## Google Classroom for Teaching Foreign Language to Digital Natives

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### Abstract

Digital Revolution, which started in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has left and continues to leave a major impact on our lives. More so, on the generation born during the late 1990s and early 2000s. This cohort of digital natives are adept at manoeuvring technology to suit their needs, in different spheres of life, even when it comes to educating themselves. Virtual classroom is the new watchword of this digitalized generation. It is convenient, organized, fast and can make an ordinary class more interesting. Google Classroom is one such virtual classroom and a learning management system (LMS) which assists not only students but also the teaching fraternity. It facilitates communication and sharing of resources. This research paper describes how Google Classroom can be implemented in Indian classrooms to teach a foreign language (FL). It also discerns the basic features of Google Classroom and offer suggestions for its practical and effective use to enhance skills like oral comprehension. It, thus, helps the FL teacher bring digitalization into the classroom.

**Key Words:** virtual classroom, digital natives, e-resource sharing, teaching foreign language, LMS

## 1. Introduction:

### 1.1 Technology and Education

Digital technology has revolutionised different domains, may it be medicine, aviation or even a simple home of the common man. Hence, it's only natural for the sector of education to witness a changing paradigm in its teaching and learning techniques due to the Digital Revolution.

The Age of Information has changed the way we acquire information and process it. Information, right or wrong, good or bad, is readily available at a single click - a phenomenon which delights learners and alarms educators (Prensky 1-6). Both these groups have varying opinions on using technology inside the classroom. Hence, there is a great need to address this concern today.

### 1.2 Technology and Learners

In India, students enrolled in higher education today have grown up using technology so much, that they consider Internet as one of the basic needs of man. Carrying a smartphone everywhere is exceedingly popular. Then, why would these digital natives want their language learning experience to be devoid of technology? Technology that they readily use to order food, for example.

The truth is that students are eager to explore such tools to their maximum benefit (Pop 1187). They adapt quickly to such "tech tools" and might be thankful to teachers for introducing them in class.

### 1.3 Technology and Educators

On the other hand, we have digital immigrants, who control the classroom and the teaching process, but hesitate to

use technology (Blake xvi). From the simple chalkboard method to using projectors and computers in class, language teachers have come a long way. Foreign language (FL) teachers, in particular, do show videos, play audio tracks, and so on. But they hardly appear to use technology as an interactive tool.

In reality, not many teachers are aware of simple ICT tools at their disposal. They consider insufficient resources, lack of preparation time and inadequate ICT training as the most dominant challenges that prevent them from using ICT in language teaching. They need to be trained and motivated to take advantage of technology (Correos 22).

### 1.4 What is Google Classroom?

Google Classroom is a free service provided by Google and is a part of Google's G Suite for Education. It is a tool developed specifically for the purpose of education. It is a platform designed to share resources and facilitate communication between teachers and students ("Classroom Features And Benefits - Classroom Help"). Google Classroom is easy to use and has a straightforward, user-friendly interface. Released in August 2014 (Novet), it has been updated from time to time.

### 1.5 Why to Use Google Classroom?

The contact hours of foreign language teachers with a class are very limited. FL teachers in India typically get two to three hours of lectures in a week. Moreover, as the presence of foreign languages is minimal in the daily lives of the students their exposure to them remains restricted. In addition, a classroom in India consists of fifty-sixty students, which is not conducive to learn FL.

FL teachers can use Google Classroom sparingly or extensively, as per their ease and need. As Google Classroom aims to improve communication between teachers and students, teachers can use it outside the classroom to be in contact with students beyond their limited lecture hours. Or, it can be used when the students are with the teacher, i.e. during the lecture. Hence, Google Classroom is both a virtual classroom and a Learning Managing System (LMS).

Furthermore, FL teachers are often in the habit of referring to multiple books and websites that offer practice on the same topic. Besides, they make and distribute their own notes and exercises to students.

Through Google Classroom, FL teachers can share e-resources like video, audio and document files from any place they are, with a simple Internet connection, thus saving time and paper. They can also send these files to multiple classrooms at the same time while planning other things. In this way, Google Classroom can help teachers multitask.

But the golden reason to use Google Classroom is that, it is connected with Google Drive, another tool from G Suite for Education. All files are neatly and automatically saved in one's personal G-Drive in different folders. For this reason, Google Classroom is highly preferable for its structured storage.

### 2. Implementation of Google Classroom in a Foreign Language Class:

First and foremost, one needs to have a G-Mail account. With it, one can access Google Classroom. On the Classroom homepage, a teacher can create a class. A class code is automatically generated, which can be shared with the students. The

students, then, can join the class using the code. Once inside this created class, a teacher can do three basic things: make an announcement, post an assignment and ask a question.

## 2.1 Making an Announcement

Once inside the created class of Google Classroom, the teacher sees a plus sign. Under it, there are several options - out of which one is "make an announcement". As the name suggests, teachers can share announcements with students - homework to be done, reminders and so on. Teachers can also share various types of e-files from the computer or share a web link. This is the easiest way to share authentic documents for improving reading comprehension skills of the students.

A "New Day, New Word" ritual can be established with the help of Google Classroom. Every morning, the teacher announces a new word in the foreign language. Students, then, have to bring that object to the class, or act it out if it is a verb or show a picture of it. Announcements can be posted to a single student or a group of students too, to make sure all students get a fair chance of discovering a new word every day!

## 2.2 Posting an Assignment

The second option under the plus sign is "posting an assignment". A scheduled and timed assignment can be given to students on Google Classroom, which can be graded later.

All FL teachers play audio clippings through audio speakers, to strengthen the oral comprehension skills of students. They discuss questions and answers after the listening. During this exercise, a few students may be left out because they didn't understand the clipping and/ or because they couldn't hear it properly. In a big classroom with sixty students, the latter is often a possibility. In such a case, FL teachers can share exercises related to oral comprehension via Google Classroom as assignments. It allows students to work independently at their own pace. It also helps them gain confidence and satisfaction.

FL teachers can also give projects to hone speaking skills as Google Classroom assignments. At A1 level, students can be asked to make a video of their favorite place, for example, a lake or a café. The students then post their videos, one by one, every day.

The distinctive feature of this option, is that, all work submitted by the students is automatically stored in the teacher's Google Drive in a separate sub-folder. The teacher becomes the owner of these documents.

## 2.3 Asking a Question

The third option is "asking a question" on Google Classroom. The teacher can ask a multi-choice question (MCQ) or ask for short answers too. In the case of an MCQ, the teacher can immediately see how many students have selected which option.

An FL teacher can start the lecture by asking *an* Yes-No question on Google Classroom. Students turn to Internet to inform themselves better, then answer the question. The teacher then shows them the results. Then, the teacher either divides the class into two groups for a debate, or simply asks the students to give their individual opinions.

The advantage of using Google Classroom in this case is that students cannot see

other responses till they themselves have responded. Often, in a show of hands scenario, they are influenced by their peers' choices. And in a big class, the teacher does not have to count heads, as the results are immediately reflected on Google Classroom. Creative writing skills can also be enhanced using this option asking students to respond spontaneously in the foreign language.

## 2.4 Some Additional Features

Apart from the above three basic options, the following are further advantages of using Google Classroom:

Google Classroom comes with a very handy Android and iOS application (app) which can be easily accessed from a smartphone or a tablet. Photos, videos, WebPages can be shared from Phone Gallery, YouTube, Internet browsers, apps like Facebook and so on, allowing teachers and students alike to use it anytime and anywhere.

Teachers can use Google Classroom to plan flipped classrooms. Flipped classrooms make students active learners. (Roehl, Amy, et al. 47)

Teachers can publish posts to the whole class, or to individual students. Teachers can also schedule posts to be displayed to the students at a future time.

Students can post comments and discuss with each other when not in the FL lecture. Private comments to a student's post can also be added by the teacher, specially to give feedback.

## 3. Limitations

Google Classroom is an excellent tool for the educators and learners of a foreign language.

However, an efficient Internet connection is required to use it. In India, many educational institutions do not offer free WiFi facilities to students, though this is set to change (Pandey). Some areas, mostly rural, are not covered by good Internet services. Moreover, some institutions may have a strict policy of using smartphones in class, which may restrict the use of Google Classroom to students.

Furthermore, teachers hesitate to bring technology to class as they think it might result in loss of quality output from students (Pop 1186).

Such limitations hamper technology from blending with education.

## 4. Conclusions

In spite of these limitations, Google Classroom remains a highly used platform throughout the world. Google says about 15 million primary- and secondary-school students in the United States use Classroom (Singer).

Google Classroom may also aid students in developing multiple intelligences through technology. Interpersonal, intrapersonal, visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic are some intelligences that can be enhanced using this tool. In this way, it helps students set their own, independent style of learning.

Google Classroom makes young learners realise that Internet can be used for an educational purpose too; not merely for infotainment. It prepares them for their future jobs in the Age of Information, as employers expect them to use technology to work smartly.

Last, but not the least, many teachers prefer using this service because of its ease-of-access and simple interface.

Google welcomes feedback about this product and provides regular updates.

In these manifold ways, Google Classroom helps foreign language teachers to bring digitalization right into their classrooms.

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