From Remote to Reward: Optimizing Virtual Remote Learning Opportunities to Enhance Speaking Skills

Canista Arthie Hensman

Department of English Language Teaching, University of Jaffna

<Canista925arthie@gmail.com>

Abstract - Virtual platforms and remote learning have become increasingly popular all over the world at a rapid pace nobody could think of. COVID-19 pandemic has been the sole reason for the above-mentioned paradigm shift, which no one could escape from. The paradigm shift from traditional physical classrooms to modern virtual platforms is not a sudden one for western, developed countries. In contrast, for developing countries, especially for countries like Sri Lanka - the swing is almost abrupt and alarming. Still, having no other ways and means to continue educational activities, educators, as well as students, switched to the online remote mode of education with little or no experience. With the prolonged struggle for more than a year with regular interruptions to traditional face-to-face educational activities, the online platforms and remote learning have finally become the so-called "New Normal" for education. On the other hand, the educators and the students are slowly realizing and valuing the positive impacts of virtual platforms and remote learning on education. With this realization, it has become clear, that the utility of online platforms in educational activities will be there forever, even during the post-pandemic era, at varying degrees. The concept of remote learning, though robs the learners of much desired social skills, has become a treasured asset especially in the case of L2 speaking classes. At this juncture, the current study, employing qualitative methodology, records various perspectives and experiences of the learners regarding their beliefs about the role of virtual remote learning opportunities as a scaffolding tool to enhance their L2 speaking skills by means of improving levels of confidence and lowering levels of anxiety. The study is an ongoing one and analyses and identifies the kind of learners for whom the utility of virtual remote learning would be optimally beneficial to effectively enhance speaking ability even in a post-pandemic scenario.

Keywords: Levels of confidence, online platforms, paradigm-shift, post-pandemic scenario, speech anxiety, traditional classes, virtual remote learning.

Department of English Language Teaching
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Rajarata University 0f Sri Lanka

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