Digital Pedagogy Before, During, and After COVID-19:
Reflections of an Indian EFL Teacher

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the adoption of synchronous online learning in Indian schools, prompting questions about the sustainability of these changes and whether digital pedagogy has returned to pre-Covid levels. A case study examined an EFL teacher's principles and practices in a rural elementary school, using Farrell's reflective practice framework to understand perceived changes influencing his thoughts, practices, and outlooks. The study reveals that the sudden adoption of digital teaching in schools had no long-term impact. Teachers received a preliminary induction, but there has not yet been any enduring transformation. As a result, following the pandemic, schools have reverted to their previous face-to-face format, abandoning the online learning impulse and environment. It has been discovered that the purported commitments to strengthen the school system's adaptability and resilience to handle any such future tragedies are ineffectual. The return of the previous resistance to digital pedagogy in school had been detrimental to the country's digital learning flight.

KEYWORDS

Covid-19, Digital Pedagogy, EFL, India, Reflections, School Teachers

INTRODUCTION

With the end of the COVID-19 threats, people may finally move past their severe existential dilemma. However, it has permanently altered every facet of human cognition and behaviour. The creation of a flexible framework to handle any such pandemic crises in the future is the main goal of the majority of retrospective evaluations and studies on its effects.

The pandemic disruption in the education system was huge across globe. It has led to closures of schools, training institutes, and higher education facilities worldwide, causing a paradigm shift in education delivery through online platforms (Muthuprasad et al., 2021; Zhao & Watterston, 2021). According to UNESCO, by the end of April 2020, 186 countries have implemented nationwide closures, affecting about 73.8% of the total enrolled learners (UNESCO, 2020a). This shift presents

challenges for both teachers and students, as they must adapt to a new system, referred to as "Education in Emergency" (Howard et al., 2021, p.3).

The pandemic had forced teachers and students to quickly adapt to virtual education, resulting in emergency of remote teaching. Instruction has shifted online, then back to the physical classroom, or a combination of remote delivery and face-to-face, known as the HyFlex model (Beatty, 2019). Teachers had to adapt to this specific learning environment to create feasible and effective learning experiences (Lockee, 2021). Teachers and students experienced psychosocial effects such as self-discipline, loneliness, depression, and desperation due to lockdown, quarantine, or family member loss (Sang et al., 2021; Dayal & Pratibha, 2023).

The pandemic prompted parents and caregivers to become home-learning helpers, utilizing technology for daily learning, teaching, and assessment, despite initial confusion and anxiety (Dos Santos, 2022). Online digital interfaces were used for learning, teaching, and assessment (Bashir et al., 2021). Teachers from technologically less advanced countries faced challenges in providing necessary devices and internet access (Kundu & Bej, 2021a). Despite these challenges, they showed support and moral values by helping each other in difficult situations (Detyna et al., 2023).

Education systems globally prioritize delivering educational standards, creating a conducive environment for student well-being, nurturing social and interpersonal skills, and teaching moral values and daily routines (Farrell & Stanclik, 2023). These are the vulnerable areas that suffered greatly during the epidemic, and as research has shown, "Schools must reopen in order to continue providing guidance and support to students" (UNESCO, 2020b, p.7).

The reopening of schools has alleviated exhaustive online classes, but students and teachers are not happy yet since they have developed a habit to work online (Mahyoob, 2020; Mayrink, Albuquerque-Costa, & Ferraz, 2021; Kundu at al., 2022). The pandemic has blurred traditional and distance education lines, leading to a shift towards multi-mode delivery systems allowing for seamless transition across different systems (Radic et al., 2021).

During the pandemic, EFL teaching-learning has been significantly influenced by technology, with teachers adopting online applications to improve language proficiency (Khatoony & Nezhadmehr, 2020; Cutri et al., 2020; Kundu & Betal, 2022). Despite technical issues, most studies praised the positive impact of online learning, offering flexibility for teachers and learners (Rajat et al., 2020; Mahyoob, 2020; Bataineh et al., 2021; Kundu & Bej, 2021b; Kundu & Bej, 2021c).

This research involves the detailed study of an Indian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teacher's perspectives on digital pedagogy before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic, with an emphasis on professional competence and teaching behaviours. The phenomenological approach (refer Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019) would be helpful to glean new insights on digital pedagogy to create a more adaptive and resilient education system in the post-pandemic age. It looks into the effects of these changes as well as the system's capacity to absorb the beneficial adjustments. The basic research questions set for this investigation include:

1. How did the teacher find digital pedagogy before the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How did he find digital pedagogy during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How did he find digital pedagogy during the post-COVID-19 era?

RESEARCH CONTEXT

In the 21st century, technology and data have become integral to education, with digital skills becoming increasingly important. Education has transitioned from traditional classrooms to online learning, supplemented by mobile phones. This allows students to attend classes from anywhere, facilitates quick communication, and allows access to information via smartphones. Here, teachers have a crucial role in incorporating ICT into their regular classes, as well as preparing students for today's digital world (UNESCO, 2011).

Integrating ICT into English language instruction is significant because it meets a real need among students who grew up with technology and are studying English (Chapelle, 2010). In general, research on the relationship between computers and English has found that the direction of effect is from computer use to English success, implying a compelling argument for the fact that using technology and computer-mediated communication tools can impact second or foreign language learning. Consequently, technology increases the visibility of language acquisition and communication (Kenning, 2007). Microsoft PowerPoint presentations improve vocabulary, and the integration of face-to-face interaction and online materials has shown significant benefits for learners (Mahmoudzadeh, 2014).

The use of ICT in English language acquisition has numerous advantages (Sayuti et al., 2020), including quick feedback, instant contact, enhanced motivation, and real-world resources both within and beyond the classroom. Showcross (2004) also listed the following benefits of technology in English language teaching: increased accessibility and flexibility; integration of media and linguistic skills; constant access to authentic material; reaching larger and more remote populations; speech samples and accents; appropriate content; feedback and monitoring; increased learner involvement and enthusiasm; and new classroom dynamics. Since the 1930s, teachers have utilized interactive media techniques to teach English language and culture, leading to the development of the internet and various applications, making ICT applications increasingly prevalent in ELT (Pardede (2011; Fauzi & Angkasawati, 2019; Ramadani & Xhaferi, 2020).

In India, digital education was not a popular and widely accepted concept before the pandemic arrival of the COVID-19 (Kaur & Aziz, 2020; Kundu, Bej, & Rice, 2020; Kundu & Bej, 2022). It didn't get a place in the daily school pedagogy despite different government initiatives due to public resistance to it. Teachers were reactionary and afraid of losing jobs, parents were suspicious of the perverted future of their wards, and school management neither had money for digital infrastructure nor had a positive mind-set to accept the change (Kundu, 2018). However, the pandemic has shifted educational principles to remoteness, digitization, and online teaching, making it unprecedented for most EFL teachers (Freddi, 2021).

In 2020, educational innovations have made remote learning possible, but access remains a challenge (Zhang & Gillespie, 2023). Solutions include mobile hotspots, mail, and public broadcasting. Electronic resources like Zoom and Google Meet have enabled global experts to join online classrooms. Hands-on learning has led to virtual field trips and labs (Bashir et al., 2021). The next generation of online education can serve learners of all ages, moving from adult learners to younger ones in primary and secondary education.

The ELT to the non-native first generation learners is one of the most difficult disciplines of Indian school pedagogy. It is a part of basic literacy in this country which has a very poor growth rate among students (Patil, 2020). Most elementary school kids in rural India have a fear of English, despite it being a compulsory second language (Sowmiya, 2018; Mishra, 2015). Adding this, the post-pandemic education quality in the India has significantly declined, with 92% and 82% of students losing at least one language and mathematical ability respectively (Muthuprasad et al., 2021). The lowest performance was seen in public schools and marginalized communities. A survey found that only 25% of grade 3 children could read fluently in their mother tongue, with Dalit and Adivasi children being particularly affected (Dayal & Pratibha, 2023). It further said only 27.5% of students had access to digital devices during digital transition, with only 15.8% finding online learning enjoyable. The ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) 2023 report reveals that 25% of rural children (between the ages of 14 and 18) struggle with reading Class 2 level texts in their native tongue, with over 43% struggling with English sentences. Teachers were unprepared and exacerbating marginalized students' exclusion.

Since Fall 2020, school reopening in India has been gradual, and COVID-19 formally announced won in September 2022 putting a lasting impact, including large-scale online learning and increased attention to teachers and students' mental health (Mercan et al., 2021; Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). Early online education pioneers applied instructional design principles to create effective learning

environments (Cutri at al., 2020). They focused on engaging students and implementing effective methods for student success, laying the groundwork for modern virtual learning, which incorporates various approaches and delivery modes.

But the pandemic has disrupted traditional teaching formats globally, forcing teachers to implement provisional solutions quickly (Moser, Wei, & Brenner, 2021). This has affected academic systems, particularly in developing countries like India, which already lack e-education infrastructure (Schmied, 2021). A qualitative study examining e-intrusion in Indian EFL teaching during the pandemic highlighted a nation-wide person-in-context approach got prominence in school pedagogy (refer Kundu & Betal, 2022).

The shift towards e-learning had transformed the role of teachers, standardized pedagogical content, and removed personal contact between students and teachers (Kundu & Bej, 2021a). This had led to a centralized mechanism monitoring performance, neglecting cultural differences, institutional experiences, social and economic backgrounds, and challenges of disparity and inequality within the education system. The system is also prone to errors, leading to setbacks for students and a lack of direct interface for individuals to voice concerns and rectify these issues. The focus on e-learning has reduced teachers to mere conduits of information, neglecting the importance of inclusiveness and equity in education.

Even so, in the short time it has been developed, e-learning has improved communication skills such as speaking, listening, writing, and reading (LSWR), the four main components of ELT (Bhatt, Dash, & Chetia, 2022). This indicates the need for more research to ensure that these beneficial changes are maintained by an ongoing e-learning programme in these schools. The present study explores how teachers view digital pedagogy over the three stages of the COVID-19 epidemic, and it will be an essential resource for learning firsthand about teachers' perspectives on these developments.

METHODOLOGY

"Human beings, who are almost unique in having the ability to learn from the experience of others, are also remarkable for their apparent disinclination to do so." (Douglas Adams Quotes, n.d.).

Humans often struggle to learn from others' experiences, possibly due to assumptions about similar circumstances, wiser decisions, or the reliability of subjective experiences. However, learning from others' experiences is essential for scholars and a foundational premise of research, which involves detailed study of subjects to discover information or gain new understanding, often requiring understanding others' experiences (Husserl, 1970).

This study employed a qualitative case study approach within the general phenomenological methodology. Phenomenology is a form of qualitative research that focuses on the study of an individual's lived experiences within the world (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). It seeks to explore a phenomenon from the perspective of those who experienced it, aiming to understand its essence and meaning (Teherani et al., 2015). It is a very effective research methodology that helps in exploration of a phenomenon within some particular context through various data sources or variety of lenses by exploring multiple facets of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Rashid et al., 2019). This attitude towards phenomenology is like that of 'a natural scientist' who has just discovered a previously unknown dimension of reality (Staiti, 2012). Thus, there is a solid theoretical foundation for the methodology this study used.

A case study is a comprehensive research design, primarily qualitative, that investigates an identified problem or a phenomenon in its real-life context, involving an individual, group, organization, or event (Yin, 2009, p. 18). According to Perry (2011), case studies are frequently used in applied linguistics research and have been shown to be effective in advancing understanding of second language instruction when used in conjunction with Farrell's (2015) framework (e.g. Farrell & Kennedy, 2019).

Figure 1. Framework for reflecting on practice
(Source: Farrell, 2015)
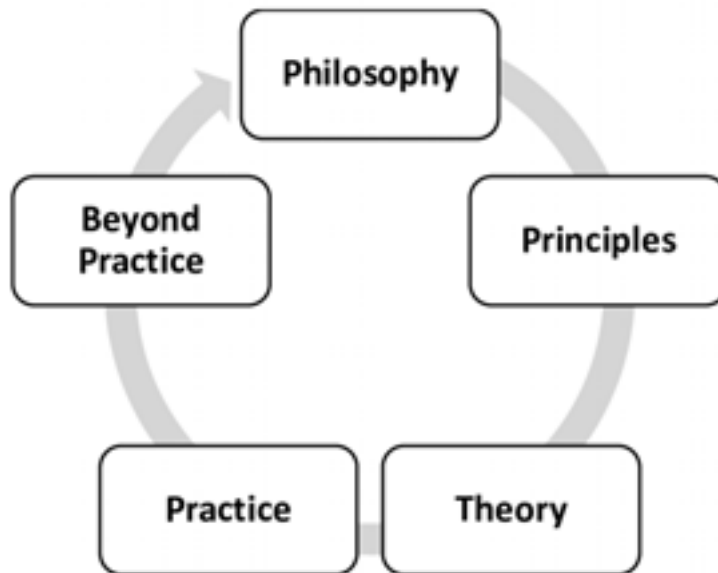
In this study there is only one participant whose thought process has been analysed over a specific phenomenon. Salil (pseudonym of the participant since his original name cannot be revealed respecting research ethics), a male EFL teacher from the state of West Bengal in India has been teaching for thirteen years in a rural elementary school and holds a masters' degree in English Language Teaching. He holds a PhD degree in education as well. Salil is a resident of the school locality for last forty years and enjoy a good reputation as a student and as a teacher. He finds this study as an opportunity to reflect on his teaching practices before, during and after COVID-19 scenarios.

Salil went through all three phases of the situation: the pre-Covid, Covid, and post-Covid phases. His memories are filled with the opportunities and challenges that this extraordinary epidemic brought about in his school and in the pedagogy. The school is a small elementary school with 85 pupils, three of his colleagues, and four grades ranging from fifth to eighth. I find him an emotional teacher who is sensitive to his students' needs and feelings.

The time frame 'before Covid' refers to time before April 2020 when the pandemic did not need a widespread shutdown of Indian schools. 'After Covid' refers to the period after September 2022 when classes resumed following a prolonged 19-month closure. The time frame in between the two is referred to as 'during Covid.'

This framework for reflecting on practice as outlined in Figure 1 below, consists of five interconnected levels: philosophy, principles, theory, practices, and beyond practice (Farrell, 2015). Farrell's (2015) framework for reflecting on practice is a recent example, focusing on intellectual, cognitive, meta-cognitive, spiritual, moral, and emotional aspects of reflection. This approach helps teachers become more aware of their philosophy, principles, theories, and practices. Wright (2010) emphasizes the importance of reflective practice in 'Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages' (TESOL), focusing on classroom teaching behaviours and teachers' professional competence (Dewey, 1933; Schons, 1983).

The initial stage of *philosophy* reflection involves teachers examining themselves as a teacher-as-person, gaining self-knowledge and examining their background and life experiences, which

significantly impact person's life. Salil was asked about his values, goals, and beliefs regarding digital pedagogy to explore this aspect.

Reflecting on teaching *principles* is crucial for effective English as a second or foreign language teaching. These principles may not align with teaching reality due to their acceptance without reference to their real grounds. Salil was asked if he finds his beliefs and values are applicable in his school's classroom practice.

Teachers must reflect on their teaching *theories* and how they can effectively deliver the desired lesson in the classroom. Stern (1983) asserts that language teachers cannot teach a language without a theory, even if it is implicit in their actions and decisions. Salil was asked about the method he used to complete his EFL teaching assignments.

Reflection on teaching *practice* allows teachers to examine observable actions, test hidden teaching aspects, and compare philosophy, principles, and theories, influenced by the first three levels of the reflective framework. Salil was asked questions on three vital aspects needed for digital pedagogy: skill, device, and attitude.

The final phase involves *critical reflection beyond practice*, encouraging teachers to explore sociolinguistic factors influencing their practice and engage in critical dialogue with their profession, fostering awareness of lesson impact on society. Here, Salil's metacognitive thinking over the EFL teaching and his creativity to continue it digitally were asked.

Freeman (2016) maintains, reflective practice offers a way into the less "accessible aspects of teacher's work" (p. 208). Reflective practice generally means that teachers take the responsibility of looking at their professional practice, and the underlying philosophy, beliefs, and theories that shape their practice both inside or outside the classroom so that their professional practice can become personally meaningful to them (Farrell, 2015). The main premise of reflection is that teachers who engage in reflective practice can develop a deeper understanding of their philosophy, principles, and theories as they relate to their actual practices, and thus become proactive and confident in their teaching (Farrell, 2019).

Over the course of a month, information was gathered via written reflection assignments, virtual classroom observations in accordance with the reflective framework (Farrell, 2015), and transcribed semi-structured interviews and follow-up interviews. Six interviews were done in total: one pre-interview to get background information and five follow-up interviews after every phase of the framework for reflective practice was completed. Every interview was done face to face, took between thirty and forty-five minutes to record, and was transcribed thereafter (Maxwell, 1992).

The research focused on a novice EFL teacher's reflections on philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice. Data analysis involved inductive discovery, deductive coding, and organization based on the reflective practice framework. Recurring patterns were grouped and compared against the research question. Member checking confirmed data validity, and findings were shared with participants for review.

FINDINGS

The answers to the primary research question are provided by the findings. How was Salil's reflections on his teaching practices in pre-Covid, during Covid, and post-Covid period?

DISCUSSION

During COVID-19, Salil effectively moved his EFL pedagogic philosophy from in-person to online even against his better judgement. By doing so, he was able to rediscover his identity as an EFL teacher and synchronise his teaching philosophies with the time's demand, procedures, and standards.

Table 1. Teacher's reflections on digital demagogy in school at three different phases

Period	Codes	Question on sub-codes	Notable responses
Before COVID-19 (before April 2020)	Philosophy	How were EFL lessons taught? Have you utilised ICT?	*"I was accustomed to teach in the way I learnt in my school, face-to-face, with an absolute teacher dominance."*
	Principles	Did you find online learning to be beneficial?	*"The listening, speaking, writing, and reading (LSWR) subjects were taught in class, but digital interventions were not based on established principles."*
	Theory	Which teaching method did you use?	*"The classrooms were a hub for language acquisition, utilizing mainly grammar translation methods. We had less communication in English since students hardly understand it."*
	Practice/Skills for digital pedagogy	Did you feel comfortable communicating online?	*"I didn't know basics of online communication at that time."*
		Did you use the internet or ICT when teaching EFL?	*"My knowledge of ICT and internet was very nominal, I just heard about these terms."*
		Did you find it difficult to manage your time during the online course?	*"I didn't have experience of taking a online class and management the class time."*
		How did you feel about online testing?	*"I didn't hear about e-assessment or assessment conducted online."*
	Practice/Devices and Support for digital pedagogy	Did you use e-devices (Smartphone, Internet, WhatsApp, Google Meet, Facebook, Messenger, E-mail)?	*"The individual had a smart phone, but it was not a good gadget as it often hangs when trying to open large websites or the internet."*
		What kind of technical problems did you experience?	*"My school didn't have a computer and internet connectivity. It got electrified in 2018."*
		How did the digital pedagogy support at your school go?	*Digital teaching learning was a concept we knew only in trainings but there were no practical utilizations from our end. School never attempted an initiative towards this end."*
	Practice/Attitude for digital pedagogy	Were you drawn to the use of digital pedagogy?	*"I had no such interest for digital pedagogy rather I was comfortable with the in-classroom face-to-face teaching."*
		Have you promised yourself anything regarding digital teaching?	*"All of my teaching commitments were associated with traditional classroom teaching learning."*
		Were you prepared to pick up new skills for digital teaching?	*"It was all relating traditional teaching and no effort I made towards learning e-learning and e-teaching."*
		Did the idea of digital education make you restless?	*"I feel I have enough of it to make my students understand what I teach in my class."*
		Were you prepared to adapt to a different style of instruction?	*"I always try to adopt myself towards a new situation pr challenges."*
	Beyond practice	Have you taken any noteworthy or novel steps towards digital teaching?	*"It was surrounding face-to-face teaching learning."*

Table 1. Continued

Period	Codes	Question on sub-codes	Notable responses
During Covid 19 (2019-2022)	Philosophy	How were EFL lessons taught? Have you utilised ICT?	*"A new philosophy and thinking developed overnight that we need to teach online to face an emergency school closure."*
	Principles	Did you find online learning to be beneficial?	*"Language teaching codes, LSWR, changed overnight and students were now served online on all four codes."*
	Theory	Which teaching method did you use?	*"These were now covered under online, synchronous or asynchronous."*
	Practice/Skills for digital pedagogy	Did you feel comfortable communicating online?	*"During Covid I was forced to adapt in online communication forgetting all my earlier resistance to it."*
		Did you use the internet or ICT when teaching EFL?	*"The emergence of an overnight online environment, I feel, enhanced my digital literacy a lot."*
		Did you find it difficult to manage your time during the online course?	*"It was a big problem initially but I found with practice I have improved my time management skills in online teaching integrating computers or smartphones."*
		How did you feel about online testing?	*"It was the last resort and I had to take it up and made myself learn e-assessment basics."*
	Practice/Devices and Support for digital pedagogy	Did you use e-devices (Smartphone, Internet, WhatsApp, Google Meet, Facebook, Messenger, E-mail)?	*"My old smartphone was giving me problems, so I traded it in for a quicker one. Students, driven by obligations, too increasingly began to arrange their gadgets so they could attend lessons online. All of us had become extremely familiar with terms like smartphone, internet, WhatsApp, Google Meet, Facebook, Messenger, and email overnight."*
		What kind of technical problems did you experience?	*"Issues were numerous like lack of devices, internet, even electricity, online communications, and many more, still the online teaching was going on in absence of an alternative."*
		How did the digital pedagogy support at your school go?	*"School's earlier stand had changed and it started pushing teachers taking online classes compulsorily with whatever they had."*
	Practice/Attitude for digital pedagogy	Were you drawn to the use of digital pedagogy?	*"Now my interest for online teaching developed and I stared gathering confidence in me about online operations."*
		Have you promised yourself anything regarding digital teaching?	*"I was commitment to my students and tried my best to serve theme somehow in those days of prolong school closures. I inspired me to change me."*
		Were you prepared to pick up new skills for digital teaching?	*"A lot of time and discussions were there over online teaching learning on different media which profusely enhanced my knowledge of it."*
		Did the idea of digital education make you restless?	*"The emergence of an emergency situation made me patient to learn and teach online."*
		Were you prepared to adapt to a different style of instruction?	*"I was lucky that I could adapt myself to this new mode of education, which was mainly the compulsion that made it possible."*
	Beyond practice	Have you taken any noteworthy or novel steps towards digital teaching?	*"l sought innovative methods to overcome challenges in online teaching, such as poor internet connectivity, by relocating to their roof or climbing a tree."*

Table 1. Continued

Period	Codes	Question on sub-codes	Notable responses
After Covid 19 (after September 2022)	Philosophy	How were EFL lessons taught? Have you utilised ICT?	*"Digital teaching is now leaving its places to the traditional teaching in classroom and is standing on the verge of oblivion once again."*
	Principles	Did you find online learning to be beneficial?	*"All four codes, LSWR, are now being served in classrooms and face-to-face."*
	Theory	Which teaching method did you use?	*"Normalcy in classroom teaching being restored, the online teaching has lost importance, although I feel it might be continued to serve some vital areas like online interaction."*
	Practice/Skills for digital pedagogy	Did you feel comfortable communicating online?	*"The online communication skill I learned during Covid has started eroding since the school has returned to its normal track and e-teaching is no more a compulsion."*
		Did you use the internet or ICT when teaching EFL?	*"The literacy I gained over technology enable teaching has been losing grip since it is no longer in use for the last one and half year."*
		Did you find it difficult to manage your time during the online course?	*"I have gained it but it is useless now and there are no online classes that we are to take now."*
		How did you feel about online testing?	*"It has again attained the obsolete designation since it is no more in use."*
	Practice/Devices and Support for digital pedagogy	Did you use e-devices (Smartphone, Internet, WhatsApp, Google Meet, Facebook, Messenger, E-mail)?	*"There is a pool of e-devices (including computers, laptops, tablets, modems, dongles) which are laying stagged in the store rooms, unused, except the one used by the head of the institution for official purpose."*
		What kind of technical problems did you experience?	*"In normalcy these issues are no longer disturbing since this delivery mode got totally suppressed under the traditional face-to-face mode."*
		How did the digital pedagogy support at your school go?	*"The school has returned to its pre-Covid stand when it had a strong resistance against the online education. It no longer supports and inspire its teachers to continue online classes, rather it has again become art practiced by the idiots."*
	Practice/Attitude for digital pedagogy	Were you drawn to the use of digital pedagogy?	*"The interest developed in me during Covid for online teaching started losing grip in me since it is no more necessary."*
		Have you promised yourself anything regarding digital teaching?	*"My commitment has again shifted to my students and finishing my syllabus in face-to-face mode."*
		Were you prepared to pick up new skills for digital teaching?	*"Now there no more necessity to learn new things about digital pedagogy."*
		Did the idea of digital education make you restless?	*"All my patience now revolves around traditional teaching. I don't think about this online teaching now."*
		Were you prepared to adapt to a different style of instruction?	*"I have again adapted myself to the old regime of traditional teaching learning."*
	Beyond practice	Have you taken any noteworthy or novel steps towards digital teaching?	*"The creativity developed has started eroding itself since it is no more prized or inspired."*

Digital Pedagogy Before Covid-19

The same teacher in pre-Covid time felt face-to-face pedagogic practices far better than the online mode. Salil stated, "*I try to place myself in their (his teachers) shoes before I actually call any judgement...*" This approach to face-to-face instruction that had worked for him in the past was what influenced his EFL teaching philosophy prior to COVID-19. It was basically teacher dominated practice with little students' interventions. Digital pedagogy did not appear in the school spectrum by then. The four verticals of EFL teaching practices, listening, speaking, writing, and reading (LSWR), took place in person mode in class around the 'grammar-translation method'.

Salil, a receptive individual, emphasized building rapport with his students as part of his teaching philosophy. He viewed interaction as a way to gain valuable feedback from students, particularly when dealing with problematic ones. He used humour and an informal environment to build an interactive ambiance, acting as a motivator rather than an authority figure. This has been evident when I felt the popularity of this teacher among students.

Salil claimed that strict learning objectives and results are essential to his teaching career and that giving struggling pupils more attention is one of his duties as a teacher. He stated that the underachievers in rural areas, who even have difficulty writing all 26 alphabets, along with a preset curriculum pose a serious threat to the development of an engaging and effective learning environment. He could feel his students' lack of benefit from this syllabus with every step he took. Salil admits the difficulty in his task when he said, "Students struggle greatly to become proficient in those EFL rules, and in actuality, they have no concept how to construct sentences correctly." The results of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023 corroborate his observations, stating that approximately 25% of rural children between the ages of 14 and 18 are unable to read a class 2 level English text "fluently" (ASER, 2023).

Salil's reflections highlight the inadequate state of EFL teaching methods in schools, which are similar to Kumar & Malekar's (2017) findings that language acquisition is a behaviouristic process for native speakers but requires intentional effort and a mentalistic approach for students learning a foreign language. Salil's observations make it clear that despite the grammar-translation method's repeated shortcomings, it remains the only widely used pedagogy in EFL instruction.

Salil has only the most basic knowledge of using digital pedagogy. He had zero confidence when it came to time management, e-assessment, and online communication. He had just learned about internet-based instruction and ICT-integrated education at that point. In an ideal world, he would stand in for the entire group of teachers who were specialists in the use of books, talk, chalk, and classroom techniques but were conflicted about the digital age (Pothula, 2021; Kundu & Bej, 2021a). There was not even one computer at his classroom, nor did he own a decent smartphone. There were no plans for his school to offer classes online. In general, there was a lack of institutional support for digital pedagogy, as has been shown in previous studies (e.g. Sowmiya, 2018; Kaur & Aziz, 2020; Kundu & Bej, 2022).

Salil also had a negative attitude towards digital teaching and learning. He was willing to acknowledge that, like other teachers at the time (refer Pothula, 2021), he had resistance to the online teaching model. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that he has tolerance, a passion for learning, and flexibility, and he was dedicated to meeting the needs and expectations of his students.

Digital Pedagogy During Covid-19

The unexpected COVID-19 outbreak rocked Salil's beliefs about digital teaching, and he quickly accepted it without giving his students or his career much thought. Teaching theories and tenets also adjusted to respond this new development. Numerous investigations have confirmed that he and his colleagues began teaching online despite numerous challenges, despite having minimal skills, attitude, and technology (Muthuprasad et al., 2021; Zhao & Watterston, 2021; Kundu & Bej, 2021c).

Salil's views show how his curiosity and love of teaching have shaped his pedagogy with an ongoing creative endeavours and personal values. He supports allowing pupils to take creative

liberties and make learning engaging for them. With the change to online instruction, Salil's lesson design processes—particularly with regard to online instruction—have been re-examined, leading to the exploration of novel teaching strategies and learning exercises following mainly the person-in-context approach.

Salil explores the resources and tools used in EFL teaching during the pandemic. WhatsApp and Google Meet were very popular among them. Social media was used to improve student contact and provide extra exercise materials. The lack of technical equipment was a concern for both teachers and learners. But there was no solution at their hand.

Salil's reflections on the challenges in EFL teaching, identifying student-related and technical issues, as well as teacher-related issues (mostly common in Kundu & Betal, 2020). The main challenges include choosing the appropriate teaching methodology and ensuring student involvement. Speaking online is the most challenging aspect to him like many teachers and monitoring student progress is difficult due to unpreparedness. He felt, scepticism in teaching English using a new online medium influences learners' interest and involvement. Technical problems and resistance to cooperation limit interaction with students during class. Poor internet connections and hardware also play a role as many past studies noted in different country contexts (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Farrell & Stanclik, 2023; Pothula, 2021; Kundu & Betal, 2022).

Despite physical limitations, Salil successfully implemented interactive and experiential learning activities, demonstrating the power of efficacy (he didn't even hesitant to climb up trees for better internet connectivity) and creativity in pedogogy. He incorporated traditional deductive methods and creative delivery to achieve learning goals. Salil acknowledged the importance of face-to-face learning and adjusted his teaching practices to incorporate creativity. His classroom dynamic challenged his desire for creativity, but it also led to greater adaptability. Salil's creativity helped him avoid burnout and fatigue, demonstrating a consistent connection between principles, theory, and practice.

Digital Pedagogy After Covid-19

Salil, a teacher in an online classroom, has been reflecting on his teaching methods and principles, adjusting to the new dynamics of teaching EFL. Despite the end of the COVID compulsions, he wished to continue online teaching practices. He said COVID-19 has squeezed the world, but it has also provided opportunities to grow, to rediscover ourselves and re-create new roles. Participating in this research helped him reflect on his teaching beliefs and methods, emphasizing motivation and giving the best to students.

For the first time, the use of social media, group chat apps like Telegram, Messenger, WhatsApp, and WeChat, virtual learning environments, Google Classroom, Zoom, and other online platforms is being investigated and tested for teaching and learning in order to continue teaching. Even after in-person instruction resumes, Salil believes, these platforms can provide learners more resources and confidence. Teachers collaborated to improve virtual teaching methods, fostering creativity and collaboration. Educational organizations offered free tools and solutions to support interactive learning environments. Online learning offered an innovative way to teach and learn, unlike traditional classroom settings, fostering a more engaging and interactive learning environment.

Salil admits that the COVID-19 pandemic has transformed education, introducing online learning as a new approach. While it presents challenges, it also offers opportunities for solutions. Schools must ensure a secure online system, teacher training, personalized learning experiences, and adequate digital infrastructure. They should also develop a strategy to evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of online learning programs. Resources like webinars, tutorials, and support teams can help navigate the process. A safe virtual learning environment, access to online tools, and secure communication methods are also crucial for a successful online learning experience.

The strategy should include teacher training, student feedback, professional development, regular meetings, a system for rewarding teachers, performance assessment, and adequate resources for teachers to provide quality instruction. Regular meetings between teachers and students, regular

evaluations of teacher performance, and adequate resources for professional development are essential for ensuring teachers are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver effective online instruction.

The study reveals an increase in efficiency and awareness of digital learning technology in post COVID-19 era with usage increasing exponentially. Teachers are more familiar with digital learning technology and satisfied with facilities with most respondents using it only after the pandemic. The pandemic scenario has improved knowledge of digital learning with most respondents using it daily.

The pandemic has prompted educational institutions to adopt digital strategies, with students accustomed to home learning becoming increasingly reliant on devices like laptops, tablets, and phones. In short, through online learning, the opportunities are endless. Salil felt this pulse should continue to revolutionizing online education and to build up a resilient system to face any such calamities in coming days.

As a sensitive teacher, Salil was unable to locate him in this circumstance: "The school had Wi-Fi connectivity, but they weren't prepared to share the password with the teachers. He was not permitted to use the two computers there; they had come to terms with digital teaching even though their school forbade the use of cell phones in the classroom." I discovered that he had developed a "learned helpless" (refer Seligman, Rosellini, & Kozak, 1975) about digital pedagogy in school, which prevented him from using his creative potentials.

Salil's observation makes it clear that like the shift from offline to online during the COVID-19 time, there has been an undercurrent of opposition to the move from online to offline in post pandemic period. Teachers were forced to adjust to this new mode, just as they were forced to do so in past. This pressure to revert to the previous method has also been felt. Most of this compulsion stems from the policy intentions which are imposed on the teachers despite their psychological distress, financial losses, and unfavourable educational experiences. The pandemic had presented policymakers with an opportunity to control teacher adoption of digital pedagogy by providing the necessary initial push. However, this opportunity has only been squandered in the lack of appropriate mentoring, disposition, and opposition from reactionaries.

POLICY IMPLICATION

This study offers a teacher's perspective on the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. It demonstrates how an Indian EFL teacher changed before going through such a significant existential crisis. Struggling to get the best out of his kids, the teacher was a fighter. Regarding the advantages of this pandemic, he is upbeat. It demonstrates that although teachers were able to adapt to the changes, the system was ill-prepared to sustain the positive advancements. This study highlights an important message for the Indian policymakers from a small rural elementary school teacher: the foundation for online pedagogy that emerged from a pandemic crisis should continue to be built upon in order to create more resilient and effective schooling.

CONCLUSION

Even in remote schools, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on pedagogy in Indian EFL teaching, which has caused a shift from in-person to online instruction. Because there were no alternative options for instruction, the adoption of online learning systems has accelerated during COVID-19 despite several obstacles. Resources have been allotted to handle administration, promote communication, and link students with course activities despite obstacles. The distinction between classroom-based instruction and virtual learning has become increasingly hazy as the next generation of online education finds new audiences and adjusts to shifting expectations. Supporting instructional continuity is now the main goal of distance education. A basic difference between the use of digital pedagogy before and after COVID-19 has been evolved from Salil reflections. Before

Covid, distance and online education provided access to instruction for those unable to participate in traditional programs. But during Covid the audience and learning ecosystem of online education changed supporting continuity of instruction. The initial impulse for a successful start to digital pedagogy was present during the Covid period, but Salil's reflections indicate that this impulse has since dried up and that digital pedagogic ideas and initiative have once again established themselves beneath the dominance of traditional classroom instruction. Salil and other educators are forced to put up with the system changing right in front of their eyes. This is a crucial discovery from the policy standpoint in the backdrop of the huge optimism in this nation regarding digital education.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

FUNDING STATEMENT

PROCESS DATES

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