

Strategies in Remote Teaching of Architectural History for imparting Quality Education in the Pandemic-affected scenario

Alisha Sinha

Assistant Professor, RV College of Architecture, Bengaluru, India

Abstract.

Teaching history has always been challenging for faculty. The subject requires constant storytelling, highlighting major terminologies, dates, events, people and places, and establishing a cognitive relationship between them. It demands an engaging pedagogy to present itself and its components to students, particularly today's generation of learners, who are technologically driven and lack attention as well as patience. This keeps the subject faculty on their toes and motivates them to keep innovating with multiple instructional tools and resources to convey the content and create an interactive and inquisitive learning environment. The pandemic has challenged this already gruelling discipline to new limits. It has led to acute need of pedagogical transformation and technological adaptation across several fields to make virtual learning comfortable yet effective. This research explores the potentials of remote learning, develops strategies to employ them efficiently and formulates a teaching methodology for history, enforcing competent academic delivery of the subject. The study revolves in the context of architectural history, but its prospects are not limited to the same. The methodology developed can be useful for teaching history as a cardinal or allied subject under various disciplines. These strategies are widespread and will be beneficial for enhancing the quality of history education in both online as well as offline teaching programs. This transformation in teaching methodology can help teachers exercise the visual, aural, motor and analytical skills of their students and thereby, enrich the learning experience.

Keywords: Content; Learning Experience; Pedagogy; Teaching Methodology; Online Education

1. Introduction

History is a crucial component of higher education, irrespective of the discipline. Whether it is the field of science (pure, engineering or medical), technology, arts, humanities or more composite fields like architecture, it is essential to understand the past¹ and its evolution to shape a better present and future. Despite being a subject with such undisputed significance in development of mankind as a whole, history struggles to gain regard due to the patience it demands from its disciples. It revolves around narratives, timelines, terminologies, characters and context, establishing a meaning and connection between them.

(Lutfi, 1980) identified the objectives of teaching history as follows:

- Increasing the people's culture by identifying aspects of their societal life that have emerged at some point in the past, so that they can be experienced by the reader's mind and imagination.

- The study of history helps abstracting incidents from which the communities' rise, existence and decline can be understood.
- The objective of studying history is not just a transfer or acquisition of abstract facts, but it intends to develop the students' capacity to responsible decisions.

1.1 Role of History in Architectural Education

The role history plays in architectural education is very critical. Not only the question of which socio-historical processes existed, but also how the buildings and their architects can be attached to them. The answers of these questions form the historical identities of the architects and their design paradigms. The architectural identities of architects, their architectural problematic, and the solutions can be only formed like this (Zafer Sagdic, 2013). It is important for the future architects and designers to understand how the civilizations shaped up, how materials developed and the need of various timelines. The knowledge of the past is essential for creating a better future. The Roman architect and engineer Vitruvius, in his very first book devoted to architecture *De architectura*, says that architectural education in the Ancient World had two aspects: **theoretical** which is mainly related to the principles of proportion, and **practical** which included the manual skills or the actual exercises of building. A wide knowledge of theory and history of architecture is also requisite for an architect who should be equipped with knowledge of various disciplines. Theoretical and historical education and practical training had taken place simultaneously in the ancient world (Özaslan, 2011).

The anthropological objective for history was often combined with an ethical or pragmatic purpose: that man should learn how to conduct himself from the lessons of history (Toebes, 1987). The scope of architectural history runs parallel, but is not limited to the same. These stories of influences of civilizations and kingdoms, construction and development of architectural styles can help students relate and predict the direction in which the future of design can be oriented, apart from getting inspirations from the stories themselves to shape the present.

To summarize, study of history as a part of architectural education is relevant in the following ways:

- i. The techniques and skills used in the past could have been successful, or failed with time. Analyzing these help in better understanding and lead to innovative design solutions.
- ii. The observation, analysis and interpretation of the built environment from the past helps in the development of critical thinking with a problem solving approach.
- iii. Certain movements, principles and strategies help in defining the architecture as the world sees it today. The study of these trails of development help architects develop a sound and thorough background for practice.
- iv. An exhaustive understanding of the trail of development, whether it is material, design style or technology helps to decipher the possible directions present architecture and its trends can incline towards.

- v. The study of architectural history provides an insight towards various design strategies that have worked or could work to face calamities and catastrophies, both natural or man-made.

1.2 Challenges and Potentials in Existing Pedagogy

Teaching history continuously involves diverse challenges and attempts to solve them. Scholars and teachers of varied experiences have continued to gather at international conferences on teaching methods and brought innovative solutions to people’s attention.

A number of factors have brought quality teaching to the forefront of higher education policies. Current determinants of the quality of teaching include: the internationalisation of higher education, the increasingly broadening scope of education and greater diversity of student profiles, the rapid changes in technology, which can quickly make programme content, the demand for greater civic engagement of graduates and regional development of higher education, the increased pressures of global competition, economic efficiency and the need to produce a skilled workforce to meet the challenges of the 21st century and others (Y. Lopukhova, 2019).

The traditional pedagogy involved in imparting the knowledge of history to the new generation is struggling due to multiple factors. The factors in this study have been evaluated by classifying them into three levels: students’ level, teachers’ level and the institutional level, discussed in Table 1.

Table 1: Concerns at the various levels in learning history

Concern	Students’ Level	Faculty Level	Institutional Level
Lack of opportunity in participation and discussion	✓		
Exam Patterns focus on memorizing, rather than understanding, grasping and interpreting from the narrative	✓	✓	✓
Misconception of history being a theoretical subject without any practical application		✓	
Terminologies not relatable to students’ lives	✓	✓	
Lack of connection between different periods of history; Inability to relate the present to the past	✓	✓	✓
Lack of examples from the local environment	✓		✓
Substantial amount of reading and self-exploration needed		✓	
Integration of technology as a teaching tool	✓	✓	✓
Active Learning Opportunities ⁱⁱ	✓		
Large Classroom Sizes	✓	✓	
Time Management		✓	

Source: Author

In the electronic world of today almost everyone has the basic knowledge of the technology required in their work areas but an honest survey shows that if we apply technology to classrooms most of the teachers are aware and using basic PPT’s and ICT aids for effective teaching but are unaware of higher and latest versions of software and its usage in the teaching process (Hasan, 2004).



1.3 Challenges and Potentials of Remote Learning

The pandemic has further challenged the pedagogical system to new levels by eliminating the idea of a physical space that used to be called a “classroom”. It has made it more compelling for the teachers to revolutionize their teaching methods and tools to make sure that their students scattered around different parts of the world are able to understand and take interest in their subject. These concerns are again, not just at the faculty level, but also at the students’ and institutional levels again, as discussed in Table 2.

Table 2: Concerns at the various levels in Remote Learning

Concern	Students’ Level	Faculty Level	Institutional Level
Lack of satisfactory infrastructure for online teaching/ learning	✓	✓	
Lack of the Physical Experience of a classroom and Collective Presence	✓	✓	✓
Compromise in personal space	✓	✓	
Site Visits not feasible	✓	✓	
Facilitation of discussions in the sessions		✓	
Creation of Digital Content		✓	
Active Learning Opportunities ⁱⁱⁱ	✓		
Ensuring Mental Presence of Students		✓	
Screen time	✓	✓	
Assessment of Learning	✓	✓	✓

Source: Author

However, looking at a more optimistic side of this new trend of learning, it has pushed faculty of different disciplines to adapt technology as a guiding tool to its maximum potential. This digitalization can become a boon in disguise, especially for academicians teaching history to explore and come up with innovative methodologies that make the subject more appealing and interesting to the target audience.

2. Approach

The aim of this research was to explore the potentials of remote learning, develop strategies to employ them efficiently and formulate a teaching methodology for history that enforces competent academic delivery of the subject.

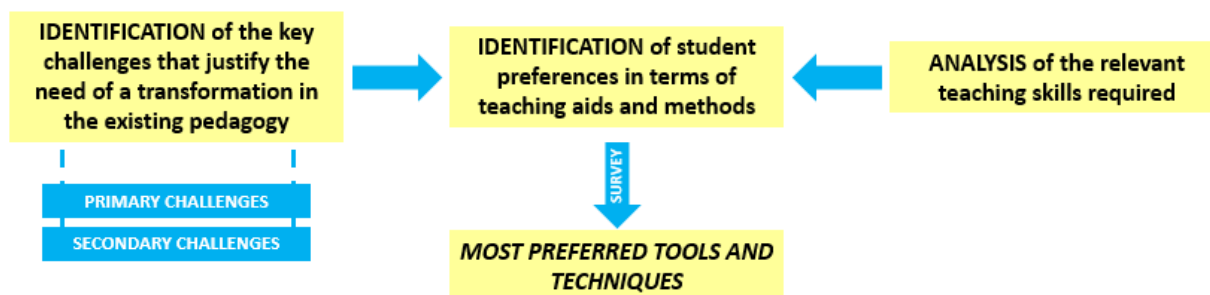
In order to achieve this, the study was divided into two major phases:

- i. Identification of Issues and Probable Solutions
- ii. Development and Design of an Innovative Pedagogy

2.1. Identification of Issues and Probable Solutions

The first phase involved identifying the key challenges that justified the need of a transformation in the existing pedagogy. This assessment was a continuation the observations from Table 1, and further elaborated the challenges by classifying them into primary and secondary. It further required an understanding and analysis of the relevant teaching skills required to teach this subject and meet the challenges identified in the first phase. As a consequence of these inferences, further down the study, a survey was conducted to understand student preferences in terms of teaching aids and methods, and the most preferred techniques were highlighted. This marked an end to the initial phase of this research (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Phase One



Source: Author

2.1.1 Identification of the Key Challenges

To understand and identify the key challenges that were existing in teaching history as a subject, Table 2 was taken as a reference, and its components were floated to a target group of 200 students (technical college level) to classify the issues into primary and secondary. The findings were grouped as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Primary and Secondary Challenges in Learning History

Primary Challenges	Secondary Challenges
Lack of Interaction	Too many terminologies and dates
Too Theoretical	Uninteresting activities/assignments
Too much text to read	Time Management
Lack of Visualization	Exam Pattern

Source: Author

The foundational observation made after going through the primary challenges was the dire need to generate tools, techniques and a simplified methodology to spawn interest in the contents of the subject. Lack of interest existing among the students and the preconceived notion of the narratives not being intriguing was found to be critical. If teachers could decipher methods that make the course structure subject sound and look appealing, most of the secondary challenges would habitually be taken care of.

2.1.2 Analysis of the relevant Teaching Skills

Based on the typology of the challenges highlighted by the students, a framework of skillsets was developed further, that could help teachers understand the need of the situation and refine their skills and qualities based on the same for successful academic delivery of the subject. These skills are listed as follows:

- Active, continuous and consistent learning
- Time Management (efficient communication that conveys the ideas well in a limited amount of time)
- Ability to relate the present to the past and justify the need of studying the subject in the respective fields
- Integration of digital technology into existing teaching methodology, use of relevant Audio-Visual aids to generate and maintain interest and intrigue among the students.

2.1.3 Identification of preferred Teaching Methods

Literature study helped in understanding the psychology of the new generation of students better. Some of the observations made by distinguished researchers were very appropriate and have been mentioned below.

- If students are accustomed to **reading in short snippets**, completing a 100-page reading assignment must seem like quite a chore. Multiply that by four courses, and we start to understand why professors may decide to assign less reading, or find means to ensure that the books are at least opened. **Blogs** or **discussion board posts**, as well as **short quizzes**, become increasingly important to assess student effort and preparation (Thaler, 2013).
- Generation Y students respond much better to “**active learning**” opportunities than lecture, and to classroom activities that maximize peer interaction, such as group discussion or projects. In terms of retention of content, the best instructional technique for this cohort is having students teach their peers (Miller, 1996).
- Young people’s greater fluency with visual media causes us to rethink the traditional lecture format. We try to **incorporate visuals throughout**, be they PowerPoint slides, video clips, or other stimuli. To the extent possible, we can easily provide students choice in their assignments, be it through the topics they are assigned to research, the resources (visual, textual, or human) they are asked to consult, or the type of assessment they are provided. Few would disagree that history is best taught when students have regular and varied opportunities to engage in active learning. They might be asked to stage a debate between two competing factions, act out an event from the past, or imagine a dialogue with a historical figure. Students who excel at art, creative writing, or music could easily bring those talents to the history classroom. Though a limited amount of frontal teaching can be useful pedagogically, there are many ways in which we can also get students to

interact with the past, analyse historical themes, and reach their own conclusions (Thaler, 2013).

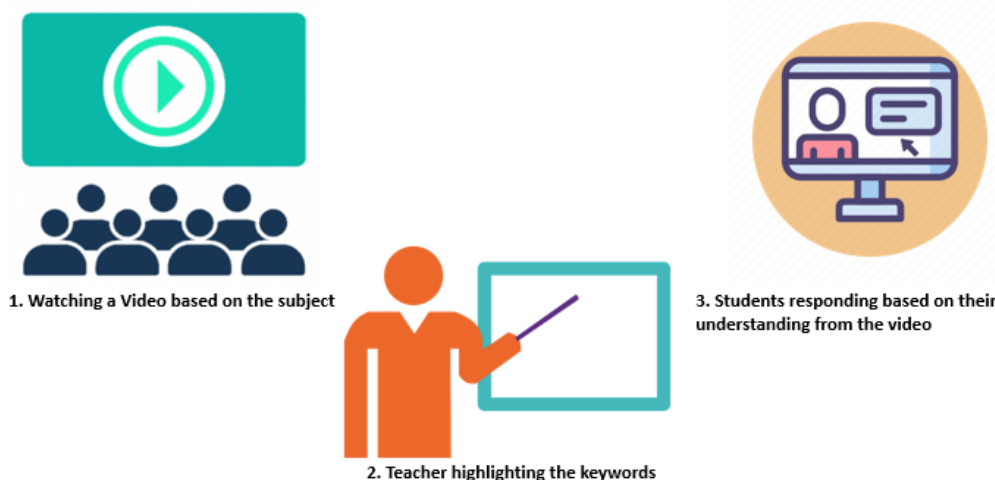
Based on interpretations from literature, a survey was floated among students to understand their preferences in terms of teaching aids and methods. It was observed that visual aids were very popular and appealing to them. They prefer visual aids, especially motion pictures, and narratives associated with them. They also like to have an interactive structure to the sessions that keep them engaged throughout the process. This gave the study a direction to develop a teaching methodology that revolve around these two factors:

- Videos and Motion Pictures as a tool
- “Active Learning” opportunities

2.2. Development and Design of an Innovative Pedagogy

The second phase involved the design of a methodology based on the factors inferred in the studies above. This included identifying a set of videos/documentaries that can be played in the classroom, the faculty highlighting the relevant keywords from the source, and finally making the students interact around those keywords.

Figure 2: Phase Two: Development of the Pedagogy



Source: Author

2.2.1. Identification of Database

The most important step in this methodology was to identify relevant sources of data, which are authentic and can be used confidently in classroom teaching as a non-literary source of information.

Substantial research and exploration was done and the following sources were found to be most authentic for teaching history (Table 4).

Table 4: Authentic Sources for Visual Pedagogy in History

Webpages and Educational Agencies	YouTube Channels
National Geographic Education	Mexus Education (Iken Edu)



PBS Learning Media	MIT Open Courseware
Boclips	Suibhne
Smart History	Simple History
Curiosity Stream	Timeline
	History Explained
	Ten Minute History

Source: Author

Apart from these, there are some specific channels, focusing on Indian History in particular, which was of particular relevance to the author and her context. But they have not been mentioned here as this list is more generalized, and on a global scale.

Also, it is important to note that some of these platforms are open, while others require subscription. Schools can take a call based on their preferences accordingly.

2.2.2. Quality of Keywords

Another important factor to be considered was the understanding of the faculty to choose the apt keywords to be displayed/ highlighted for the students to focus upon. It was essential for these keywords to have the following characteristics:

- The keywords should be used in the video clip for the students to easily recall and relate to.
- The keywords should be appropriate and relevant to the context and type of history being taught. For example, when teaching history of architecture, the keywords can revolve around the design elements, spatial quality and elements of built significance.
- It is ideal to include terminologies that define or shape up the narrative being talked about.
- The keywords should be distinct enough to mark their importance in the particular time period/ narrative
- The entire collection and sequence of the keywords being used should help the students easily recall and build their narrative about the topic being taught. This would even help in examination patterns that require subjective writing.

2.2.3. Steps involved in the Methodology

The ultimate step-by-step teaching methodology that developed has been described below:

- i. The teacher develops a collection of video clips that can aid the learning of a particular topic in history.
- ii. In the studio (physical or virtual), he or she keeps a whiteboard ready with them.
- iii. The teacher then plays the clips, and simultaneously keeps listening and extracting keywords from the narrative, noting them on the whiteboard.
- iv. When the video ends, the board with the keywords is displayed on the students' screen (in case of online mode).

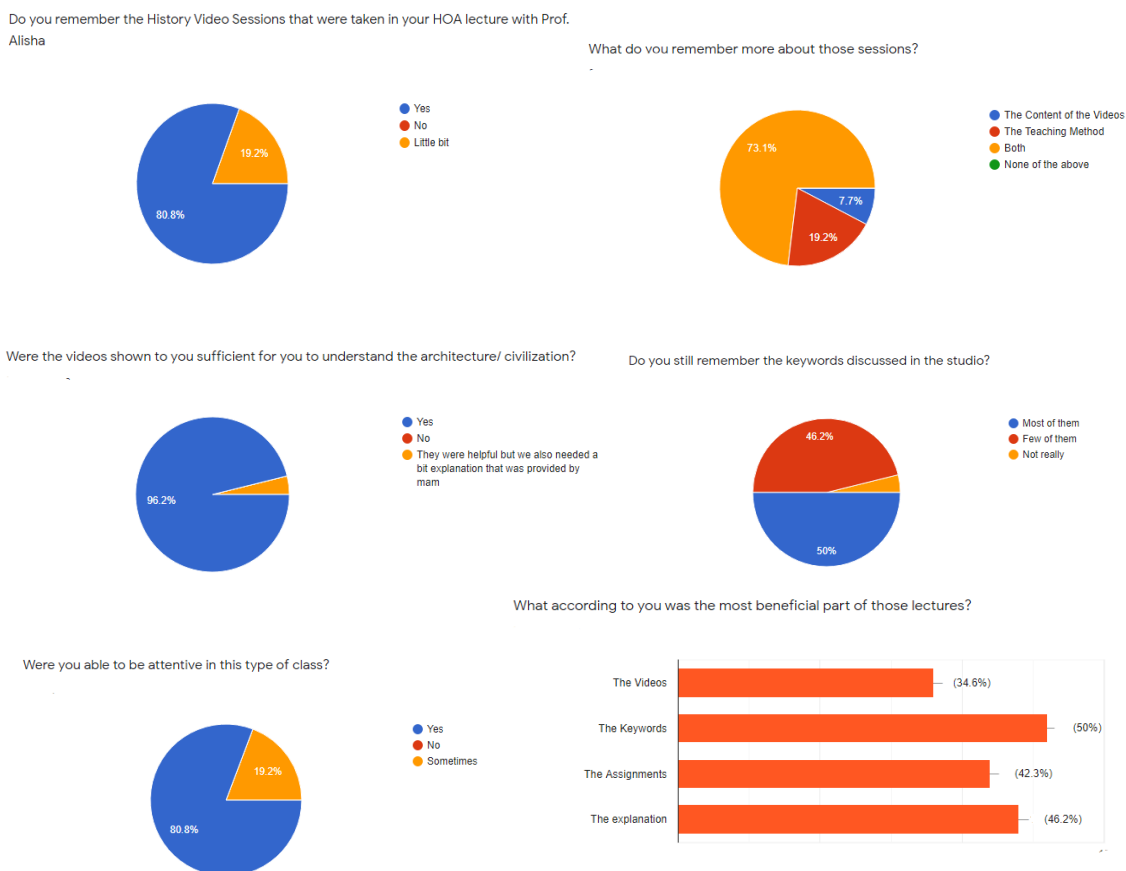
- v. The students are asked to pick the keywords displayed, in the same sequence as listed by the teacher. Hence, the students should be attentive while the video is played.
- vi. Each student has to speak about their understanding of the keyword with respect to the topic and its narrative in one or two sentences. If the person misses any point, the classmates are welcomed to contribute.
- vii. It is important that every student must speak about one topic or another, so that there is equal opportunity of participation and collaborative learning.

3. Findings and Reception

3.1 Critical Reception

This methodology was tried over a period of three years on different batches of students at three different institutes for the subject of history (mentioned in the acknowledgement). This involved around 200 students, who were asked to give their feedback with respect to the new methodology. It was appreciated and successfully accepted by the students. Few of the survey responses have been depicted in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Survey Responses



Source: Author via Google forms

Further, a selective feedback given by some of these students has been quoted below to understand their experience better.

“The videos which were shown was very easy to understand and the key words help to keep the history in mind.”

...

“It helped us understand more n the videos kept us entertained as well and also you explaining in between the video lectures was also very helpful .and you have very good communication skills keeping the students attentive n making each one of us understand as much.”

...

“Video lectures are helpful since there’s too much to learn and videos help us remember.”

...

“During lectures we used to note down some key words that were helpful for our knowledge.”

...

“Videos are a good way of learning especially when it comes to lectures such as those of History of Architecture. Though, I would personally suggest a better methodology wherein teacher-student communication gets an upper hand and the interest in maintained among the students.”

...

“History of Architecture was really an Amazing Lecture. I loved when Ma'am used to ask questions after a lecture and actually it is important so that we should know how much we understood from that Video.”

...

“The activity where we were noting down the key points and were asked to elaborate the key point to every student in class helped us understand to particular civilizations/topic.”

3.2 Benefits of the Technique

This new methodology thus developed was understood to have a couple of advantages over the traditional methods of teaching history.

- i. It was visually appealing and helped in student attentiveness.
- ii. The keywords formed a depository for the students to refer from.
- iii. The interactive session helped in peer learning and healthy competition.
- iv. It can be successfully used in both online and offline teaching.

3.3 Challenges and Scope for Improvement

However, it is still a developing methodology in its nascent stage and requires improvisation on certain grounds.

- i. The overall time consumed in watching the clips and then discussing over them gets extended sometimes. Hence, time management is very crucial.
- ii. The sources of data i.e., the video clips need to be taken from authentic sources and the teacher needs to double check their validity.

4. Conclusion

This new pedagogy has the potential of easing out the pressures of the subject history, on both ends- for the faculty as well as the students. It intends to make learning fun, at the same time effectively utilize visual aids so that the narratives leave an impression in the memory of its audience.

The complete success of this methodology does not solely depend on the teacher. It can be achieved at three distinct levels:

- i. **Individual Faculty Level** – The teacher needs to refine his/her skills of choosing the most appropriate visual, extracting the most relevant keywords out of it, and engaging the class in an interactive and dynamic session based on the above two. The teacher also needs to understand the academic and professional responsibility he/she holds with respect to providing dependable sources of information to their students.
- ii. **Program/ Course Level** – As mentioned at several places in the above study, the educational objectives for learning history need to be redefined, so that the students taking the course have enough clarity and thought behind choosing it to be a part of their curriculum. The measures of assessing a student's learning can also be reworked upon to ensure fair and relevant takeaways from the subject. Lastly, the module distribution for the subject can be done in such a way that the topics are fairly spread across an achievable course duration.
- iii. **Institutional Level** – At the level of the institute, certain windows of opportunities can be opened across geographical boundaries, utilizing the potential of online education system, to make use of specialized resources. Internal quality assurance is also important to keep a record of the satisfaction levels at both student and faculty ends. Institutes should open up to the Blended Learning Approach, especially in a subject like history.

Concluding at this point, the methodology intends to be refined with time and experience, and with inputs from other experienced academicians. The intention of this paper is fulfilled by bringing it open to an international platform for faculty to analyze, review, adapt and even critique.

Acknowledgment

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ⁱ It is important to note that the terms "Past" and "History" in this paper do not refer to a very significant amount of time ago only. What happened ages ago, centuries ago, decades ago, years ago, months ago, days ago, yesterday or even the past morning is history. Hence, the knowledge and importance of historical studies talked about as a part of this study include anything that is not happening in the present.

ⁱⁱ Active Learning Opportunities include less reading and theoretical teaching, and involves a variety of classroom activities, quizzes that maximize peer interaction, such as group discussion or projects. In terms of retention of content, the best instructional technique for this cohort is having students teach their peers (Miller, 1996).