Task based approach through Flipped classroom: English Language Learning

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Abstract. The effectiveness of task based learning and intervention of Language Lab in learning a new language has been established in several studies mentioned in the literature review. Incorporating a task-based approach in hybrid blended classroom is the major scope of this paper. The purpose of this study is to analyze the role and effectiveness of task based learning in the study of English Language through the intervention of online tools. Moreover, this research attempts to investigate the effectiveness on a cohort of Indian students pursuing Bachelor of Technology and Management in a State Private University. This paper will elucidate some existing practices of hybrid/blended models of English language learning that were put to use before COVID- 19 directed change in the Indian education system.

Keywords: Hybrid blended learning, task based learning, English Language learning.

1 Introduction

The role of a teacher nowadays is that of a creator, manager and facilitator of a learning environment. Irrespective of the apprehensions of the role of teachers in language teaching through flipped classroom, it is actually a very important one. An instructor is expected to have the knowledge and skills, and to be acquainted of the latest technological interventions and interfaces. Virtual instruction provides instructors

with the option to deliver content- synchronously and asynchronously. The comfort of taking a class through a personal medium such as laptop, tablet or mobile phone can be amplified using correct tools of delivery. Flipped classroom, when understood appropriately, can enhance user experience and learning as studies have suggested in the past.

1.1 Task based learning and Language Lab intervention

A language instructor is expected to be able to conduct workshops on drafting letters, reports, resume and other important correspondence. Additionally, providing remedial sessions to slow learners to hone their skills is also a part of the job. A language instructor is also expected to act as a counsellor, communication strategist and a trainer in soft skills and life skills. (Adamu et.al. 2018)

The task-based learning structure is created in a way to facilitate learning the language through tasks. In a study by Willis (1998), the following learning situations are listed as effective for language learning:

- Exposure to the target language, in this case English;
- Opportunities to use the given language for voicing one's thoughts or meaning and comprehension of ideas based on what students know;
- And finally to focus on language form which should be upgraded wherever necessary to prevent 'fossilisation'.

Task based learning and Language Lab intervention as studies suggest, are effective ways of language learning for students in all spheres of study. Peter Skehan (1996), as quoted by Karim (2020) demonstrated that task-based learning is an interesting way of content delivery and it elicits student interaction. The research further suggests that if students are given some time for preparation in this mechanism, it increases the range of language used in the performance of the task. However, preparation time has little influence on the accuracy of the language of a student. According to Karim (2020), giving some time to prepare in task-based learning is a sensible choice as it encourages them to use a new language. 93% students think that this given time helps them a lot more than impromptu or without preparation time (Karim, 2020).

'Authentic' task used as teaching material helps develop abilities in students to understand and process what they listen to, rather than just gain marks. For instance, if a BBC podcast is used in classrooms instead of any other material created only for the sake of the class, it helps in understanding the original purpose of the source as much as possible. Authentic stress, intonation and emphasis on ideas in close resemblance to the source helps in understanding the purpose better. A good example of this would be railway or airport announcements that help in finding the direction, timing and reasons for delay if any. An authentic task material helps in comprehending the message better (Widdowson, 1996).

Brenes & Alberto (2011) suggest in addition to this, audio-visual equipment should be made a mandatory part of every language-learning course, where technology-aided facilitation of content is an integral part of the pedagogy. The study further states that in listening and ear training exercises, language labs include

recordings on tapes, digital content and a computer software as an interface to interact with the students. Carter and McCarthy (as cited by Bygate, 2001) point out that "*since the mid-1970s tape-recording has been sufficiently cheap and practical to enable the widespread study of talk—whether native speaker talk or learner talk—and use of tape recorders in language classrooms*" (p. 14). Tape recorders have a special place in the the audio-language laboratory. They are used in ear training and making students aware of the characteristics of spoken discourse. (Brenes & Alberto, 2011) Use of video material or visual aids in face to face lectures makes it easier for students to understand the abstract content, says Gottschalk (1965), as cited by Hashmi (2013). Additionally, the role of a digital language lab is indispensable in the curriculum of an engineering student *"as machineries which maintain a cognitive approach to language acquisition are those which permit students utmost ability to be shown in a meaningful framework"* (Hashmi, 2013, pp.1)

The basic principles of language learning namely Listening, Speaking, Reading and writing, are better understood and practices when learners are given hands on learning experience in the Language Labs. Out of these four skills, Listening and Reading are considered passive or comprehension skill as they help students in understanding and learning new concepts. Quite literally, whatever a person can speak or write is what a person has either heard or read. Speaking skills and Writing skill on the other hand are referred to as Production skills or Active skills- Active because a learner is active in creating something and production because at the end of the process there is a product or an output which the student gives. Unlike the premises of a classroom where the teacher is left with pictures and drawings to explain the process, the Language Lab given an interface where a student can view the content, do it by themselves and understand the lecture properly. The correct pronunciation of vowels sounds and consonants sounds can be demonstrated effectively through the Language Labs. Students are allocated individual consoles where they can listen and comprehend the language as spoken by native speakers. For instance, a BBC podcast- how an anchor stresses and emphasizes on some parts of the narrative are all part of ear training for students. Similarly, the study of the sounds becomes natural and organic in a Language Lab such as the sound of a Vowel (long and short), Consonant (voiced and non-voiced), as well as Diphthongs that are a combination of vowel sounds. (Adamu et.al. 2018).

Researchers in the area of Language learning have conducted several studies on language lab intervention, task based learning and classroom setting. In a study by Benjamin (2018), the importance of language lab intervention in English language learning, specially speaking skills was analyzed. The sample audience of the study were non-native of the English language. They were learning English as a Second Language. The finding of this study was based on pre and post oral test conducted on the sample population. It was observed that before the Language Lab intervention, they could pronounce certain words well in the pre oral test. But after the training session through language lab intervention, they could correctly speak in the post oral test. Wherein they could not speak correctly in pre oral test but after the training session they could correctly

speak the words which was proved by post oral test. After the experiment, the sample population was asked to fill in a questionnaire indicating their preferences. As suggested in the finding, spoken skill was considered as the most difficult by the ESL trainers and Language Lab intervention was lauded useful in filling the said gap (Benjamin, 2018)

There are comparative studies in the area where experts have side by side observed the effectiveness of both the learning interventions. Some have emphasized on the effect of the language labs in language learning in direct comparison with regular classroom teaching. The following are some important studies in the area of comparative studies:

In a study by Gass, Mackey and Ross-Feldman (2005) the researchers studied the *'quality of conversational interactions in classrooms and laboratories'*. The researchers, essentially linguists, chose a sample of people studied Spanish as a foreign language. However, based on their study they did not find any difference between the two interventions that is- language intervention and classroom intervention. This study was cited by Brenes (2011) in the study of language labs and the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses.

Another study by Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (1996), however, pointed out another advantage in using a language lab when it comes to teaching pronunciation. Reasons- students are able to record themselves in a language lab setting; they can later listen to their own voices, take feedback actively, compare and respond. They said that:

*"Another controlled practice technique that works well if a language laboratory is available is that of mirroring or shadowing. To begin, learners read over the written text of a speech sample—be it a conversation or monologue—several times making sure that they understand it well. Then learners listen to the tape several times while reading along silently until their eyes follow the text in coordination with the speaker. Using a two-track tape system, learners record their voice while reading along with the speaker trying to maintain the same speed, rhythm, stress, and intonation. Finally, learners can play back the two simultaneous recordings and compare them." (*Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin, 1996, *p. 199)*

In some studies, it was argued that the spoken activities need to be made more interesting in order for students to respond. Reasons why students stay silent in the class could a varied basket-an activity could be boring or 'pitched at a wrong level'. Often the kind responses expected from students are dichotomous in nature where students can say Yes or No and then they sit quietly and chatter in their mother tongue. The study suggests that 94% students believe that speaking activities can be delivered in more interesting ways. The principle behind these activities should be to 'involve real communication that promotes learning and comprehension as suggested by Richard and Rodger (1989). In addition to this, Mahmud (2003) as cited by Karim (2020) argues that speaking can only develop through listening and ear training supplemented by 'visual information' and task based activities such as role-play. Karim (2020) suggests on the basis of

researches that instructors need to take a closer look at the kind of spoken activities used by them; whether or not that captures the students interest and need to speak and communicate.

1.2 Effective Online intervention

Wang Tao, Vice President of Tencent Cloud and Vice President of Tencent Education propounds that the integration of information technology in learning at all levels will be further augmented and e-learning solutions someday sooner become a vital component of education. In fact, educationists such as Dr Amjad of The University of Jordan, opinionate that e-learning solutions have changed the way of teaching completely. He points out how the medium of online instruction he chose for his classes, Lark, enabled him to reach out to students more efficiently and effectively through chat groups, video conferencing, voting and document sharing, during this pandemic. He suggests that his students find communicating on online platform more comfortable. Dr.Amjad strongly professes that e-learning solutions and face-to-face teaching can go hand in hand even after the pandemic.

Earlier studies of distance learning which was then used synonymously with online education, suggested that technology aided learning was not significantly different from regular classroom learning in terms of effectiveness and student understanding. Online education, in fact, was a more cost effective solution to education. With an advancement of technology enabling a wide population of the world to use web enabled platforms, online learning is suggested effective and efficient. A study by the U.S. Department of Education (2010) concludes that students fared equally or in some cases bases in their online courses tan traditional brick and mortar classroom teaching.

In a study by Neuhauser (2002), the researcher compared two sections of the same course—one section was online and asynchronous; the other was face-to-face. Both the sections were taught by the same instructor and same instructional content was used for both the sections. The findings of the study suggested no significant difference in the test scores test scores, assignments, participation grades, and final grades. The researcher, however suggested that the group which was exposed to online learning fared 'slightly higher'. Overwhelming majority of the students concluded that online education was as effective or sometimes more effective than face to face learning. The researcher however recommends that the results of the study must not be overgeneralized, which suggests a gap of conducting similar researches on different student populations.

Swan (2003) in a strongly worded statement quotes that the main objective of education is learning. So at circumstances, learning effectiveness is what should be measured before other factors such as access, student's satisfaction and cost effectiveness. The researcher recommends that if learning ceases to happen

in the online environment due to any reason, then the whole discussion of which medium is better, goes off the table.

2   Creating a Flipped classroom

Tucker (2012) and Prensky (2008) define the flipped classroom as a model of education in which students are provided course content and reading material before the start of the class. The class could be either face-to-face or online through video conferencing. This model of education helps students in understanding the concepts before they enter the class and then later use the class timing to discuss what they learnt or clarify doubts. It saves the time of both the parties, as there is no redundancy of repetition of content. Prensky (2001) also suggests that the millennial students need to be engaged through the course material provided to them online. .

2.1 Preparing a model flipped class for Language learning- English Communication

Department of Humanities at University of Petroleum & Energy Studies in India developed a comprehensive course called English Communication indigenously for its first year students in the year 2017, much before the COVID-19 directed change switched to online learning. An online language learning course is no instructor's first choice, especially in a Country like India where internet accessibility is a privilege.   The course was offered as a mandatory four-credit course to the students where they took two hours of lecture face to face and two hours online, every week for six months. The same course continues to be offered as completely online to first year students (synchronous as well as asynchronous), after the pandemic directed shift. The course runs on Blackboard Collaborate, which is a video conferencing, enabled Learning Management System (LMS).

Back in 2017 when the course English Communication was first conceptualized, there were several rounds of debates amongst language Faculty about the division of content into synchronous and asynchronous modules. At the end of the discussion, the decision was taken to create an exhaustive forty eight hour plan which included the details of every single hour of instruction that a student would take, either asynchronously or face to face.

The course focused on the development of students' language & communication skills, critical thinking, and problem solving skills through the understanding of four pillars of English Language namely Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. The course also enabled the students appreciate the nuances of technical communication along with a brushing up of their English grammar. Students were to be assessed on their presentation skills (using various technological tools, ability to work in a team and present their work with technical conviction).

The course was expected to meet the following outcomes of language learning post completion which meant that at the end of the course, a student would be able to:

- Comprehend and summarize various structural principles of English Grammar, prerequisite to English Communication.

- Evaluate and apply the acquired learning of remedial Grammar for self-expression and diverse communication purposes.

- Identify and analyze the nuances of English Language prerequisite to Scientific and Technical Writing.

- Apply appropriate Language skills for developing scientific and technical content using academic and experimental approaches.

- Comprehend and analyze receptive & productive skills on the basis of various task-based and machine-based activities.

- Apply and Formulate scenario based forms of Content for English Language learning and presentation.

2.2 Deciding the flow of content

To accomplish the above outcome of language learning through effective flipped classroom intervention, the course was sub divided into three major headings namely- Technical Communication, Grammar plus and Language Lab. The forty eight hour session plan was spread into the aforementioned headers. The format of the course was decided so that the content for each of the three headers was planned and place in week wise sections on the course portal. Out of the forty eight hours of engagement, twenty four hours were kept online and the other twenty four were brought face to face.
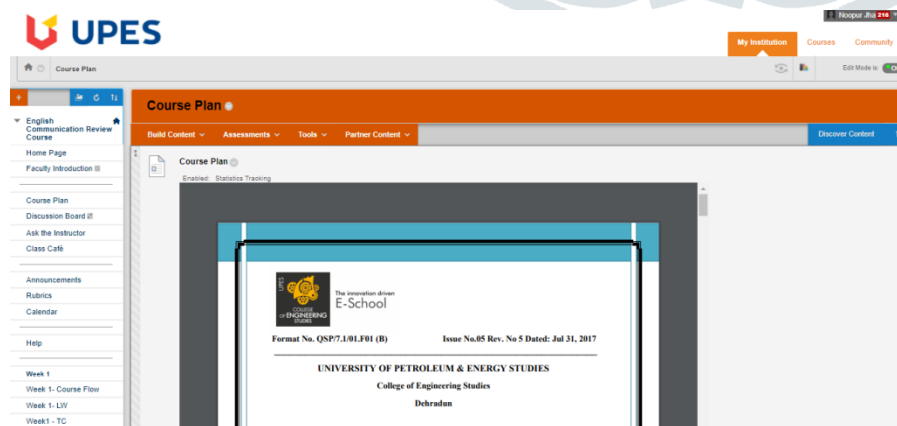

Fig. Portal of the course English Communication on Blackboard

The components included in each of the three sections were as listed below:

Week	Component	Weekly Course flow	Expected outcomes
1	Language Workshop	Introduction to Language Workshop syllabus & Machine interface	To get apprised of the Course structure, evaluation plan and evaluation Pattern.
	Technical Communication	Introduction to technical Communication	To define and discuss the nature of Technical writing.
	Grammar +	Overview of Remedial Grammar	To revisit aspects of Grammar and usage of correct English.
2	Language Workshop	Self-Expression techniques.	To be able to make a presentation on self.
	Technical Communication	Scientific English – Nuances	Essentials of technical writing: sentence structure and paragraph development.
	Grammar +	Common Errors in English	To be able to draft an introduction about self-using correct parameters.
3	Language Workshop	Listening Skills: Basic Ear Training. Listening to Received Pronunciation.	To be able to discriminate between native and second language using machine based listening practice.
	Technical Communication	Generalization	To be able to identify the use and levels of generalization in technical writing.
	Grammar +	Articles and Prepositions	To be able to make correct usage of articles and prepositions in writing.
4	Language Workshop	Listening Skills: Attention to Accuracy: Situational Conversations/Role Play/Development of Argumentative Skills(using BEC audio in the Labs)	To assess the impact of the listening practice sessions by being exposed to BEC audio listening test- Continuous Evaluation Tool.

	Technical Communication	Classification	To recognize and be able to write different levels of classification.
	Grammar +	Tense 1,2,3	To be able to use correct form(s) of tense.
5	Language Workshop	Speaking Skills: Individual Introduction to IPA symbols. Basic training for correct Pronunciation pattern	To be acquainted with the various organs of speech using International Phonetics Alphabet & Phonetic drilling using both audio-video & quizzes. To learn and use the correct 'place and manner of articulation'.
	Technical Communication	Definition	To correctly define an entity based on specific parameters.
	Grammar +	Simple Compound and Complex sentence	To be able appreciate the difference among the different types of sentences and use them correctly.
6	Language Workshop	Speaking Skills: Official/Public Speaking with emphasis on correct speech patterns, common errors in reading and speaking with emphasis on Para linguistics.	To carry out the basics of Public speaking; Etiquette while following correct voice modulation and acceptable Paralinguistic features.
	Technical Communication	Comparison & Contrast	To understand and list the similarities and differences using correct technique.
	Grammar +	Active & Passive Voice	To be able to make use of as well as to be able to convert both Active and Passive voice in different contexts.

7	Language Workshop	Speaking Skills: Individual speaking skills	To assess the ability of being able to use acquired Speaking Skills using Extempore-Continuous Evaluation tool.
	Technical Communication	Instructions	To be able to synthesize formal and informal instructions.
	Grammar +	Conditional Sentences	To be able to compare types of conditional sentences.
8	Language Workshop	Reading Skills: Skimming and Scanning: Comprehension Skills based on practice Reading Comprehension	To differentiate among various reading techniques viz. Skimming Scanning etc. required to enhancing reading ability.
	Technical Communication	Description	To be able to develop technical descriptions.
	Grammar+	Question Tags	To be able to identify and use proper question tags.
9	Language Workshop	Reading Skills: Skimming and Scanning: Comprehension Skills based on practice Reading Comprehension	To assess the ability Reading Comprehension using standard BEC Reading Comprehension as Continuous Evaluation tool.
	Technical Communication	Narratives	To be able to develop narratives using linear construction.
	Grammar +	Phrasal Verbs	To be able to identify and use phrasal verbs correctly.
10	Language Workshop	Writing Skill : Practice	To be able to identify and apply critical thinking skills in writing.
	Technical Communication	Explanation	To be able to develop technical explanations. .

	Grammar +	Idioms	To be able to use the idioms to enrich their expression
11	Language Workshop	Writing Skills: Writing for Purpose (Objective/Subjective) with special emphasis on Grammar and Vocabulary Building Exercises	To apply language & reflective skills to create a write up for given iconic images.
	Technical Communication	Hypothesis	To formulate hypothetical statements based on the use of prediction and circumstances.
	Grammar +	Blog	To be able to apply all this acquired learning in their writing skills
12	Language Workshop	Self - Reflection Activity	To be able to make a comparison in one's evolution in terms of one's communication ability in a semester
	Technical Communication	Technical Poster- forms, layouts, types.	To be able to create technical posters.
	Grammar +	Buzzwords	To learn and put to use trending words and phrases.

2.2 Weekly content delivery and discussion:

Every week, students met the Faculty in physical classroom for a two-hour long session. However, before meeting with the Faculty for a face-to-face session, a weekly course flow message would be sent to them on Blackboard Announcement so that they come to the class well prepared. The course flow message was a unique idea so that the students were well aware of what to expect in a week's delivery; additionally if they would wish to take a few practice exercises before coming to the class, that option was also available to them. The course flow was a technique used to promote proactive and accelerated behavior in the students, which is the major intent of a flipped classroom. Mentioned below is an example of the weekly course flow:

COURSE FLOW- WEEK – 1

Hello Students!

Welcome to the First week of English Communication.

As, you can see below, the Course, ENGLISH COMMUNICATION is trifurcated into the following modules:

Language Workshop

Technical Communication

Grammar *+ (G+)*

Continues Evaluation (CE) based on the graded activity will be conducted, as per the weekly course plan.

You are expected to go through the resources provided, so that you may actively participate in classroom discussions and online forums/discussions based on each session module. Graded activity has been listed under a separate tab in the Week.

Component	*Contents on Weekly F2F / Blended / Online Resources*	*Activity*	*Learning Outcomes*
Language Workshop	*Introduction to Language Workshop syllabus & Machine interface*	*Ice-Breaker*	*To get apprised of the Course structure, CE plan and evaluation Pattern.*
Technical Communication	*Introduction to technical Communication*	***Graded Discussion***	*To define and discuss the nature of Technical writing.*

Grammar +	Overview of Remedial Grammar	**Graded Test**	To revisit aspects of Grammar and usage of correct English.

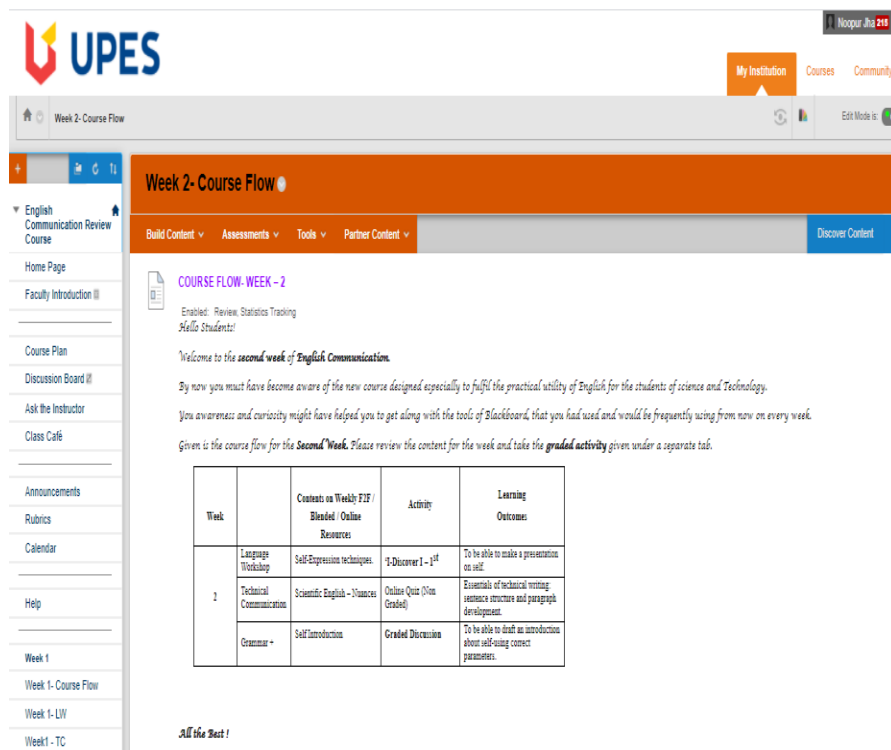*All the Best for the coming week!*

Fig. Weekly courseflow available to students at the beginning of every week of English Communication

Making the delivery interesting online was a challenge as the medium (Blackboard) was still new and unexplored. Beside that, putting up text document on a student's screen is not the best way to promote active learning. So in the interest of creating enganging content through innovative delivery, Kaltura and Storyline were used with animations and voice overs. One such example is that of a creatively created content in the second week of Grammar plus. The exercise is called Self introduction where a student writes a speech about himself or herself to formally introduce to the class and the Faculty. Basically they were expected to go through the content on Blackboard and the deliver their speech later that week in the physical classroom. Here is the transcirpt of the Voice over used to build the content on Self Introuction.

Self Introduction

- *Start the write up with a greeting!*

- *Use "I am…" or you can use "My name is…" instead of starting with "Myself…"*

- *While stating your native or hometown, mention in a line what is unique about the city/town/village. It could be a different cuisine maybe, a special handicraft, city planning, or anything at all.*

- *Do not mention 10th class and 12th class. There are terms for it like Matriculation or Senior Secondary, etc.*

- *There is more to you than what grades you scored in your examinations previously.*

- *Focus more on your qualities, special skills, punctuality, professional behavior, patience, sense of humor etc.*

- *When writing about your hobby, do not write about the things you do to pass time.*

- *Identify your hobby as something that you specially take out time for, like playing guitar, gardening, reading a book or working out in a gym.*

- *Let us learn to differentiate between the English we use on Facebook and the English we use in a discussion!*

- *Whenever unsure of a spelling, do not hesitate to use a dictionary or speak with your instructor.*

- *Make sure you use your commas and periods at the proper place. Punctuations are very important in a passage!*

- *Before you post your discussion, read it once to rectify any silly errors you might have made. It's called Proof Reading!*
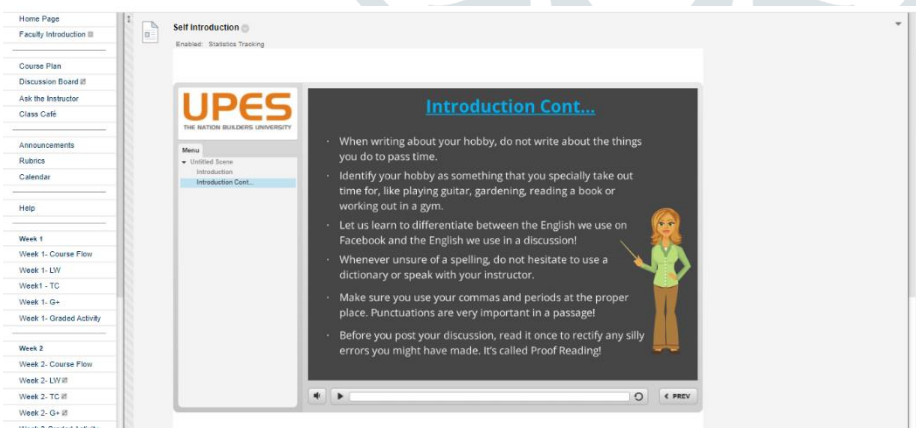

Fig. Self introduction content created on storyline using voice-over and animated instructor.

2.3 Evaluation Pattern and method:

Keeping in mind the intent of the course and the need for language learning paramount, the evaluation was kept as continuous pattern. Every week students were required to take test in the form of an assignment or a discussion on Blackboard portal, objective quiz again on Blackboard or oral evaluation either on Blackboard or in the physical classroom. However, in the interest of making the exams more interactive and to enhance the user experience, innovative evaluations were created in terms of delivery and content. One such method test was based on learning Tense in Grammar plus. The test was set in a way that a student could take it up as many time as he or she would want till they achieve a score over seventy percent. The picture below shows the test that students took under the section of Grammar Plus.
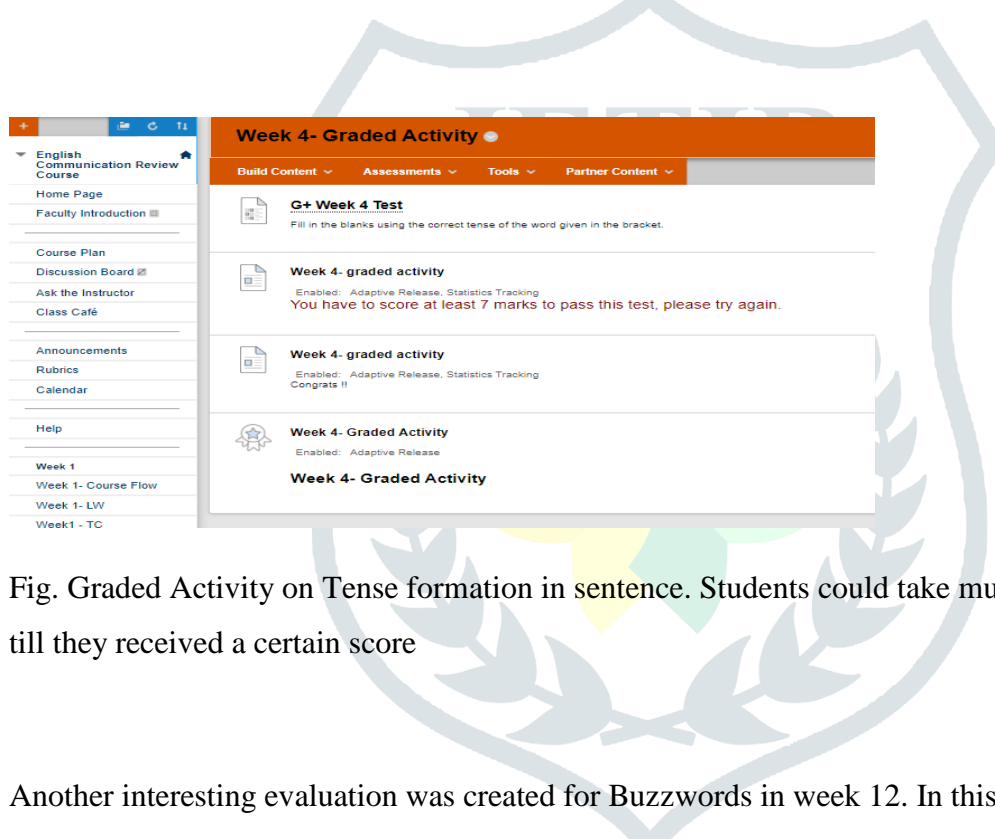

Fig. Graded Activity on Tense formation in sentence. Students could take multiple attempts of this test till they received a certain score

Another interesting evaluation was created for Buzzwords in week 12. In this exercise, students needed to scan through their social media handles, news sites they visited frequently so that they could find out words or phrases that were trending at that time- an important exercise that helped them in understanding lexicographic terms and colloquial. The activity planned for them incorporated the following exercise:

Buzzword exercise-

Dear Students,

Here is something fun for you to do!

- *Go through your Facebook wall.*
- *Check on your Instagram feed.*
- *See what is trending on twitter today.*
- *Watch your favorite news channel for about 10 minutes, or visit the online telecast.*
- *See the Front page of at least three English Newspapers.*
- *Additionally, use every other source of information that you can find.*

Point is, you need to find 5 buzzwords, using all of these sources. These buzzwords can be from any field be it science, business, movies, social network etc. Once you find your buzzwords, use them in sentences that bring out their meaning. Please Note- Your Post will be evaluated only after you comment on two of your classmates' posts.

All the Best!

3   Conclusion:

Students met their respective Faculty once every week at a scheduled time for two hours. They were highly engaged with the online content, although the initial motive was to not miss a single graded activity. Nevertheless, eventually they began to enjoy it. The exercises were created in short snippets instead of mid semester and end semester essay type exams. Although short discussion and assignments were also part of the entire basket. The following report suggests the activity of one batch of B.Tech Computer Science with specialization in Business Analytics:

Course Activity Overview

Course Name	**English Communication**
Course ID	INPE01.COMM1001.COMM1001.2017.1.CS.50024054.BTec-CS-BAO
Number of Students	121
Number of Active Students	121
Date Range	01/07/17 - 31/12/17

Activity for all enrolled students.

Course Overview

Student Activity By Day

Charts do not appear in Excel

01/07/17 - 31/12/17

Total Time in Course	6187.57
Average Time Per Active Student	51.14

Day of Week	Hours
Monday	986.72
Tuesday	918.61
Wednesday	1191.53

Thursday	1066.04
Friday	544.70
Saturday	871.22
Sunday	608.76
Student Overview (121 Students)	
Click a bar to view a student's individual activity.	
Charts do not appear in Excel	
Average Time Per Active Student In Hours	51.14

The course report has a detailed list of all the students who attended the course and amount of time every student spent on the portal. This link will redirect to the original course report of the batch:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1itVihF_6gbmfWrEU5tvhchPb-aU9ot8W/view?usp=sharing

The concept of flipped learning is centered on engagement and interactivity of the students and the facilitator or instructor. While traditional school of thought professes teaching learning, flipped learning is probably the next generation pedagogy that makes students more argumentative, more akin to discussion and cross-questioning. The classroom is converted to a debating room where everybody interacts and engages.

This experiment of creating a flipped class for English Language Learning had its own challenges in terms of preparation of the content. At a certain point in time, it looked like an impossible task to review students every single week; especially when every single instructor deals with a cohort size of more than 100 students. However, with the help of machine-based activities the job was facilitated. Creating engaging content for the students so that they spend time online while ensuring that there is a definite take away in terms of language learning- easier said than done. Nevertheless, it is a challenge that every 21st century teacher, instructor, facilitator is equipped to deal with.

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