors were recommended to remind students about their responsibility regularly for more productive interaction, and effective engagement in the discussions and activities, as well as voicing out their opinions. This could make the learners become more critical and flexible learners who are constantly involved in teamwork and can accomplish Translation projects and assignments successfully.

Keywords: *Collaborative Learning, Covid-19, face to face, online, Translation*

Introduction

The education sector was significantly affected during the Covid-19 pandemic in that most educational institutes had to closely adhere to safety regulations. Most physical classes switched to online classes, and while a viable alternative, the online mode of instruction is now a host to different sets of new problems. Online learning is no longer an alternative but

an essential platform for most educational institutions like schools and tertiary institutions (Dhawan, 2020). Interaction between the educator and learner was greatly inhibited, it became less "personal" (Aboagye et al., 2020). Therefore, choosing an effective approach among the many different approaches, such as the process-based approach, product-based approach, task-based approach and the social constructivist approach has been challenging for educators. As proposed by Piaget (1996), learning is not a mere individual exploration, but an interactive construction of knowledge with the world.

This review paper aimed to describe the challenges and advantages of Collaborative Learning approach in online mode of teaching and learning, particularly in Translation classes to uncover the relevant studies, a review protocol was used and the most recent studies related to the theme of the present study were highlighted by searching the keywords from reliable databases, and providing relatively conclusive discussions.

Challenges of online teaching and learning

Studies have reported various challenges faced by the students in the online classroom. They often find it difficult to adapt to the new structure of classroom practices (Simamora, 2020). For example, even in face-to-face mode of education, learners may not feel motivated enough to work in teams, let alone in online mode whereby the less personal environment might even worsen the situation. This scenario is explained by Mayes and Freitas (2007) who state that learner motivation is greatly associated with peers and the society. Students' lack of self-regulation might result in the loss of their motivation to learn and consequently poor academic performance (Rasheed et al., 2020). A solution for this problem is self-selection of texts which may assist the learners to become more enthusiastic and productive (Al-Shehari, 2017).

Aside from that, not having face-to-face classes means that social and non-verbal cues can be easily overlooked. Online discussions take longer than usual compared to the physical classroom discussions, as students would either be hesitant to speak which would lead to prolonged silence when providing their feedback and responses (Damary et al., 2017). Furthermore, less social interactions between students could lead to psychological pressure on the students (Sadeghi, 2019), such as stress and anxiety. Elmer et al., 's (2020) study indicated the significance of social contacts in students' mental health and the importance of students at higher risk of social isolation and negative psychological effects during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, online classes will need to be planned carefully and purposefully by considering students' attributes, the content of the course, and the learning environment to gauge a positive learning experience (Smart, & Cappel, 2006). Designing an apt course content also remains an ongoing problem when the educators are not adequately prepared or equipped in the process of transitioning to online learning. The consequences of this inexperience will be instructors' poor competency in the application of the teaching methods (Azman, et al., 2020; Ng et al., 2020; Siao et al., 2022), and the learners' poor performance and learning in the online mode (Dhawan, 2020). Therefore, an important point to consider in adapting to the "new" norm of the online teaching mode is the adaptation to the justified course content that is able to be delivered "successfully" to the students via the "new platforms". Students may also find it difficult to get in touch with the lecturers when in need of their advice and suggestions on assignments in online education. However, this could also depend largely on the responsiveness of the instructors, and to what extent they welcome after class communications about the lesson, which might take up much of their time. Manca and Meluzzi (2020) emphasized the role of families and teachers in supporting students during the Covid-19 crisis.

In online teaching and learning, there appears greater trials that are beyond the control of the instructors which hinder classroom practices. There are two main considerations for the acceptance and use of technology; technological and socio-cultural factors. Students, teachers, and educational institutions often face a similar challenge, the technological challenge (Rasheed et al., 2020). Gilbert (2015) found a lack of reliable internet at home, the lack of face-to-face help from the instructor, and the lack of “genuine communication” as the most significant challenges of online learning. Likewise, students reported that social interactions and face-to-face communication with the instructors were lacking (Adnan, & Anwar, 2020). Students and teachers who are not familiar with the latest software, applications, and devices would face difficulties during the teaching and learning process. The ongoing advancements in educational technology could also add to the challenge as instructors and learners need to update their knowledge about such faced-paced changes and developments. For some educational institutions, it might be challenging to provide the appropriate and continuous technological support for online learning instructions. Technical issues due to inappropriate IT infrastructure, e.g., in rural areas, is an obstacle for effective online classes. For instance, Adnan and Anwar (2020) reported that many students in Pakistan are deprived of stable internet access and faced financial issues to accommodate online learning. Some educational institutions, particularly those who do not receive any financial support from their governments, may not be able to sustain a continuous and pertinent technological support for online learning instructions. Predicament as such has specifically hampered rural students in Nigeria (Odunjo-Saka et al., 2021). As for the socio-cultural factor, low participation by the students and their unwillingness to engage in the classroom discussions for successful learning could be other challenges for instructors, as a well-structured and meaningful task encourages learner’s engagement (Ellaway, 2007). This goal, however, can be harder to achieve in an online class due to the nature of online learning environment where there are no physical interactions between the peers, and between the peers and the instructors (Kim, Liu, & Bonk, 2005). Low engagement could impair students’ focus, or cause distraction in the learning process. Song et al. (2004) claimed that students would only participate in online discussions if it was convenient to them. This would impact their ability to learn efficiently, especially, the more complex parts of the course content, such as theories. In the context of interactive learning, instructors are required to advance their knowledge to stay well-informed about the latest development (Masterman, & Vogel, 2007).

In online classes, various problems emerge during the discussions, such as internet network quality, noise and other disturbing factors that may hinder this effective communication.

Unlike face-to-face classroom discussions, using gestures or drawings to elaborate points and provide explanations could be easier in online classroom discussions (Pym et al., 2003) as students are likely to get distracted easily in online classes. According to Schmidt (2020), learning how to become not “distractable” is an essential and timeless skill for successful education.

Aside from posing challenges to students, the shift from the physical classroom to an online learning platform has impinged instructors’ classroom practices greatly. Lecturers consume more time in online teaching compared to traditional teaching for answering individual questions, and they are highly concerned about students’ dishonesty and self-regulation (Liu, 2014). Therefore, teachers found this new teaching setting more difficult and taxing than a classroom-based environment (Mishra et al., 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar, & Morrison, 2020). Instructors and policymakers need to re-consider the challenges to overcome the obstacles and achieve the educational goals.

Merits of online teaching and learning

Notwithstanding the challenges faced, online learning is undeniably benefiting students to a great extent. Online teaching could contribute to improving students' abilities to deal with the challenges in their learning process. This includes problem-solving, encouraging teamwork, and developing a sense of responsibility and discipline. As suggested by Damary et al. (2017), online learning reduces students' financial burden, and allows them to adapt to the speed of learning through their engagement with other classmates from different cultures in tertiary education. In other words, because of its flexibility and attractive features, online learning could create an environment that empowers the students to pace and regulate themselves as well as their own educational needs, and becomes more functional for the learners compared to the traditional on-site class (Terando, 2014). Providing students with rich materials and creating an enjoyable learning environment are essential to engage students more enthusiastically (Lee et al., 2021).

Despite the challenges and limitations of online teaching, many instructors are relatively positive about this new teaching "fashion". Lecturers who were involved in online teaching noted that their ability to respond to students' questions and their creativity to motivate students in engaging class activities were improved (Graham, 2019). Thanks to the developments in technology and with the advancement of the learning and communication software, writing on board or drawing is not an issue anymore, and some may even find it even more effective than the conventional physical classes. This was highlighted by Haghshenas (2019) which asserted that educational software promotes collaborative learning and interactive communication between instructors and students.

In addition to the advancement of educational software that encourages students engagement (Gillett-Swan, 2017), participating in online classroom learning enables students to acquire soft skills embedded in learning activities. Online teaching allows students to utilize their ability to explore independently (Saxena, 2020) and be more liberal in choosing their learning content and style, depending of what type of learner they are (visual, kinaesthetic, or auditory). This independent learning could be further amplified by the incorporation of different types of activities, such as an online forums or reflective journals that facilitate students' learning via reflections and sharing opinions as they are taking an active role in accomplishing the assignments or in-class activities (Masterman, & Vogel, 2007). Students' active exploration and discovery are essential to the cultivation of innovative talents (Na, et al., 2021).

In addition, online teaching has a real-time update function which enables the students and instructors to keep track of the latest development trends of the subject, modify and supplement online teaching in time, and strengthen their teaching ability. Therefore, the requirements of online teaching are not reduced, but improved (Matthew et al., 2018). Learners, instructors and stakeholders need to welcome online teaching and learning because of its liveliness efficiency, flexibility, and effectiveness. According to Finn and Vandenham (2004), by integrating technological devices in the classroom like handheld computers, students demonstrate positive performances on group participation, homework submission, exposure to new learning opportunities in different disciplines. Clearly, by reducing the limitations, such as network and power interruptions which greatly affect online education in the selected countries as reported in Onyema et al.'s (2020) study, students and instructors could be aided to have appropriate access to the facilities and courses.

Despite all the merits, online teaching may not substitute face to face entirely particularly in developing countries where due to the "digital divide gap", i.e., gap between those who have access to new technology and those who do not (Soomro, et al., 2020).

Henceforth, blended/hybrid learning could be the best options in most of the teaching environments and situational contexts.

Collaborative approach in online teaching and translation context

Learning and teaching in Translations also had to change to accommodate the online learning platforms and approaches. Conducting Translation classes during the pandemic poses various challenges to both students and instructors. However, the need to incorporate computer-based instruments and tools into translation teaching and learning has long been emphasized by Translation trainers and practitioners (Király, 2000).

One of the effective approaches in teaching Translation is collaborative approach of teaching and learning (Venkatesan et al., 2014). Collaborative learning is a pedagogical approach, where students work as a team to solve challenges, accomplish assignments, and learn new knowledge. In collaborative learning, there are three types of peer learning: peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and collaborative learning (Al-Shehari, 2017), whereby the relation (power and influence) between the instructor and the learners is usually equal, and both have almost identical (with the instructor's slightly higher) level of knowledge in the topic discussions. According to Johnson and Johnson (2018), five basic elements must be structured into the situation in order to obtain the effectiveness of cooperative learning: positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, social skills, and group processing. Collaborative learning is indeed not an approach for the instructor to relieve from the classroom practices, yet it exposes students to a different dimension to approach the materials provided (Palloff, & Pratt, 2010). Collaborative learning is usually practised with small groups of learners, helping each other to attain their aim and accomplish the projects by responsibly validating the tasks. If the tasks are well planned and adopted, it can strengthen learners' talents as well as their styles of learning (Beetham, & Sharpe, 2007).

Collaborative translation plays a significant role in Translation training. Salinas (2007) summarized several strengths for collaborative translator training, such as expanding linguistic knowledge, aggregating cultural knowledge, enhancing research techniques, reviewing a translation and quality assurance, and consolidating learners' autonomous learning and assessment. In online Translation training, she recommends starting by supplying the trainees with authentic texts from the Internet or using texts that translators have previously produced for the translation jobs. It is necessary to pay attention to the content of the composition and to use the appropriate form of text and the appropriate degree of complexity for teaching purposes. The suggestions given will allow Translation instructors to create activities for themselves such as downloading texts from the Internet and incorporating them into exercises using a tool like *Moodle*, as translator trainers despite Translation theoreticians, typically do not use structured textbooks in their classes.

Implementation of this approach helps Translation students to become more responsible for growing their understanding of their own learning and their peers'. In this pedagogical approach, students are encouraged to discuss their translations with their peers, compare their own translations with their peers' s work, justify their own translations and, therefore, absorb the merits of others' work and practise new translation techniques (Yuliasri, 2017). Moreover, collaborative learning in Translation often requires learners to work together with the instructor, who plays the role of the group member. They collectively determine a general aim for the learning process and outcome. It is important to note that collaborative learning does not misrepresent individual responsibility, but to getting the most out of each participant. For example, in addition to the students' decision on the type of the test for evaluating a translated text (e.g., Tee, et al., 2022), the instructor is supposed to highlight the general purpose of the course and the requirements of the programme (AlShehari, 2017). In

terms of discussing translations, the instructor would rather give verbal comments and gestures to relate parts of texts rather than put it all down in writing which is time-consuming. Furthermore, collaborating with their peers in producing a translation project is beneficial to the development of learners' negotiation and interpersonal skills, leadership skills and the skills of organising joint translation work, which are essential skills for a translator (Barros, 2011; Thelen, 2016; Yaqubi et al., 2018). Collaborative translation encourages practising the real working conditions of Translation companies to help the trainees adapt to the work environment. Furthermore, having students as "challengers" is important for active learning in online translation classes, and the idiosyncratic feature of translation, namely no perfect, correct and ideal translation (Newmark, 1988).

However, such effective teaching and learning approach cannot be easily achieved in an online class. The primary challenges of online Translation teaching and learning are the inconvenience of interaction and lack of initiative. For instance, Translation teaching needs to be accompanied by discussions and group work (James et al, 2018), but the students and lecturers' unfamiliarity with the online learning environment can pose challenges such as technical incompetency, general efficacy, and grasping and maintaining the students' attention throughout the online classes on Translation (Huang et al., 2020; Simamore, 2020). Despite the feasibility of real-time communication via online platforms, socio-psychological factors are another hindrance (Venkatesan et al., 2014). Engagement in the context of a Translation class is crucial due to the complexity of the course content (Goh et al., 2022). Hence, some students may be reluctant to express their personal opinions, contradict others' views and ask questions probably because of their cultural norms or lack of initiative in a web-based environment (Damary et al., 2017). For example, translation could be "unsuccessful" when due to the "culture bump" a reader of a target text (translation) has difficulty understanding a source-culture allusion (Ng, & Amini, 2019; Yap et al., 2018).

Apart from that, it is also challenging for online translation instructors to replicate real working situations and enhance the trainees' not merely translation techniques, but also interpersonal competence, as well as inspire the trainees' enthusiasm for thinking critically, debating with their peers and acquiring ideas that they can draw upon in the future. Al-Jarf (2017) noted that while students enjoyed and appreciated online translation learning, lecturers required more time to go through every discussion response and provide constructive feedback.

The online courses of the Translation may enable students to practise translation quality management and know where to find assistance, classify translations based on their level of quality with clear explanations for the assessment, help the students to work and function as a team, understand the stylistic and grammatical variations between language pairs students, and critical analysis of students' own translations (Al-Jarf, 2017).

In online Translation classes, getting to know the students' cultural background may be slowed down, and ultimately affect the learning process affected due to the distant nature of education in this mode. In some cases, the trainer may have to ask the students to provide multiple back translations to validate the individual translations where group works are not feasible, bearing in mind that providing feedback to individual students is more time consuming than giving comments on the group projects or assignments. Likewise, monitoring their progress is another relevant issue because online classroom might not be conducive as focusing on one student might neglect others who are in an entirely different "virtual learning atmosphere".

In sum, from a cultural perspective, as culture is a complex product of the interacting human minds (Kuan, et al., 2019), the response to collaborative learning, project-based, or problem-based methods can never be identical in face to face and online teaching and learning

of Translation. It is, therefore, essential for the instructor to inculcate cultural sensitivity in the class and utilize the dynamic cultural background of the students (Styler, 2004).

Conclusion

It is evident that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, online learning received a great boost in switching from teaching to learning. The pandemic situation posed unprecedented challenges that required instructors and students to adapt to online teaching and learning. Especially in tertiary education, students and instructors were unable to meet face to face in the class. They had to react to the changing conditions and formulate alternative strategies in accomplishing online learning.

One general advantage could be that unlike traditional teacher-centered physical classes, online classes are often student-centered due to the necessity of student participation and engagement as well as the given technological opportunities thanks to the use of the latest online platforms for teaching and learning. While students are generally more comfortable participating in the classroom discussions and activities assigned by the instructor in the collaborative learning online, some learners still hope to learn by listening to the lectures passively, or by participating in the individual and group discussions and presentation with their cameras turned off. Most difficulties lie in the “unsatisfactory” level of student participation in collaborative learning approach in online teaching mode, some teachers may find that online collaborative learning approach is time-consuming especially when giving feedback to individual students, translation validations, findings evidences from the text, etc.

It can be concluded that teachers need to adjust their teaching strategies to deal with the students’ challenges and problems. From the perspective of teachers, such polarized differences greatly hinder online interaction and holistic learning. Teachers also need to be proficient in engaging with effective use of various educational softwares, applications, and teaching aids, and to encourage students to familiarize themselves with the platforms before the online classes begin. Teachers can also encourage peer interactions, and collaboration to minimize students’ dependence on the teacher, as the online learning environment is generally a depersonalized setting which can impose restrictions on students’ expression of ideas freely in Translation classes.

It should be noted that group discussions, projects, activities, reflective journals, forums, in-class tasks, quizzes, and other types of group activities and assignments which are purposefully designed for groups than individuals promote collaboration, teamwork, and cooperation among the Translation students. Additionally, multiple collaborative activities as such enhance skills development such critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication skills, creativity, and time management of the students. In addition to that, the new socio-linguistic, cultural and subject matter knowledge related to Translation allow the students to learn throughout the whole process of collaborative learning.

In conclusion, the two modes of learning have pros and cons in the context of teaching Translation. For example, in face-to-face classes, instructors and students can discuss actively, the translation task could be revised much faster and easier where problems in the translation could be immediately identified, discussed with students and solved (Al-Jarf, 2017). Moreover, while online platforms provide students with a “convenient” learning environment, the traditional mode of face-to-face teaching may enhance students’ aptitude, personality, and more active rather than passive learners. Curriculum developers and education policymakers should encourage augmenting teachers’ digital skills. In this regard, media plays a key role in supporting national education goals for quality planning and emphasizing the students’ immense social-educational responsibility as well.

Having said that, although online teaching and learning are beneficial for Translation students, a combination of face-to-face and online teaching would be the best. Students from cultures with high power distance and uncertainty avoidance need to exit their comfort zone, as in an online environment, otherwise, they may be overlooked. A learning approach that uses both face-to-face lessons and e-learning is blended learning (b-learning) and aims to incorporate the benefits of both. It narrows the distance between conventional approaches and e-learning. While b-learning is often entrenched due to the financial problems of transitioning completely to e-learning, it can also be a question of pedagogical efficiency. Adopting blended (hybrid) mode of learning, wherever possible and provided that the circumstances and facilities are suitable, could be a constructive method for Translation classes in using collaborative approach of learning, which could assist to solve the teaching and learning problems to some extent. However, some topics in translation, especially interpreting, will require the instructor and students to be present physically in the class, or for example in Translation/Interpreting lab.

The lesson learnt is that the traditional learning mode, approaches and methods will continue to change for the “better” even after the pandemic, and perhaps “convenience”, affordability, and accessibility will be the principal variables in shaping the future of education in Translation, if not most fields.

Finally, adopting the best approach contextually shall be a continuous endeavour by the instructors to ensure no one-size-fits-all teaching pedagogy in promoting effective collaborative learning in a variety of learning environments, specifically online Translation class. This is to enhance students learning experiences as well as to maximise their learning capacities to accommodate the shift of education interface from physical classroom to online classroom amid COVID-19 pandemic.

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