CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF ONLINE EDUCATION

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Abstract

Online education has many benefits such as portability, ease of access, reduced need of physical infrastructure, lowered costs and greater flexibility. But that isn't to say that it doesn't come with demerits. 60% of the students who have recently shifted into an online learning system thought of the experience as boring and struggled with motivating themselves to pay attention in class. Learning at home can be lonely. Without the buzz of the classroom setting and the company of their peers, its no surprise that some students can begin to feel a strong sense of isolation that slowly erodes their desire to learn. Conducting virtual group activities using chats and discussion boards, setting clear and measurable goals are a few things that can be done to maintain classroom dynamic and keep things personable in a digital environment. Online education in India is still in the early stages of growth, having a clear understanding of the challenges encountered and the perception of the teachers and students can aid in the creation of successful and organised ways for conducting online classes. This research paper is to be discussed about " Challenges and Opportunities of Online Education"

Key Words: Online Education, Challenges and Opportunities, Digital Infrastructure, Web interaction, Mobile learning

Statement of the Problem

"Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."

Benjamin Franklin

The education industry was one of the worst hit by the COVID- 19 pandemic, with institutions scrambling to find solutions to keep their doors open.In these times of need,online learning tools emerged as a boon. Online education has many benefits such as portability, ease of access reduced need for physical infrastructure, lowered costs and greater flexibility. But that isn't to say that it doesn't come with its demerits. In a recent survey,60% of the students who have recently shifted into an online-learning system thought of the experience as boring and struggled with motivating themselves to pay attention in class. In the light of the events, this study is pertinent to examine teachers and student's perceptions of online teaching and the obstacles they face in Online teaching.

Objectives of Study

1. To examine the perceptions of college teachers concerning virtual teaching and of COVID -19 pandemic.
2. To examine teacher's difficulties and challenges in e-learning through out the COVID -19 pandemic.
3. To examine the challenges that students faced in e-learning.
4. To give suggestions for better performance of Online teaching and learning.

Research Methodology

Sample survey approach has been followed. 50 questionnaires to teachers and 200 questionnaires to students were administered in degree colleges. Data has been analysed by calculation of percentages.

Review of Literature

The effect of COVID -19 pandemic did not only lead to stand still global economic growth but also retroverted many countries developmental progress (Statista 2020). The world-wide education system is facing a new crisis due to the prolonged closure of schools and universities since March 2020 to curb the transmission of the disease and suddenly traditional classrooms have shifted into virtual classrooms having a staggering effect on the Indian educational sector because of the enormous digital divide (Khan et al.,2021). Due to COVID-19 out break 63 million teachers have been affected globally and hardly any country provided training to the teachers on virtual teaching (UNESCO 2020). Besides these 320 million students in India have been severely affected due to the nationwide lockdown(Sharma 2020)

Teachers' perception and Challenges towards Online teaching during COVID-19 pandemic in India

1.Demographic profile of the respondent teachers

Variables	Levels	Frequency	Percentage
College	Government	40	80
	Private	6	12
	Aided	4	8

Source: Authors calculation from google forms questionnaires and Personal interviews,

The majority of respondents (80%)said they were teaching in government colleges while (12%)were teaching in private colleges and (8%)were in aided colleges.

Virtual teaching and assessment problems confronted by respondent teachers

S.no	statement	yes	No	Cannot say
1	Facing any problem while conducting online classes	46	47	7
2.	Problem of student'sassessment and evaluationin online teaching	55	45	=
3.	Problem of tracking attendance during online teaching	70	30	-

Several teachers complained "non-availability of smart phones for students, network issues, less participation of students "are major problems during online classes. More than half the teachers (55%) confronted the problem of student assessment and evaluation online. Many teachers felt that in online evaluation "Authenticity of students work their understanding and behavioural changes cannot be checked". More than 70% of the teachers faced the problem of tracking attendance during online teaching. Very few students joined online classes and after joining they off their video.Students do not listen properly; they do not answer any question from the teachers. Half the teachers perceived anxiety regarding delivery of content, electricity or internet connection during online teaching.

Teachers positive and negative perception of online teaching
Teachers' positive perception of online education

S.no	Students	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Ease and quick share of reading material	15	30
2.	Flexibility in time and space	25	50
3.	Fast feedback	10	20

Source: Authors calculation from google form questionnaires and interviews

The majority of teachers (50%) opined that in virtual classes time and space are flexible because it has appeared as a convenient option as it is cost effective,travelling time can be saved and no geographical space barrier. The second highest positive rate was (30%)as teachers felt that in online teaching. "Ease and quick share of reading material" between instructor and pupil any time without much impacting on the environment.

Negative perception of teachers

The data on negative perception of teachers is given below.The highest response rate was 80% about to "lack of interaction with students " in e-learning which leads to an inability to determine pupils psychological and emotional needs,difficulty in communicating with learners and lack of capacity to successfully dispel pupils doubts. The second highest response received on the factor; teachers were "facing difficulties in student retention" in online classes is 44%. The statement" online teaching is inconvenient and ineffective" got 28% of responses which indicates that majority of teachers were not tech savvy.

Teachers Negative perception on online education

S.no	Statements	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Facing difficulties in student retention	22	44
2	Lack of interaction with students	40	80
3.	Not satisfied to deliver content in online classes	17	34
4.	Teachers were not tech savvy	14	28

Major challenges and issues confronted by teachers in virtual teaching
Challenges and issues faced by teachers in online classes

S.no	Statements	Frequency	Percentage
1	Adapting to remote teaching	15	30
2	Creating digital content	18	36
3.	Lack of technical knowledge	13	26
4.	Online evaluation of students	32	64

The majority of teachers (64%) faced difficulties in online evaluationof students due to connectivity issues, many teachers were unaware of virtual evolution portals for assessment and lacked the necessary equipment and training to do them.The second largest response rate was with regard to lack of basic facilities like a printer, white board, marker etc. the teachers were unable to clarify and describe themselves in virtual classes due to inadequate facilities at home. Similarly, lack of basic amenities, external distraction and family disturbance during teaching and conducting online assessments were key problems faced by professors. A total of 48% of the teachers confronted the problem in conducting online examinations and 36% have a problem in creating digital content.

Students' perception and challenges towards online teaching during COVID -19 pandemic in India

200 questionnaires were administered to Degree students.20% were administered to lower middle-class students, 50% to middle class students 20% to upper middle-class students and 10% to rich people.

Income levels of parents of the respondent students

S.no	Levels	Frequency	Percentage
1	Less than Rs 15000 per month	40	20
2.	Less than Rs 30,000 per month	100	50
3.	Between Rs 30000 – 50,000 per month	40	20
4.	Above Rs 50000 per month	20	10

The following are the biggest challenges faced by students in Online education

Lack of Motivation:

The table below gives data relating to motivation.32% of the students feel that it is boring and difficult to pay attention in online classes. 48% of the students complain of lacking motivation due to lack of interpersonal touch between the students and the teachers in the online classes. The need for physical interaction is also a necessity for maintaining engagement which the online learning methodology has no answers yet Institutions need to deliver interactive lessons to students.

Motivational problems faced by students in Online Teaching

S.no	Statement	Frequency	Percentage
1.	It is boring and difficult to pay attention	64	32
2.	Lack of interpersonal touch between students and teachers	96	48
3.	Lack of interactive lessons	58	29

Source: Authors calculation from google formsquestionnaires and personal interview

Infrastructure and Technical issues
Infrastructure and technical issues faced by students

S.no	Statement	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Infrastructural Problems	96	48
2.	Absence of digital literacy	64	32
3.	Lack of Technical knowledge	53	26.5

Source: Authors calculation from google form questionnaires and personal interviews
48% of the students feel they have infrastructural problems. Though online learning doesn't require huge buildings, big classrooms, chairs, tables, black boards and chalk, it doesn't mean there are no infrastructural requirements. The need for a computer, adequate software, constant electricity and high-bandwidth internet is quite a big demand. In most developed nations, this infrastructure is available to the public through public libraries if they cannot personally afford it. But for developing countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and many others, this quality of infrastructure is only available to a select few percent of the population.

32% of the students complain that they do not have Digital literacy. To proficiently learn through an online system requires understanding the working of multiple software, which presents a huge learning curve. Also, students need to understand online communication etiquette and know their rights and responsibilities in an online learning environment.

A bigger problem is with constant technical issues faced by both teachers and students on these platforms. These problems often require technical support to rectify, causing frequent disruption in the learning flow.

Lack of personal interaction and quality in course structure
Drawbacks of online teaching

S.no	Statement	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Lack of in-person interaction	137	68.5
2.	Not suitable for special need students	148	74
3.	Lack of brand image	151	75.5

Source: Authors calculation from Google form questionnaires and personal interviews
68.5% of the students complain lack of in-person interaction in online teaching. The physical presence inside a classroom with a teacher and fellow peers often leads to an atmosphere that can't be replicated through virtual means. Physical classrooms also allow for teachers to provide more personal attention to each student's needs.

74% of the students feel that online teaching is not suitable for special need students. Special need students need a more personalised and hands on method of teaching. Though technology has improved drastically,It is still heavily dependent on the need for an expert or a teacher to be there fulltime to guide the student through the tasks. These problems have caused special need students to fall behind others in their academic pursuits.

Institutions have retained their obsolete course curriculum and structure even after shifting online. Online resources such as YouTube, Google, Skill share, Udemy and others offer better content on these subjects for cheaper or even free. These platforms also let them pick and choose their subjects, making the learning structure highly flexible. This should cause educational institutions to rethink their approach to teaching as a whole.

Education has more to do about branding than learning. It matters more from where you studied than what you studied. 75.5 % of the students feel that online teaching lacks brand image. The online courses for degrees are often not accredited and mostly not recognised by the job market or other institutions. Though schools have embraced the online learning system, the higher educational institutions and the government have yet to recognise them as legitimate methods of obtaining a professional degree.

Abundant Distractions and Lack of Discipline Teaching and Learning

S.no	Statement	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Abundant Distractions	149	74.5
2.	Lack of Discipline	96	48
3.	It makes learning lonely	123	62.5
4.	Parents have an important role in motivating students	83	41.5

Source: Authors calculation from Google form questionnaires and Personal interviews
With recurrent technical issues, bandwidth problems and monotonous lectures, online attendance has seen a drastic dip. Most students find learning online, boring and often complain of lacking the motivation to make it through a class.74.5% of the students say that there are distractions in online teaching. Even teachers often complain of a lack of tools to make the classes engaging, leading to loss of interest from both parties. 48% complain about lack of discipline. The physical model ensures discipline as students cannot switch off webcams and doze off.

62.5%of the students feel thatonline education makes learning lonely. Isolation can also undermine many of the instructional strategies that we take for granted in our classrooms. Group work, class discussion and collaborative activity

can disappear from the program entirely if we aren't careful, and with them go the associated levels of student engagement and rich learning that those experiences provide. 41.5% of the students feel that parents have an important role in motivating students to online learning.

Conclusions and Suggestions

University teachers felt that e-learning is beneficial during the present pandemic. Teachers are confronted with many challenges in virtual classes such as online evaluation and creating digital content for students, lack of technical knowledge. Most of the teachers preferred a combination of both online and offline teaching for knowledge imparting and character building of students in the post COVID-19 period. Although 77.5% of teachers said that online teaching is not better than conventional teaching for superior quality of education. In underdeveloped country like India where the digital divide among the wealthy and the underprivileged the haves and have-nots must be properly handled because the weakest and most marginalised students are the ones who are impacted the worst by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Learning at home can be lonely. Without the buss of the classroom setting and the company of their peers, it is no surprise that some students can begin to feel a strong sense of isolation that slowly erodes their desire to learn. There are a few things you can do to maintain classroom dynamics and keep thing personable in a digital environment. They are

a)   Coordinate virtual group activities using chats, discussion boards or cloud tools for collaboration.
b)   Show your face and let students hear your voice
c)   Schedule regular check ins with students via email or chat. If you have the capacity, pay attention to those at risk of disengagement in particular

Clear and measurable goals are the best source of motivation. Set them regularly so that students have something to focus on. Instead of setting an open-ended task and leaving them to it- clearly specify

a)   The time the students should spend on the task
b)   A measurable or quantifiable outcome
c)   A means of accountability
d)   A due date

Also don't forget that parents can be the biggest asset when it comes to maintaining student motivation at home. Technical problem is another difficulty of online education. Assess whether your students have reliable access to technology. Not every home will always have a reliable internet connection or readily available device for students to use. An initial email, message or text to parents will give them the opportunity to flag these issues so that you can prepare to accommodate such students ahead of time. Online education in India is still in the early stages of growth, having a clear understanding of the challenges encountered and the perceptions of teachers and students can aid in the creation of successful and organised ways for conducting online classes.

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