Facilitating ELT through Moodle and Google Classroom

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Abstract

Now-a-days many English language teachers are resorting to what is called “blended teaching/learning” in an endeavor to incorporate information technology into their pedagogical practices. They often use virtual platforms like Moodle and Google Classroom to support and supplement their physical classroom teaching, which transcends the routine constraints of traditional educational system. In their capacity, teachers and students may engage in necessary interactions “anytime anywhere”, adding extra momentum to the teaching-learning process. English language teaching (ELT) may be specially facilitated by such features as constant connectivity, anytime feed-backing, assignment creation, submission and grading, file sharing, virtual interaction and collaboration, etc. Here is an attempt to delineate some important features of Moodle and Google Classroom, two useful technological tools, in the light of the author’s experience as a teacher.

Keywords: ELT, Moodle, Google Classroom, blended learning, virtual classroom, information technology

1. Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed tremendous explosion of information technology, influencing all domains of knowledge, not sparing pedagogy. Teachers have looked beyond their physical classroom settings, coming to terms with the virtual dimensions. Virtual worlds, more precisely, Virtual learning environments have expanded spectacularly with technical, theoretical and pedagogical underpinnings (Garrido-Iñigo& Rodríguez-Moreno, 2015). Virtual interactions and collaborations have been found useful for teaching and learning in any discipline. With the passage of time and advances of technology, teachers and students are getting increasingly dependent on various platforms of e-learning (Khan, 2005). Baisel et al said, “Innovative teaching, collaborative learning, interactive teaching-learning and technology enabled learning have become the order of the day” (p. 330).

Wide availability of computer, laptop and smart phones, and the easy access to internet have made it possible for teachers and students to engage in interaction outside their intra-mural classrooms, making teaching-learning more interesting and effective. In course of technological development, a number of applications emerged, enabling integral management of on-line learning process, including blended learning (Jones & Lau, 2010; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Popat et al, 2007). Such platforms, as ramifications of e-learning, have dual roles to play in teaching/learning process. Firstly,
they facilitate ‘content management’ (coursework, homework, etc.), ‘synchronized collaboration’ (chat, videoconferences, etc.), and ‘non-synchronized collaboration’ (forum, messages, blog, etc.). And secondly, they help in managing students and their courses (Weller, 2007). These dual roles as positive outcomes of technology are being obvious day by day and being welcomed by the education managers and administrators.

The educational methodology of e-learning subscribes to the same philosophy of Computer Assistant Language Learning (CALL), Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), Network-Based Language Teaching (NBLT) and ICT Enabled Pedagogy (ICTEP), which are found useful for teachers and learners (Rahman, 2018; Barman, 2012; Smith & Baber, 2005; Warschauer & Kern, 2000; Dudeney, 2000; Levy, 1997). Teachers have two options for adopting this methodology in their professional practices. Either they may exclusively use the virtual platforms, totally avoiding face-to-face interaction, or they may partly teach through printed materials in the physical classroom and partly through soft materials in virtual classroom. Students receive inputs in the same way. The second option is usually referred to as ‘blended teaching/learning’, which makes a compromise between ‘traditionality’ and ‘modernity’ (Tucker et al., 2016; Garrison & Vaughan, 2007). Many technological tools have been innovated to facilitate teaching and learning in the recent decades. Like teachers of other disciplines, the ELT practitioners have also adopted them for the benefits of their students. In this paper we will discuss two such technological tools, namely “Moodle” and “Google Classroom”—how they are used by the language teachers, what are taught and how, what are their benefits and limitations, and other related issues.

2. Features of Moodle

Moodle is an online educational platform for teachers and students to get engaged in interaction for discussion and clarification of lessons. The full name of Moodle is “modular object-oriented dynamic learning environment”, which was first launched in 2002. Originally developed by Martin Dougiamas and owned by Moodle Headquarters and Moodle Community, it has been appreciated as a free and open-source learning management system and adopted by a large number of educational institutions all over the world (Costello, 2013). The system is customizable and hence the personal and institutional users can customize it according to their own needs. It may provide interactive and stimulating learning experiences to the tutors (Chourishi et al., 2015). According to Oproiu (2014), it makes “communication process between students and the teaching staff more efficient”. Students are attracted to Moodle for various reasons. Damnjanovic et al. (2015) identified several factors including communicativeness, information quality, performance outcome, perceived usefulness, satisfaction and system quality that influence students’ decision for using the platform. Horvat et al. (2015) claimed that in the platform female students were better users than their male counterparts in terms of average waiting time for a response, feedback quality, material thoroughness, material clarity, website user-friendliness, cooperation diversity, and material quantity. Students usually show interest in this brand of e-learning and feel satisfied (ibid.).

Now we will have a glance at how a user will use Moodle to meet his/her purposes. A user has to log in first for being able to access the full features of Moodle. Before login, the Moodle homepage may look like this:
Here courses of several users will be visible along with the identity of the institution. The courses are categorized according to the design of the institutional administrator. For example, they may be categorized according to faculty and department. The user may select any category to view the courses under it. After logging in with username and password, the homepage of Moodle might look like this:
Now the user’s identity will be visible and he/she will be able to customize certain features if he/she wishes. On the left side bar, the user will see the buttons of dashboard, site home, calendar, private files and ‘my’ courses. The user may enter any of his/her courses and perform necessary activities. We may look at some specific features of Moodle:

a) **Action menu**: On the top-right, the teacher will find an action menu button which includes: edit settings, turn editing on, filters, gradebook setup, outcomes, backup, restore, import, reset and more.

b) **Left vertical menu**: On the left side vertical bar, the teacher will find the options of course title, participants, badges, competencies, grades, dashboard, site home, calendar, private files, created courses and course archive page.

c) **Course topics**: The middle of the page will show the course topics created by the teacher as per the course plan. The attached files will also be shown. One can add, delete and modify topics as necessary, for which one has to turn on editing mode, however. The teacher may create any assignment here for the students, whose number will be visible on the top of topic lists.

d) **Enrolling students**: For enrolling students, the teacher has to generate an enrolment key first, which involves a certain procedure (Participants > Enrolment Method > Self enrolment enable > Enrolment key > Save). By using the enrolment key, the students will enter the course and perform necessary actions, for example, submit assignment.

e) **Checking scripts**: The teacher can check scripts written or uploaded by the students and provide feedbacks. The teacher may also grade the student’s work. The students may learn from teacher’s feedback and know about their grades.

f) **Uploading options**: The teacher has a wide range of uploading options in Moodle. He/she can add various activities and resources. As activity, he/she can add assignment, chat, database, external tool, forum, glossary, interactive content, lesson, questionnaire, quiz, survey, wiki and workshop, etc. As resource, he/she can add book, file, folder, label, page, recordings, URL, etc. Upper adding options are shown in the following screenshot (lower adding options are revealed going down the scrollbar):

![Figure 3: A screenshot of Moodle page promoted for adding activity/resource](image-url)
3. Features of Google Classroom

Google Classroom was launched by Google authorities to supplement traditional classroom-based teaching-learning with online facilities. Google Classroom was first introduced in 2014 and since then it has enjoyed wide acceptance and popularity among the teaching community. It has been appreciated as a free web service aiming to simplify creating, distributing and grading assignments, enabling teachers and students to share files among themselves. For Google Classroom, assignments are stored in Google Drive while Google Docs, Sheets and Slides are used for writing. It is also connected to Gmail and Google Calendar, used for communication and scheduling respectively. Students are invited to join a class through an automatically generated course code. Students can submit their assignments, write in textbox or attach files. The teachers will check and grade them at their convenience.

A teacher has to log into Google Classroom with username and password. After logging in, he/she may find there his or her courses already created. Unlike Moodle, in this platform he/she can create his/her own courses. After login, a Google Classroom page may look like this:

![Google Classroom Page](image)

**Figure 4: A screenshot of Google Classroom page after login**

The triple-dash button on the left temple, upon click, will show classes and calendar. On the right temple, the user’s identity will be shown. Beside user’s identity, the top-right corner will also show a button of Google apps and another button to create and join a class. The teacher may click on any course visible on the page and enter it to perform necessary academic activities. We may look at some specific features of Google Classroom:

a) **Stream and People:** On a particular page, the teacher will find two buttons on the top, namely ‘Stream’ and ‘People’. Stream includes the posts by the teachers and
students visible in the center. On the left, it includes upcoming activity, class drive folder, classroom calendar, Google calendar and topics created by the teacher. People includes the identity of the course teacher and all the students enrolled in the course.

b) **Specific tasks:** The teacher can perform five kinds of tasks through the stream section. The tasks are creating announcement, creating assignment, creating quiz assignment, creating question and reusing post. All these can be done following some easy procedure. The students will respond to any task as per instruction.

c) **Sharing files:** The teacher may share any file relating to lesson, course plan and rubric with the students. The students may also upload their own files and share with the teacher and fellow students. Besides uploading files, the students may directly write on the text box and post it for the assessment of the teacher.

d) **Enrolling students:** The teacher has to enroll students before they are able to respond in the course work. The teacher will provide a course code to the students, through which they will enter the course and perform their assigned activities. The course code will be generated automatically when a course is created and it will be visible just below the course title.

e) **Collaborative task:** The teacher may create a task and ask his/her students to solve it. Students, one by one, can put in their contributions bit by bit and come to a solution collectively. For example, the teacher may ask the students to write an essay and students may develop it gradually under the guidance of the teacher.

f) **Checking scripts:** The teacher can read the students’ posts and mark them according to their merits. The teacher may publish the marks along with the evaluative comments. The students will get an idea of their performance and how to improve for better performance. An evaluation page in Google Classroom may look like this:

![Figure 5: A screenshot of Google Classroom while checking script](image-url)
4. Teaching English through Moodle and Google Classroom

Teaching English through Moodle and Google Classroom may sound interesting as it incorporates many features which are not available in the traditional classroom environments. These two e-learning platforms or tools may be exploited by the language teachers alongside their physical classrooms to reap various benefits. They may teach various aspects of English language in an interactive way. Some of them are listed below:

a) **Vocabulary:** The teacher may post specific words according to the level of the student group. The students may come up with the meaning of the words. The teacher may ask students to consider how the words have been constructed and how they are used in sentences, leading to the realms of morphology and syntax.

b) **Grammar:** The teacher may teach tenses, parts of speech and any other portions of grammar. The teacher may do it inductively or deductively. The teacher may provide a rule and ask the students to give examples (deductive method). Or the teacher may post a passage and draw their attention to how specific sentences have been constructed and used to convey certain meaning.

c) **Mechanics:** The teacher may teach how various punctuation marks and capital letters are used in words and sentences. The teacher may ask students to write something (in several sentences) and he/she may identify the mechanical errors. The students can understand where they have made mistakes and are expected not to repeat them in future.

d) **Paragraph:** The teacher may post a topic and ask the students to write topic sentences. He/she may choose one topic sentence and ask the students to write sentences to develop the body consistent with the chosen topic sentence. The paragraph will be developed cumulatively with the contributions of multiple students taking part in the procedure.

e) **Essay:** The teacher may post a topic and ask the students to write thesis statement for it. He/she may choose one of the thesis statements written by the students and ask them to divide it into different segments. Each segment will turn into a paragraph with lexical and syntactic fleshing. The paragraphs will be written by the students in group and ultimately all the paragraphs will lead to an essay.

f) **Letter:** The teacher will post a topic and format of letter and the students will write letters following instructions provided by the teacher. The students will pay attention to various parts of a letter: heading, inside address, greeting (salutation), body, complimentary close and signature line. Any language and format errors will be corrected by the teacher.

g) **Conversation/Dialogue:** The teacher may post a topic and the students will write conversations/dialogues in pair or group. It would be better if the topic is related to the real life of the students. It will intrigue them most. The students may practice conversations/dialogues after they are written. The conversations/dialogues may even later be used in drama or short story.

h) **Reading comprehension:** The teacher will post a passage along with questions intended to test their comprehension. The students will read it and write the answers of the questions, which the teacher will check. If the teacher decides, he/she may go for multiple choice questions (MCQ), which may be created and graded through the e-learning features.
i) **Listening:** The teacher may post a link of an interesting YouTube video or upload an audio track created by the teacher himself/herself or collected from any other sources. He/she then ask the students to listen to it carefully one or several times at their convenience. The students will take a test on it, from which the teacher will be able to measure the extent of their listening skill.

j) **Discussion:** The teacher may post the link of a movie and ask the students to watch it at their leisure. The teacher will organize a discussion on it in the class where the students will talk on characters, themes, settings, language and other relevant aspects. This method will go through a line of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The order of material introduction followed by classroom discussion also reflects strategies of “Flipped Learning” (Bergmann & Sams, 2015) and “Student-Centered Learning” (Jacobs, Renandya & Power, 2016).

5. **Comparing and Contrasting the Platforms**

Both Moodle and Google Classroom have been designed to help the teachers to engage students outside their physical classes. Both of them have their own features which are utilized by the teachers and students to derive teaching-learning benefits. We may look at some similarities and differences between the two:

**Similarities:**

a) Both of them facilitate collaboration between the teachers and students in a virtual environment, avoiding the necessity of face-to-face interaction.

b) Both of them provide facilities for the teacher to upload files, create assignments and grade the writings submitted by students.

c) Any type of file—text, pdf, jpg, ppt, audio and video—can be uploaded by teachers and students in both the platforms.

d) Students can submit assignments as per the instructions of the teacher and know feedbacks and grades given on their work in both the platforms.

e) In both of them, creating course is necessary on teacher’s part, and enrolment in the course is necessary on the part of students.

f) Both of them enable a single teacher to create (or to be created for him/her) as many courses as he/she wishes and is capable of handling.

g) Both of them are free and can be used and customized by the individual teachers. However, institutional registration may be necessary for Google Classroom and certain school package of Moodle may be cost-bound.

h) After the completion of courses, they may be archived and preserved for reuse in later times.

i) Both of them depend on users’ writing ability rather than speaking ability to communicate with one another.

j) Both of them consider teachers’ and students’ knowledge of computer operations as a precondition.

**Differences:**

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<th>Sl.</th>
<th>Google Classroom</th>
<th>Moodle</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Teachers may create their own courses in Google Classroom with their own efforts.</td>
<td>Teachers cannot create their own courses in Moodle themselves, where an employed administrator of the institution does the job for the teachers.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>It is less complex in its operation. A</td>
<td>It is comparatively complex in its</td>
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5. Advantages of Using Moodle and Google Classroom

Both Moodle and Google Classroom offers great advantages, boosting the capacity of teachers in the profession of ELT and other disciplines. They hold the obvious advantages of accessibility, flexibility and adaptability as may be case with any web-based learning system (Gallagher et al, 2005). Some well perceived advantages of the two platforms are listed below:

1. **Freedom from Routine:** The tools free the teachers and students from the confines of classroom and routine. Teachers can interact with the students even when they are not present in the scheduled classes as fixed by administration. The teachers and students may connect to one another registered in the systems via internet ‘anywhere any time’. They may work at home or garden, and at noon or midnight, as they wish.

2. **Uploading Teaching Materials:** The teachers may upload the soft forms of their lesson plans and lessons in the portal. Not only text materials but also audio and video materials are possible to upload. The students may check and download them at their convenience. If the teacher wishes, he/she may upload a chapter or a whole book for the students to read at home. They may come to the class prepared and contribute better to the discussion initiated by the teacher.

3. **Avoidance of Paper and Paperwork:** The platforms can do without paper and paperwork, avoiding a negative impact on environment. Traditional teaching/learning depends heavily on printed materials. Students’ assignments, after grading, turn into garbage, requiring disposal. A virtual classroom avoids this hazard. It also saves money since the costs of buying reading and writing materials are reduced to a great extent. One soft text may be copied numberless times.

4. **Organizing Files:** Teachers can upload and organize files virtually and use them whenever they need. Not only the teachers, the students can also organize their files better in virtual environment (Latif, 2016; Shaharanee et al, 2016). It is much more convenient than the dealings of hard copies.

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<td>3.</td>
<td>The platform is relatively small and simple, with rudiments of option.</td>
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<td>The platform is comprehensive, relatively bigger with numerous options.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>It functions well both in computer and smartphone.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>It functions well in computer and less so in smartphone.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>It has only a few customizable options and it is rarely used to create private websites.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It has many customizable options, and it is often used to create private websites for education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>There are only a few ‘add-ons’ (e.g. driveslide, slideshot, group maker, list docs, teacher newsletter) available which can be used to extend the functions of Google Classroom.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There are more than a thousand downloadable plugins which can be used to extend the functions of Moodle.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Google Classroom is a well-recognized e-learning system where the list of topics of a course does not take the center space.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Moodle is well recognized as a course management system and here the topics of a course is well visible in the middle of the page.</td>
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5. **Overcoming Limitations of Physical Infrastructure:** The platforms may transcend the limitations of physical infrastructure. They may be used even if there is no physical classroom. The materials are ‘soft’ and work is done via computers, laptops and smartphones. Thus they may reduce costs of infra-structural development, which might be favored by administration.

6. **Uninterrupted Teaching:** During natural disasters like rains and floods, and society-induced crises like strike and violence, it is possible to conduct classes with these platforms. Again, in the situation of severe traffic jam, the teachers and students may even stay home and interact with one another. Thus progress of academic activities as per semester plan is not hampered when these platforms are used.

7. **Enhancing Teaching Efficiency:** Teachers can enhance their efficiency of teaching with Moodle and Google Classroom training and ensure quality education (Iftakhar, 2016). The ability to work with computer and internet will turn the teachers into expert online educators, who can reach greater circle of learners in wider geographical periphery, with the extension of their professional roles and responsibilities (Gray, 2016; Nagele, 2019).

8. **Promoting Digitization of Institution:** The practice of Moodle and Google Classroom increases the digital image of an educational institution, which may have a positive influence during the process of national and international rankings. The platforms enhance digital literacy, ensuring optimum utilization of digital technologies (Hazemi, Stephen, & Shneiderman, 2013).

### 6. Limitations of the Platforms

Moodle and Google Classroom however are not devoid of limitations. They are not real substitutes for physical classrooms. The contact and face-to-face interactions between teachers and students is essential for many courses which are aesthetic and practical in nature. For example, music and art classes can hardly be conducted effectively without the presence of a teacher. There are other limitations which are mentioned below:

1. In most of the cases, teachers engage themselves in Moodle and Google Classroom as an additional workload but they are paid additionally for it.
2. Students learn manner and courtesy in the physical classroom, but Moodle and Google Classroom do not promise to teach so.
3. Moodle and Google Classroom are dependent on computers, certain configurations and internet. They cannot be used where these equipment and services are not available.
4. Using Moodle and Google too much may cause computer addiction, affecting both physical and mental health.
5. Personal data in these platforms may be misused in violation of privacy. They may be used for business and other self-interests.

### Pedagogical Philosophy

Moodle and Google Classroom are founded on the basic principles of interaction and collaboration/cooperation. Interaction is ensured with teacher’s creation and conduction of a course and students’ enrolment and attendance in that course. And, of course, it is accomplished in a virtual environment. Interaction is deemed to be a key learning strategy here. The more interaction, the more learning. Here the students learn not only...
from their teachers, but also from their peers. This interactive learning is endorsed by the philosophy of Social Constructivism, according to which the development of knowledge is enabled by social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). An interactive educational model is seen in the following diagram:

![Interactive Educational Model Diagram](image)

**Figure 6: An interactive model of education. (S=student; T=teacher)**

When students interact among themselves, they form a ‘peer bond’ and make efforts to solve a problem without anxiety (often anxiety is symptomatic of student-teacher face-to-face interaction). When students work together, they in fact collaborate or cooperate among themselves. That is, the solution of a problem in this method of learning is collaborative/cooperative in nature. Clark & Mayer (2011) claim that collaborative learning has excellent potential to improve individual learning. Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (2007) observes, “Cooperation, compared with competitive and individualistic efforts, tends to result in higher achievement, greater long-term retention of what is learned, more frequent use of higher-level reasoning and meta-cognitive thought, more accurate and creative problem solving, more willingness to take on difficult tasks and persist in working toward goal accomplishment. . . .” (p. 19). It is supported by Slavin (2011), “Cooperative learning methods are extensively researched and under certain well-specified conditions they are known to substantially improve student achievement in most subjects and grade levels” (p. 344).

In fact, based on the principle of collaboration/cooperation, a full-fledged English language teaching method has developed which is referred to as “Cooperative Language Learning” (Richards & Rodgers, 2009, p. 192). They define it as an approach to teaching that makes maximum use of cooperative activities involving pairs and small groups of learners in the classroom. The definition of CLL by Olsen and Kagan (1992):

Cooperative Learning is group learning activity organized so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others. (p. 8)

The principle of collaboration/cooperation is effectively used by the e-learning platforms Moodle and Google Classroom. Students employ sufficient time in communicating with one another and reach a level of competence and performance with the spirit of team work.

**7. Conclusion**
Moodle and Google Classroom may be said to be twin boons of modern information technology. In the present world, ELT practitioners, like teachers of other disciplines, use them mostly as supportive teaching facilities to attain their professional objectives (Al-Marief & Al-Emran, 2018; Al-Emran & Malik, 2016; Su, 2006). Teachers and students become smarter with the use of technology. However, the technological tools are yet to be recognized as the complete alternatives to physical classrooms. Their role is rather supplementary. Teachers provide additional teaching services through them. Students get extra care from their teachers outside their routine classes. The educational institutions around the world take two approaches to the use of such e-learning platforms. In one approach, it is obligatory and in the other, it is optional. In the former one, the teachers and students are bound to use the tools as part of their academic activities. In case of the latter, the teachers and students use the tools out of their own interests to reap additional benefits. As the trend goes, it seems that more and more obligation will be in order.

References


