
Major Challenges in Implementation of Online Mode of Teaching in Higher Education in India

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Abstract

Online teaching is no longer a new subject of discussion or innovation. It has been practiced sporadically since the arrival and development of internet services. With time, Online teaching in Higher education has become mainstream due to two major factors – mass proliferation of mobile internet services and covid 19 pandemic which has catalysed, rather forced us to shift to online mode of teaching, thereby paralysing and halting the conventional face to face mode of teaching- learning. However, many hindrances surfaced and were identified during the forced implementation of online mode of teaching during the covid 19 induced lockdown period. This paper aims to point out methodically those challenges: time management, lack of parental cooperation, inability to adapt with new technology, lack of appropriate resources, technical problems, indiscipline, and lack of confidence and so on; which we still have to win over for successful implementation of online teaching in higher education sector. The paper also analyses the weaknesses of online teaching - learning procedure based on teachers' perceptions. The study based on secondary source of data, is descriptive, analytical and qualitative. The study will play a vital role in enlightening the educational administrators and policy makers of the challenges in online teaching and assist them to resolve the crisis confronted by the teachers at different levels of online mode of teaching.

Keywords:- Lockdown, Challenges, Online teaching, Covid 19.

Introduction

The extremity of the pandemic has worsened the quality of education and pushed the educational world into a cyberspace mode with the aim of the continuity of teaching and learning process. Though education could have been supported by the posh private institutions with some virtual interruptions but the government institutions poorly suffered the transition. This paper basically aims to focus on some of the conditions that are detrimental to the prospect of online teaching in Higher Education in India. However, we are not opposing the mainstreaming of online mode of teaching. But we just want to present the context. Our aim is to provide a picture of the ground reality, where implementation of the online mode of teaching appears to be too ambitious.

All India survey on Higher Education report (AISHE 20-21) reveals that forty three percent (43%) Universities and sixty one percent (61%) colleges are located in rural areas in India. According to World Bank Staff estimates on the United Nations Population Divisions World Organization Prospects rural population in India was around 65 percent in India in 2021. According to ICUBE 2021 study report (2022) named 'Internet in India' Internet penetration in rural India is 37 (thirty-seven) percent. So, these

three-point data provide us with a very meaningful insight regarding accessibility of internet connection in rural India. This low internet penetration is one of the major challenges of online mode of teaching in Higher Education in India. India is one of the leading countries in terms of Internet users. Internet technology has made many complex processes and procedures simple. In pre Covid -19 period as mentioned earlier sporadic use of internet prevailed for the delivery of lessons and knowledge in Higher Education. Some distance education institutes used online mode of delivery to reach their remotely located students. But that was also not the preferred mode in pre- Covid era. Covid 19 turned our lives upside down. Emerging as a health issue, health emergency, it did not confine itself to health sector, on the contrary emerged and evolved as a social crisis. It affected all other sectors of society- economy, education, polity to mention a few among others. Besides, the horror and the pathological situation created by the pandemic, what made life more difficult, psychologically painful and isolating was the so called 'social distancing'. Social distancing measures were used to control and arrest the spread and transmission of the highly infectious deadly disease. This Covid 19 induced lockdown forced the total Higher Education system to shift and switch into online mode. This was initiated to keep the process of teaching learning uninterrupted. Even the process of evaluations (examinations) was also conducted in online mode. As we all know that necessity is the mother of invention many mobile based Apps and other techniques and platforms came into existence or were developed for the smooth conduction of online teaching learning process. And this Covid 19 forced us to adopt almost 20 years of possible advancement in 20 months. Rapidly all the stakeholders of the Higher Education system made themselves prepared to be a part of this online teaching learning process- as there was no other option other than embracing and joining the Bandwagon without being out of the system.

But it is to be remembered that, sudden enforcement of a new technology, process cannot ensure total participation given the lack of resources and capabilities such as purchasing power, internet connectivity, network issues etc. Many educators found it difficult to adopt the online mode of teaching. Media reports during the Covid 19 lockdown period highlighted certain unfortunate incidents. The role of education in the holistic development of a Nation in general and in building individual personality in specific is undeniable. Education is the preserver and bearer of society's culture. It is necessary not only for increasing the literacy rate of the Nation, but also to accelerate the productivity of the country. With the rapid growth and innovations in the information, communication and technological sectors, brought about by the processes of modernization, globalization increased the demand of skilled workforce than ever before. The fast-changing dimension of society has entrusted education with the task of not only generating, preserving and transmitting cultural values, heritages from generations to generations, but in producing skilled, technologically equipped, manpower capable of meeting its industrial needs. The effectiveness of any educational system depends on many factors. One such factor is mode of teaching- that is the way knowledge being imparted among the students. No doubt the significance of 'face to face' interaction in any sort of relationship is undeniable. Hence, in the context of online mode of teaching, an additional responsibility is shouldered to generate technologically equipped workforce by the educational system for meeting the needs of industry 4.0. Consequently, the conventional balance of entire educational system will be disturbed and become complicated. Being a country reflecting 'mosaic culture'- it is the amalgamation of different castes, religions, sects, languages etc. There exist discrimination and inequalities along these lines. As Tilak (1979) mentioned that – 'Inequality in educational opportunity is of different types: regional inequality, inequality by sex, inequality by caste, inequality by parental income, inequality by parental occupation, etc.' Democratization of society is not

possible without democratization of education (Bagchi, 2010). Online mode of teaching will definitely hamper this process of democratization of education. Rather, this online mode of teaching will promote digital divide and will generate a sense of alienation among a section of students. According to UNICEF report on Out – of – School – Children – in South Asia, 2014 (OOSC) India has 17.8 million out of school children. According to UNESCO report challenges faced by digital divide are – low capacity in digital and learning, poor system support, inability to reach all students, preference for in – person teaching. According to The Food and Agriculture Organisation’s “State of Food Security and Nutrition in the world 2022”, because of the Pandemic the total number of people being not able to afford a healthy diet has increased by 112 million to 3.2 billion. Though India specific data was unavailable, but statistical estimate by FAO shows that 41percent people in India suffer from food insecurity in 2019 - 2021 (Rajalakshmi, 2022). Food comes first. With this huge number of people suffering from food insecurity, how can people dream about holistic education for their children. One might question the relevance of the above-mentioned factors in the context of online teaching. We should remember that the above-mentioned problems though, not directly but indirectly are related to and do pose challenge in the accomplishment of implementing online mode of teaching in Higher Education. Unity in diversity is the phrase often used to describe India’s glorious tradition. Though this incredible Nation sets an example of such unification in diversification, but these factors of diversification often are sources of conflicts, violence in society. As Gore (1996) warns us of such ‘rosy reconstruction’ and suggests not to consider such harmony as ‘granted’. Given the heterogenous nature of our Nation, the implementation and of online mode of teaching becomes if not impossible, but quite a challenging task.

Infrastructural Challenges- Online teaching doesn’t depend on basic infrastructural requirements: huge institutional buildings, spacious and well- ventilated classrooms, chairs, desks, blackboards, or chalk and so on. Instead, it needs a computer, adequate software, constant electricity, and high-bandwidth internet. In the developed nations, these requirements are complied through public libraries to those who cannot personally afford it. But for developing nations such as India, this quality of infrastructure is available only by a selected percent of the population whereas the maximum fail to access. In fact, in a report in The New Indian Express on 27th August 2020, UNICEF contends that students from backward and marginalized communities in the developing nations cannot access smartphones and even if they manage the gadget but the poor connectivity becomes the greatest challenge on their way of learning. In some cases, the students use the gadgets of their family members or the devices at cybercafe. Such restrictions and limitations prevent a teacher from continuing a hassle-free class.

Technical Challenges- The current generation is no doubt proficient in computer work. But Digital Literacy is no easy goal. In fact, teaching - learning through an online system includes a profound understanding of the workings of multiple software and for it one has to undergo an extended learning curve. Very frequently the teachers and students confront the technical glitches during classes which are like digressions on the way of imparting smooth education and to combat these challenges a teacher and student both has to acquire technical knowledge which appears to be a big issue to solve. Unfortunately, in the nations like India there is no such privileged either for the teachers or for the students to have training for developing digital literacy skills which will also include Knowledge related to the operation of gadgets as well as online communication etiquette and rights and responsibilities. Thus, most of the teachers confront the problem of carrying class on desktops or other devices and using software Apps. Besides, English being the language of operation in respect of these Apps, some teachers with difficulty

in understanding English fail to operate smoothly and confidently. Not only this, online classes require more competency in respect of content management. The teacher has to arrange the topic material systematically so that the class could be conducted successfully. It is in-service training that can boost enough confidence in teachers to run online mode of teaching - learning, however it is unfortunate that rare emphasis has been given by the authorities on such issues and therefore the challenges for the teachers persists.

Class Management Challenges- The biggest challenge for a teacher in respect of online teaching is the management of the class discipline. Narrow scope for face-to-face interaction between teacher and student has somehow hampered the basic interests of teaching. It is undoubted that the physical presence inside a classroom with teacher and classmates is more helpful in improving the student's engagement to the class and the subject taught. In online classes often the students get addicted to various things like virtual games, chatting, social media watching movies, watching videos and so on. It is different for the to control this as individual attention is impossible in online class. The physical classes can never be substituted by the virtual classes which lack in person interaction. Apart from this, the various digressions in virtual classes like forgetting to mute the microphones, background noises and ambience hinders the teaching and are also difficult to manage like that in physical classes.

Challenges in Time management- Online mode of teaching is a time-consuming method of imparting education. Due to lack of ready experience, most of the teachers take more time in operating the devices and the apps before the class. This somehow kills time. Besides the network connectivity and technical glitches during a class not only hampers the proper running of the class but also consumes time. Online class demands organized content material and this makes the teacher devote a huge time in arranging the content material so that the class can be delivered systematically and smoothly. Apart from this, in online classes the lack of physical interaction with the teacher causes more doubts related to the understanding of the subject in the students. Therefore, students ask to repeat the concept, again and again, and teachers are unable to keep pace with the time frame for covering the content in allotted periods.

Poor Attendance- A very serious challenge faced by the teachers during online teaching is the attendance - very often a very small number of students join live lessons and miss the chance for live interactions and ask questions where they need clarity. Though it is not clear why students often skip online classes, it may be due to Internet availability and connectivity or may be because the students find online classes boring and they lack motivation to continue. In fact, teachers also complain about the lack of tools to make the classes more engaging and to hook up the interest and concentration of the students in the class. The students get engaged in several sources of entertainment and thus get derailed from educational goals.

Challenges of Family responsibilities- Another challenge of online mode of teaching faced by the teachers, though detected late, is overlapping of professional and personal responsibilities. In traditional mode of class room teaching, teachers attend the institution for fixed hours. During this time, they keep themselves fully engaged in their profession and carry on their duties successfully. Unlikely in online mode, as the teachers teach from their home the duty schedule is seldom maintained as they frequently get involved in some forced family tasks while conducting class. Besides, the household ambience is completely different from the workstation environment. Especially for the female teachers, the household chores like dusting, cleaning, housekeeping, cooking, babysitting have to be maintained

parallelly along with the profession. Thus, the overlapping of the family and professional duties makes it harder and the teachers fail to give their best in their job of teaching. Online teaching can be a boon, if it is properly implemented considering accessibility status of the receivers (which often depends on the socio-economic status) and other infrastructural barriers. The increasing internet accessibility due to enhanced mobile use and wide geographical coverage with cellular networks can act favourably to boost online mode of teaching in higher education. But, the basic need or the pre requirement necessary to spread and establish online teaching is the adequate and the wide availability of internet-technology infrastructure. As for conventional physical classes the government requires to construct brick and mortar infrastructure in colleges and Universities, similarly such publicly available and accessible virtual classroom infrastructure should also be constructed. Only then online teaching in the arena of higher education will be an implementable realistic idea. As we all know before cultivation the field has to be prepared so, before the implementation of online teaching we have to prepare proper need-based facilities, in order to make the idea fruitful and equitable across the different socio- economic strata. Therefore, in a nutshell we can say that the government must go for a detailed action plan involving IT experts and other stakeholders of higher education, so that a realistic road map can be prepared to make virtual mode of higher education a reality.

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