



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Digital Humanities*

Female ESL teachers' challenges at the tertiary level in India: An analysis during pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic

J. Daisy Rani^{1*} , & T. Shrimathy Venkatalakshmi¹¹Anna University, India*Correspondence: daisyrajesh@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

This study explores the effectiveness of female English language teachers at the tertiary level in India in achieving optimal results with students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds during the pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic periods. Women in the 21st century have made significant strides across professions, contributing notably to the socio-economic growth of the country. Teaching, considered a noble and suitable profession, remains a preferred career choice for women in India. At the tertiary level, particularly in teaching English as a second language, teachers face numerous challenges; however, female educators encounter unique obstacles. This study examines these challenges in the Indian context, noting disparities in the distribution of female teachers at various educational levels and the initial hurdles in entering higher education. Once in the profession, teaching diverse students requires additional skills and adaptability. The COVID-19 pandemic further introduced significant shifts in the teaching-learning process. Using a qualitative research design, this study includes classroom observations (offline and online), informal interviews, and teacher questionnaires. Findings reveal the impact of domestic, social, and environmental factors on teaching effectiveness and highlight how female educators overcome these barriers by adapting, innovating, and managing multiple responsibilities, demonstrating resilience in ever-changing scenarios.

KEYWORDS: blended learning, humanistic approach, online teaching, stress, work-life balance

Research Journal in Advanced Humanities

Volume 6, Issue 1, 2025

ISSN: 2708-5945 (Print)

ISSN: 2708-5953 (Online)

ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted: 20 January 2025

Accepted: 1 March 2025

Published: 3 May 2025

HOW TO CITE

Rani, D., & Venkatalakshmi, S. . (2025). Female ESL teachers' challenges at the tertiary level in India: An analysis during pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic. *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 6(2). <https://doi.org/10.58256/xn5tk045>



Published in Nairobi, Kenya by Royallite Global, an imprint of Royallite Publishers Limited

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Introduction

With the impact of globalization, Industrialization, and digitalization, women have made their entry into various sectors. Among the various career options, the teaching profession is one of the noble and dynamic professions mostly opted for by educated women in India – the major cited reason being the sense of security the job provides. It is also considered a deemed career option among married women as it demands fewer hours of work thereby paving the way for household chores. It is the stereotyped profession in India as it is assumed as a convenient profession, but women chose this option not just out of sheer interest since it is the only available option as the other career options demand more investment and labor. Hence, a convenient choice with less demand attracts many women to opt for this profession. Women's contribution in other fields such as Science and Technology, Politics, and so on is immense, and when it comes to education, it is phenomenal; women are considered born teachers as it comes to them very naturally. Women in multiple disparate professions and from disparate socioeconomic backgrounds illumine all the diverse adversities impacting their experience of working life (Hussain, 2008). Modern Indian women are much more interested in education, and many of them have prepared themselves to be competent in any sector.

According to a review obtained from *The Times of India* (Anand, 2019), it proves that there is more number of women teachers at primary schools as they have the potential to understand the psychological and emotional needs of the students, and they are also considered good counselors; therefore, children also have a sense of security when they leave their house to come to school for education. Being kind at heart and empathetic, their emotional quotient makes these female teachers more suitable for the primary level of education when compared to their male counterparts. But, at the level of higher education, mostly male teachers are considered as they tend to be strict, and they are preferred to discipline the students.

It is an assumption that the virtues of love, empathy, and kindness make women teachers able to handle only the junior level, but women do break these clusters and stereotype roles assigned to them and prove their skills even at the level of higher education. The tertiary level of education is an important stage of education, and women's contribution at this stage is also crucial. Thus, the teaching profession can be best handled by suitable teachers irrespective of gender. Higher education plays an important role in everyone's life as it leads to the socio-economic growth of the country. In the age of digitalization and modernization, teaching and learning English have become the need of the hour. Hence, it is important to have efficient and skilled teaching to impart education.

Higher education plays a major role in producing not just specialists in the given field but also cultured men and women. At this juncture, it is necessary to discuss the role of the English language, as it is the main medium of education in higher education in India. The significance of learning English is very vital in this modern age; English is the lingua franca of the world, and it is learned as a second or foreign language in many parts of the world (Paik, 2008). English is discerned as an essential tool to live in the global economy, and, hence, the requirement for learning the English language is also escalating. In India, the English language has attained the status of associate official language and also serves as a link language. Since India is a multilingual country, teaching and learning English is indispensable and become an integral part of this era of globalization and digitalization.

A law was passed in 1967 that stated: "English will continue as an Associate Official Language for an indefinite period" (Krishnaswamy & Krishnaswamy, 2006, p. 123). Also, according to the first education commission in free India, i.e. The University Education Commission, English must be learned in high schools and in universities to keep in touch with ever-augmenting knowledge.

This poses an immense array of problems for English language teachers at the tertiary level in India as they have to deal with students who enter colleges from different boards of education and socioeconomic backgrounds. A multi-lingual classroom possesses components such as regional language, the local language, and the learner's mother tongue (Malone, 2007). The present research tries to analyze the adversities encountered by English Language Teachers, especially Women Teachers during various periods, i.e. Pre-Pandemic, Pandemic, and Post-Pandemic. Informal interviews with the teachers, classroom observation – both offline and online, and distribution of questionnaires to the teachers were some of the tools used for collecting data.

Literature review

The major objective of learning a language is to be able to communicate in that language, and teaching plays a pivotal role in enhancing the skills required for communication. English is learned as a second language in India from the primary level of education, i.e. from class one onwards to higher secondary level. Since English has attained the status of Associate Official Language, teaching and learning English have gained significant importance. According to Jimenez and Rose (2010), devoid of any systematized effort, students in the procedure of learning English possess no hope of obtaining the types and amounts of social, cultural, and academic capital, which they are required to proceed into higher education or a few important endeavors. English is also taught at the tertiary level in India both in Arts and Science Colleges and Engineering Colleges, but the problem with teaching English at the tertiary level is that teachers have to teach students who have studied from different boards at the higher secondary level and students who enter college from the diverse socio-economic background. According to Nilima Roy, “the rural population of India that relies upon agriculture and limited income ends up sending their children to Government schools wherein English is not taught as a skill but as a subject” (Roy, 2014, p. 2). This type of learning becomes detrimental in the long run.

The teachers have to use regional language in their English classes to make the slow learners of English understand better. The teacher has to adopt a teaching methodology that suits both the regional and English medium students. The teaching of English in Indian colleges demands extra effort from the teachers. As they are loaded with teaching work and clerical work, therefore, they need to spare a few hours at home by sacrificing their household work, and female teachers are doubly burdened in dealing with this.

A study by Chanana (2013) reports that women’s teaching and research activities are undervalued at the time of university appointments, and women are also absent in higher education management. Rosenholz and Simpson (1990) highlight that the teachers who are involved in academics spend preparing lesson plans, and classroom activities and consistently contemplate what way to enhance students’ participation and execution.

According to Mari and Mohideen (2015), women faculty have the top level of stress. As they find it arduous to regulate their domestic and professional life, they have stress because of bad support from coworkers and long working hours. Supporting this statement, Anu Radha (2015) ascertains that academic and corporate women are equally stressed, and as well some women do not have adequate time either for their family or recreation.

A study conducted by Lakshmi & Kumar on 250 women at SRM University stated that women experience intense stress as they attempt to balance their domestic life and professional lives. This research revealed that continued work under pressure would lead to bad performance at the institution as well as in domestic life. Rao and Ramasundaram (2009) conducted a study on academic women employees. The study was intended to bring out the association and the impact of demographic profiles on the levels of depression. Statistical analyses prove that depression exists among all women employees across the demographic characteristics namely age, group, number of children, educational background, and number of dependents with a vital difference.

During the pandemic period, almost all the working communities were badly affected; the work from home became ubiquitous. The abrupt transfer to an “online portal” because of pandemic circumstances inflicts additional stress and assigned work upon the tutors and other workers who attempt to sustain a balance between work and personal life besides tutoring, research, and service responsibilities (Rapanta et al., 2020; Houlden & Veletsianos, 2020). The greatest impacted domain is higher education, which was afflicted by the deficit of pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987). This immediate situation had an impact on teachers of entire backgrounds and ages since they needed to make ready for virtual tutoring that involves technological complications and a lack of technological aid (Hodges et al., 2020).

Remote working was the concept during this time, and this triple burdened the women teachers who worked from home. Because in a patriarchal society like India, women at home had additional responsibilities in taking care of elders, children, and other domestic work. As Kurland and Bailey (1999) state, working from home leads to higher struggle as being at home refers to vicinity and availability to family and, thus, additional pressure to fulfill the haphazard demands alongside planned office obligations. This means women working from home are anticipated to do the domestic chores at any given time, which is exactly the scenario in most of the cases in the Indian context. Though men render their support in household work, it is assumed as the responsibility of women to take care of the elders, children, and any other work at home. In India, males

performing housekeeping chores are recognized to be frail (Aycan, 2004).

Although one had the autonomy over where one works and how one works the situation presented a different scenario for different people. The pandemic imposed a triple burden on women regardless of whether they were employees or homemakers. The instantaneous online transfer of the education industry included additional pressure and tasks at hand for female teachers who strive in sustaining a work-life balance in the field of tutoring, research, and domestic duties during the pandemic (Houlden & Veletsianos, 2020).

Laren et al. (2020) state that whether it remains a battle, natural disaster, or pandemic, women's susceptibilities rise and compliancy to extra obligations. They further opine that across the sphere encompassing several nations and with diverse cultures, it is 'SHE' who constantly bears the heftiest burden of anticipation. Indian women are fastened to diverse characteristics and responsibilities that incorporate kid care, their studies, domestic work, and so on (Aryee et al., 2005; Ravindran & Baral, 2014). Women who flunk to perform maternal and wifelike responsibilities remain frequently ascertained to think remorseful for this (Jost & Banaji, 1994). Worldwide, tutors have been proclaimed a rise in the levels of strain and distress because of the transfer of tutoring to virtual forums (ibid, 2020).

Data collection

This study is a part of ongoing research that comprises a large number of data from teachers working in both Arts and Science Colleges and Engineering Colleges from a few districts in Tamilnadu, India. For this study, only 15 responders are taken for analysis.

Methodology

A qualitative research methodology is adopted to analyze the challenges encountered by female teachers of English at the tertiary level. Teachers' questionnaires eliciting information about work, classroom observation – both offline and online, and informal semi-structured interviews with teachers were also employed. Most of the teachers preferred to be anonymous due to fear of job insecurity.

Table 1 – Informal interview with teachers

01.	What is the reason for choosing the profession?
02.	Could you please share your experience of teaching ESL to college students?
03.	What is your educational qualification?
04.	Do you constantly attend faculty Development Programs and Workshops related to ELT?
05.	Are you a member of any English groups and forums, E.g. ELTAI or any other groups pertaining to ELT?
06.	What is the method you adopt to teach English as a Second Language?
07.	Can you briefly elaborate on the happenings in your general English classes when you adapt the given method in the syllabus?
08.	Are you successful in teaching the four skills (LSRW) in English for general English classes?
09.	What are the obstacles in executing the tasks?
10.	Can you suggest some recommendations for better teaching and learning of English?

As Cohen et. al (2007) state, Interviews are an invaluable methodology for analyzing the building and discussions of meanings in a natural setting. It helps to analyze the people's views more clearly and in detail. It is a powerful tool to elicit information that helps the researcher to have a greater insight into what actually happens in their English classes. Questions pertaining to their general English classes, their pedagogical methods, and the obstacles they encounter in implementing the given tasks are discussed.

Data analysis

Findings from the interview

Question 1. “*What is the reason for choosing the profession?*”

The response from most of the teachers was that it was a convenient profession, and teaching English at the tertiary level added prestige to them. But, few chose as they had no option to join other professions due to financial reasons, and it demanded more labor. So, they had to opt for this position that was their next option. Hence, they could spare time for their family also.

Question 2. “*Could you please share your experience of teaching ESL to college students?*”

Teaching English as a Second Language at colleges is always challenging because almost all the teachers handle students from not just one particular group or background – they encounter students from diverse backgrounds. The pattern of general English classes at Arts and Science College in Tamilnadu is that students are from mixed branches; so, students of all categories are there in the class. So, adapting one particular technique or pedagogical method is always challenging. It is the same in Engineering colleges too; the students are from different social backgrounds and different mediums of instruction. They had to devise a particular methodology that suited the entire class.

Teacher 5 who works in an Engineering college was of the view that teaching English was one of the greatest challenges for them, as they always encountered students who preferred to be passive listeners and were non-cooperative in any given task because most of the students were from rural regions and regional medium schools. Obtaining a minimum pass percentage was the goal to be achieved. *Teacher 1* who works in an Arts college in Chennai said that there were some bright students in her general classes, but when considering the whole class, it was not suitable to adapt to a particular methodology as the remaining students were unwilling and depended on the students in doing any activity.

Question 6. “*What is the method you adopt to teach English as a Second Language?*”

Almost all the teachers stated that they adopted communicative language teaching (CLT) except *Teacher 5* and *Teacher 11* who preferred a humanistic approach, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and Bilingual Method to handle their students from the regional medium background.

Question 7. “*Can you briefly elaborate on the happenings in your general English classes when you adapt the given method in the syllabus?*”

To this question, all the teachers welcomed the given syllabus, i.e., the CLT method that is the trend in teaching English as a Second Language now. To substantiate this, there is a common book named *Communicative English 1 & 2* for all the Arts and Science Colleges in Tamilnadu. Similarly, in Engineering colleges too, *Technical English for Engineers* is used, which focuses on communication concerning all the skills - speaking and writing are given more importance. However, the problem arises in the execution of the given syllabus to large classes in the hours allocated for general English classes. The students from regional medium are always reluctant to be involved in communication tasks, like debate, language games, quizzes, and so on, for fear of being ridiculed by their peers; but, they manage in written communication. *Teachers 5 & 11* stated that the spirit of communicative activity was lost when the students lack interest.

Question 8. “*Are you successful in teaching the four skills (LSRW) in English for general English classes?*”

Enhancing the four skills is the main goal of the syllabus given at the tertiary level, but speaking skills are the most difficult skill to achieve by all the students. This is the view of all the teachers as most of them had few or more students from the regional medium and enhancing their communication skills, i.e., speaking within the speculated time limit, was never achieved; whereas, the other skills, i.e., reading, listening, and writing, were achieved by these students when the teacher gave extra care and attention by monitoring their work constantly as they were answerable to their heads when these students did not clear their exams.

Question 9. “*What are the obstacles in executing the tasks?*”

The teachers were interviewed during different periods, and, so, the teachers taught both offline and online modes. Enhancing their technical ability, especially during the pandemic period, the technical glitch was a major obstacle for all the teachers as they were clueless about whether the students attended the classes. Executing the given syllabus in the classes at the given time, both during online classes and offline classes, was demanding due to large classes and limited hours for English. Teachers 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, and 10 were of the view that extra work, apart from academics, prevented them from preparing for their classes. So, they had to work even at home apart from the working hours for the college; this created stress among these teachers.

Question 10. “*Can you suggest some recommendations for better teaching and learning of English?*”

Some teachers from private institutions gave their suggestions, i.e., Teachers 1, 2, 5, 6, 11, 13 & 14 were from private colleges, and they were loaded with responsibilities other than teaching ESL to students. They suggested that they were given more free time to prepare for their classes; hence, they need not carry the office work home. Most of them suggested that the pay scale was also less when compared to the teachers working in Government Colleges/Universities. Thus, they looked forward to a uniform pay scale in private colleges which would serve as a motivation to work. The teachers also looked forward to proper acknowledgment and appreciation to perform better. General English classes were always full – there were more than 50 students in the classes; this was the major cause of the improper implementation of the tasks. The teachers also suggested that general English classes should have a minimum number of students, i.e., 25-30 students per class. Hence, it would be convenient to monitor their learning outcomes. Also, the teachers suggested that the syllabus should be limited and context-oriented so that it would attract students’ involvement and could be executed with ease. Teachers opine that FDP and workshops should be made mandatory, because, in some colleges, they were not allowed to attend during college timings.

Table 2 Demographic profile of the teachers

Teacher ID	Gender	Marital status	Educational qualification	Area of specialization	Work experience	Additional ELT qualification
1	Female	Married	M.Phil.	ELT	10-15 yrs.	Yes TES OL
2	Female	Married	Ph.D.	ELT	0-5 yrs.	Yes Two courses
3	Female	Married	Ph.D.	Ecocriticism	10-15 yrs.	Yes Many online courses
4	Female	Married	Ph.D.	Children’s Literature	5-10 yrs.	No
5	Female	Married	Ph.D.	ELT	10-15 yrs.	Yes TEFL, ESL, EFL
6	Female	Married	Ph.D.	ELT	0-5 yrs.	Yes Two courses
7	Female	Married	Ph.D.	ELT	10-15 yrs.	No
8	Female	Married	Ph.D.	ELT	10-15 yrs.	No

9	Female	Married	Ph.D.	ELT	5-10 yrs.	Yes CELTA, BEC
10	Female	Married	Ph.D.	Literature	10-15 yrs.	No
11	Female	Unmarried	M.Phil.	TBLT	0-5 yrs.	Yes 5 courses
12	Female	Married	M.Phil.	Literature	10-15 yrs.	Yes 5 courses
13	Female	Unmarried	M.Phil.	ELT	0-5 yrs.	Yes PGCTE
14	Female	Married	M.Phil.	Literature	5-10 yrs.	No
15	Female	Married	Ph.D.	ELT	Above 15 yrs.	No

Discussion

From the demographic profile obtained from the teachers of English at the tertiary level, it can be concluded that maximum teachers have the necessary educational qualification, i.e., they have either completed their Ph.D. or are in pursuit of a Ph.D. Among the 15 teachers, 9 teachers also possess additional ELT qualifications necessary to teach English at the tertiary level. Among the 15 female teachers chosen for study, 13 teachers are married and 12 are unmarried. Regarding the years of experience, 11 teachers out of 15 teachers possess a minimum of 5 years and a maximum of 10 years or more than 10 years of experience in some cases in teaching English as a second language at the tertiary level.

Challenges encountered by the female teachers in their ESL classes

The selected teachers for the study reported that there exist innumerable challenges in the teaching of English as a second language at the tertiary level.

In a multilingual country like India, teachers have to deal with classes that encompass students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and educational backgrounds. This demands extra effort from the teachers as they have to adopt a bilingual method of teaching because teachers have to handle students who come to college from different mediums and boards of education.

Handling large classes is another major obstacle that hinders the teaching-learning process as giving personal attention, executing language activities, checking the students' progresses, and being audible create stress, and the teachers become both physically and mentally exhausted. Verma and Abhuja (2011: 140) discuss the problems of large classes in the Indian context, where it is extremely difficult for teachers to give personal attention to learners within the given time slot of 40-45 minutes.

Work-life balance is the next major issue faced by female teachers. Comfortable work time is the major criterion for opting for this profession when compared to other career options. So, women opt for this profession to spare time for their families. But, in the current scenario, teaching women carry their workload home as the given work and allotted time do not suit providing effective teaching. Also, in private institutions, teachers are answerable if the students do not pass the examination. So, for job security and fear of commitment to work, female teachers carry their work home. For the married female teachers, it created an additional burden for them as it is a stigma attached in the patriarchal Indian society in which doing household work and taking care of the family is a woman's work. Though men extend their help by sharing the responsibilities of taking care of the children and family, it is assumed as a woman's work.

Challenges in academia – women enter the teaching profession with lots of passion and inspiration, and teaching English at the tertiary level gives them a sense of dignity. However, due to their overloaded

responsibilities at home and the workplace, women are unable to concentrate more on research, publication, and pursue any other technical education concerning teaching, unlike their male counterparts.

During the pandemic and post-pandemic, women were mostly affected by the domestic and environmental settings. They had to adapt to new teaching methodologies and had to update with the latest technical skills to handle any given situation. Some women were affected by the pandemic, and they are still unable to provide their best in teaching as they previously did. Thus, teaching English is always a challenge for female teachers in India irrespective of time.

Classroom observation

To understand the challenges faced by the female teacher of English as a Second Language at the Tertiary Level, classroom observation was made in three different stages of time, i.e., pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic periods. The challenges and success factors that the teachers encounter in their classrooms are directly observed by the researchers.

Classroom observation: Pre-pandemic

The class chosen for observation during the pre-pandemic period was 1st year general English at an Engineering college in Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu.

Year of the students	-	1 st year
Branch	-	Mechanical engineering and mechatronics
Class strength	-	58
Textbook	-	No specific textbook; just a reference based on the syllabus
Topic	-	Subject-verb agreement
Time duration	-	40 minutes

The teacher started the class with the saying “*Hard Work Never Fails*”.

The teacher started to explain the topic “What is a subject-verb agreement?”

The teacher first explained, “What is a subject” and answered this question starting with “It” which answers the question *who, what, when, and why*.

Then, she further explained the basics of singular and plural and gave examples of second person and third person.

The students were passively listening in the class.

The teacher then proceeded to explain the next concept, “What is a verb?” – Students - silence- no response. The Teacher explained the meaning of the verb both in English and the regional language.

The teacher explained the concept of the topic very clearly by using the blackboard.

Started by writing Rule No. 1.

Singular Subject	→	Singular Verb
Plural Subject	→	Plural Verb

The teacher gave two examples to explain the topic.

Eg. 1. I go to the market.

S/he goes to the market.

Eg. 2. Bread and Butter is a healthy breakfast.

Explanation – both the subject, i.e., bread and butter are referred to as one food. So, a singular subject takes a singular verb.

Eg.3. The crew was rescued.

Explanation – since crew refers to an entire group, the verb “was” is used.

Eg. 4. Scissors are kept aside.

Explanation – The Teacher explains that the scissors are made of two halves, and, hence, it is a pair; so, a plural verb “are” is used.

Eg. 5. Each and every candidate in the class is good.

Explanation – When a sentence starts with each, then it uses a singular verb.

The Teacher taught them 5 main rules in the topic and asked them to work on the workbook by assigning homework.

Findings of the classroom observation – Pre-pandemic

The class observed was B.E. 1st year general English. The Class was a mixed branch of Mechanical Engineering and Mechatronics. Most of the students were from rural backgrounds and less privileged sections of society; they studied English as a second language in their schools from their 1st standard onwards. As Swan aptly points “It is a shock to realize that, after more than ten very expensive years of communicative teaching, we cannot prove that a single student has more effective command of English” (Swan, 1980, 76-82).

The students preferred to be passive listeners and were very reluctant to give a response. The teacher had to use the regional language in between to explain the topic clearly to make the students understand. The students had only workbooks that had a minimum explanation for each topic.

The teacher had to make an additional effort in giving them notes apart from explaining to them with the blackboard. The syllabus was framed with the CLT approach, but the teacher did not follow that as she preferred that the Humanistic Approach to teaching English would enhance the teacher-student relationship while taking the class. The teacher further added that, since the students were mostly from government schools and rural backgrounds, the CLT method did not work; large class and time constraints further restricted the adoption of the CLT syllabus and, thus, opted for the Humanistic Approach. It is chosen by estimating the knowledge and understanding of the students. Apart from handling English classes, the teacher had additional responsibilities such as Academic Coordinator, In-Charge of the Women’s Cell, and a few more classes of general English (a total of 25 – 30 hours per week). All these responsibilities added a burden to the teacher as she had very little time for preparation. The salary is also not appreciable. The teacher is a married woman and has a kid; she has to carry home the incomplete work and, thus, could spare only a few hours with the family. Despite these challenges, the teacher completed her doctorate and constantly upgraded her skills by attending FDPs and workshops. The teacher thrives to give the best performance both at the workplace and at home.

Classroom observation: During pandemic

The class observation was done in an online mode during the pandemic period. The first-year general English class of an Arts College in Chennai was observed.

Year	-	1 st year
Branch	-	B. Com.
Class strength	-	53
Textbook	-	No specific textbook
Topic	-	Communication skills (listening skills)
Duration	-	90 minutes

The class began with the teacher’s explanation of the importance of communication skills – both verbal and non-verbal skills. The teacher further said that simple communication skills are necessary to make other people understand. The communication needs to be fabricated or bombastic. The teacher stressed the importance of verbal communication. The class went on in an interactive method. The teacher focused on one particular skill in LSRW, i.e., listening.

The session went on like this

Teacher	-	“What is listening?”
Student 1	-	“Paying attention when someone speaks.”
Student 2	-	“It is nothing but concentration.”

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| Student 3 | - | “Receiving and responding.” |
| Student 4 | - | “Trying to understand when someone speaks.” |

The students were given an elaborate explanation about listening saying that a good listener will also pay attention to non-verbal communication. During the session, students were interrupting the online class by removing certain students and muting the mike of the students when called by the teacher; they were very mischievous in the class. The teacher called out a few students’ names, but there was no response from those students. The teacher used this as an example and further explained by saying that listening never happens by just being physically present but by paying attention – both physical and psychological aspects are to get along with each other.

The teacher focused on the importance of ‘response’ in the listening process since response helps to estimate the caliber of listening. The teacher further called out to the students to clarify their doubts; since there were no questions, the teacher continued to lecture. The teacher proceeded to explain the ‘importance’ of listening skills and elaborated on the ‘types of listening skills’, i.e., selective listening, emphatic listening, biased listening, and so on.

The students were asked to relate these types of listening to their personal lives so that they could understand the skill better.

Some responses from the students’ side were . . .

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|-----------|---|---|
| Student 1 | - | “I am able to listen and understand but unable to respond.” |
| Student 2 | - | “I pay attention, I listen but, when the teacher questions, I am not able to respond immediately.” |
| Teacher | - | “It will, i.e. (immediate response), develop with practice, and you have to come out of your nutshell.” |

The teacher further added that, due to the pandemic, people are at home; therefore, every skill is retarded, for instance, speaking skills, writing skills, and so on. The session was an interactive one. The teacher then told the students to compare themselves with any animal, bird, or insect. Most of the students came out with an interesting one; to name a few – *Fox, Squirrel, Parrot, Dog, Lion, Hawk*, and so on. The given names either denote beauty or power.

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|-------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| The Teacher | : | “Did any of you remember snail?” |
| Students | : | “No, ma’am.” |
| Teacher | : | “Tell me the character of a snail.” |
| Student 1 | : | “They are slow.” |
| Student 2 | : | “They have an antenna.” |
| Student 3 | : | “They have a shell.” |
| Student 4 | : | “They move very slowly,” |
| Student 5 | : | “It protects itself with its shell.” |
| Teacher | : | “Is it a protection? Really?” |
| Students | : | “Yes, ma’am.” |

The teacher further proceeded to explain saying, “the shell may appear like a protection for the snail. When someone approaches it, it may go back to its nutshell; it may feel secure, and, therefore, no one bothers. It may be helpful for a snail but not for a human being. Nobody wants to be a snail as it is unattractive and insignificant. Thus, to shine in life, a person has to come out of the nutshell and break the barriers to be noticed and appreciated.” After giving this wonderful example and comparison, the teacher advised the students to be good listeners to become good speakers. Thus, the importance of listening skills was taught elaborately and interestingly. The class was then suspended.

Findings of the observation: During the pandemic

The class chosen for the observation was 1st B. Com of a self-financing Arts and Science College in Chennai. The first-year general English class was observed. The class was conducted in online mode due to the pandemic situation. The students were from a healthy financial background, and most of them had their schooling in English medium. The teachers had to take a class on the topic 'Communication Skills' and 'Listening Skills'. It was taught online; the teacher had to be extra cautious in delivering the lecture, and it was a continuous lecture from 10:10 am to 11:40 am. The teaching was constantly monitored either by the Department Head or Principal or any other important person as the links were shared with them also.

The teacher had to switch on the camera during the teaching process, but it was not mandatory for the students. Therefore, it can only be assumed that the students are listeners. The teacher made a wonderful PPT to make the class interesting and narrated many stories in between to keep the students attentive and make the class interesting. Among the 58 students, only 5-6 students responded whenever the teacher posted a question. It was an interactive session. Most of the students were not interested to answer the questions, and some of the students were also mischievous by creating technical disturbance for the teacher; they were beyond the control of the teacher as they could not be monitored. The teacher had to manage these activities without being rude to the students and, at the same time, continue with the lecture. The teacher also faced technical difficulties as she was not audible for some time. This teacher was also allocated many classes, long hours, and additional responsibilities, such as the setting of question papers every week, immediate correction arrangement of guest lectures, and helping in conducting conferences. It is also mandatory for teachers to publish research papers in reputed journals to prove their academic competence.

The teacher is a single parent, and, therefore, she had the additional burden of taking responsibility for household chores. Since she is the only earning member in the family, she had to develop a work profile to stick with the organization. The teacher is pursuing her Ph.D. and, hence, has to attend many webinars related to her study. Constantly using the computer created psychological stress and illness for the teacher, but this did not prevent her from giving the best teaching to the students.

Class Room observation: Post-pandemic

Year	-	1 st year
Branch	-	1 st B.A. (English Literature)
Class strength	-	70
Textbook	-	Communicative English
Topic	-	Reading (types of reading)
Duration	-	40 minutes

The teacher started the class by saying "Today's class is about types of reading."

The Teacher told them to refer to their textbook which explained 'Types of Reading'.

Teacher	:	"How many types of reading are there?" She asked a student to read.
Student	:	"Extensive and intensive reading."
Teacher	:	"Can any of you explain what is extensive and intensive reading?"
Student	:	"When we study short stories or novels, it is called extensive reading, and lengthy stories are intensive reading."
Teacher	:	"How will you read a Novel?"
Teacher	:	"When you read a novel and see difficult words, you don't look for the meaning of each word, rather you gradually understand."
Teacher	:	"O'Henry's short stories have an interesting ending. Rabindranath Tagore's is filled with humanism and pathos."

The teacher read out the explanation given in the book to the student and continued saying that it is difficult to read at the initial level; so, it is better to start with short stories or articles and said all this falls under the category of extensive reading. The teacher motivated the students to read short stories. This interest in the beginning stage will develop the habit of reading, and she proceeded to explain the benefits of reading. She further added that a narrative novel would be a good hobby and a pleasure. The class got depressed a bit early as they had to go to a lecture in the auditorium.

Findings of the classroom observation: Post-pandemic

The class chosen for the observation was first-year B.A. English literature in an Arts and Science College affiliated to the Madras University. The first-year general English classes class was observed, and this was a large heterogeneous class with a maximum of 70 students. Though the college has begun to function in a normal offline mode, the fear instilled due to COVID-19 was very much apparent both among teachers and students. The students were given the option to attend class via online mode also; this created an abnormal situation in the classroom, as the teacher had to monitor both the students in the classroom (offline) and, at the same time, she connected with students who are attending online. So, the Blended Method was adopted by the teacher – a relevant pedagogy suitable to both the teacher and the learners; the COVID-19 pandemic has given us a chance to facilitate the introduction of digital learning (Dhawan 2020). This saying may appear promising, but its adoption in Blended Learning, i.e. both the online and offline modes at the same time, creates a chaotic environment for the teacher as it becomes challenging to keep track of both students simultaneously. In the class observed, it is noted that the process of teaching is delayed as the teachers had to concentrate on the students in offline and online modes simultaneously. Most of the students belong to the middle class or from weak socioeconomic backgrounds, and most of them were also from regional medium schools. Therefore, their level of participation in the class was not up to the level of expectation, and their core interest in activities was totally lost in the class. All of them had to wear a mask and maintain social distancing. Hence, there was hardly any communication among the students or with the teachers. The teacher was unable to elicit the expected response from the students. The students and the teacher used mobile phones. The PDF of the book Communicative English was used. Consequently, the teacher could neither concentrate on the chalk-and-talk method nor the digital book as she had to monitor the students also.

This delayed the process of teaching, and the essence of English class was totally lost. The teacher could only ask the students to read from the mobile phone and only a minimum of explanation was given. The topic chosen for the day was 'Reading'. The teacher explained extensive and intensive reading. An informal interview with the teacher stated that the teacher was unable to complete the portions in the given time; apart from that, the teacher had to prepare for both online and offline modes. The control over the students was completely lost as the students were not compelled to attend the classes. So, giving assignments, conducting tests, or engaging the students in language games were just a plan and was hardly accomplished. The effect of the pandemic was very much present in this class.

Conclusion

The teaching of English as a second language in India poses various challenges to the teachers irrespective of gender. Since this study was done from a female perspective, it revealed that the female teachers were doubly burdened than their male counterparts as they had the additional responsibility of doing household chores. This study was done at different time phases, i.e. *pre-pandemic*, *pandemic*, and *post-pandemic*. It was observed that, during all the periods, the female teachers encountered numerous challenges in spite of all that they were successful in generating the desired output from the students.

Some of the strategies adopted by these female teachers for the successful teaching and learning of English as a second language are:

- The communicative Language Teaching method is the most widely used method at the Tertiary level in India in both Arts and Science Colleges and Engineering Colleges but the teachers adopted a teaching method which was most conducive for their classes as there were various factors that hindered the execution of the CLT method in their classrooms.
- The teachers did not stick to one particular Method or Technique, they used Blended Learning, Humanistic Approach, Bilingual Methods, CLT method (Communicative Language Teaching), and TBLT method (Task-Based Language Teaching) for successful teaching and learning.
- The teachers constantly upgraded their professional knowledge and technical skills by attending faculty development programs (FDPs), conferences, and seminars. This served as a major tool for their success in handling the teaching difficulties during the pandemic and post-pandemic period.

Women in India are breaking the clutches to be productive in any given field. Thus, it is suggested that the workplace should provide a conducive environment for the betterment of women.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgments

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Heads of Departments and Principals of the colleges where the participant teachers are employed. Their support and permission were instrumental in facilitating this study. I deeply appreciate their cooperation and encouragement, which made this research possible.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Disclaimer Statement: This work is not a part of any thesis.

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Authorship and Level of Contribution

This study is co-authored, with equal contribution from both authors in all aspects, including research design, data collection, analysis, and manuscript preparation. The collaborative efforts and shared insights have been integral to the successful completion of this work.

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