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Research Article

Online education during Covid 19 Pandemic: Challenges and Solutions

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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions across the country have been forced and pushed to move from offline mode of teaching to online mode of instruction during the current COVID-19 crisis globally. According to the World Health Organization, Covid-19 has been declared as pandemic which has turned to be a hazard to humankind and its affect will visible for all times to come. This has made it compulsory for teachers and instructors to shift from in-class to online teaching pattern. The present situation has made it obligatory for the teachers to become more flexible and innovative in their pedagogical techniques. The traditional and old- styled methods are no longer in vogue and cannot assure successful and effective teaching learning process. To be impactful and impressive in teaching online, there are several required components since teaching online has brought about many issues and challenges in the present scenario.
Besides reviewing some of the issues and   challenges, this paper will also discuss solutions to beat difficulties faced by teachers during online teaching.

Keywords: Online, Challenge, Teaching, Knowledge, Skills, Learning.

Introduction

The modern-day millennials have grown up with the Internet and computers, they are much tech savvy and well versed with social media and digital marketing tools. They have seen the world in ways the previous generations could not have even thought of. The millennials want to see the immediate application of knowledge since they are very active, agile and well aware of how the world is moving pretty fast. In this modern hectic life, full of hurries and worries, the rapid technological changes are rampant. Looking at the pace of current society, online teaching – learning process has become the need of the hour.

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Higher education institutions across the country have gradually and steadily adapted to online teaching in the past one year as a compulsion which has also become a part of the teaching process

for all times to come. For the past ten years, the higher education institutions equipped several teaching spaces with the newest and up-to- date technological infrastructure so that their human resources in the form of teachers and staff can become trained to use the technology effectively. This prepared the teaching fraternity to be well organized and equipped with teaching online efficiently in a work from home scenario globally.

Challenges in online teaching during pandemic

According to the teaching fraternity, with the current scenario during the Covid-19 pandemic, it is natural for the education system to be suspectable to outside threats and dangers. Many logistical trials and changes in attitude had to be brought for converting the instructional delivery into digital mode. The pandemic brought about a lot of anxiety to the students thus impacting negatively on their academic performance also. Besides, majority of teachers were not efficiently equipped and prepared to deliver superior teaching remotely when the pandemic started in 2020. The level of comfort ensured by the conventional teaching method to the teacher cannot be ensured in online teaching. In addition to the above, there are other challenges which the teaching community is facing even after one year of the pandemic now. So, the issues discussed here will not only be pertaining to the technology or technical trials, but also the physical challenges which will be quite interesting and stimulating to analyse.

Engaging the student successfully in online teaching is as vital and difficult as engaging in traditional education. The most important and rampant challenge which the teachers are facing in online teaching is the lack of interaction with the students. The teachers are missing the interactive sessions which they used to have in pre covid times in physical/ offline mode. This is leading to the need of developing appropriate methods of engagement for online education. It has become imperative for the teachers to incorporate interactions into online education mode which is not that easy and simple. The teachers have understood that the usage of a supercomputer does not ensure human interaction. The teacher has to innovate new ways and methods to aid the learner get justly engaged and involved in the course. Teachers, especially the senior ones being less adept technologically are prone to humiliative heckling amid the lectures from unknown external individuals, who are not a part of the class. Various researchers have found that the level of interaction with the students is directly proportional to the positive attitude of students. There is a deficiency of head on face-to-face communication in online education, so the study and research are being done now as to how to dovetail a congenial environment of interaction between the teacher and the taught through various modules and technology available. While designing new material and tools for enhancing interaction, it is being kept in mind that the interaction must give the student the chance to enter into discussions with other students as well as acquiring feedback from the teacher. The teacher's feedback should reinforce the course material and encourage the students to become more engaged in the learning process.

A common challenge in online teaching is students' tendency to ignore interaction and conversation since the students also do not want to face the teacher by turning their cameras on. They ignore the instructions given by their teachers and hence become non participative and disinterested in classes at times. Interaction in teaching learning process is a significant supporter of learning. Satisfaction with the teaching-learning is directly associated with the amount of

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interface provided. How happy and satisfied the student is, will determine how much knowledge is received and utilised by the students.

Fulfilment and interaction are likely to occur when the teaching is well planned, strategic and interaction options are clarified to the students as well as the teachers well in advance.

Need for Essential good Online Learning traits for learners

Self-motivation and Self direction are the two most needed characteristics which the students need to have in them and which are lacking the most. The dearth of college environment and effervescence demotivates students. Excessive comfort of the homes leads to lethargy amongst them through   online learning mode. Due to lack of infrastructure dovetailing, collaboration and confidence, many doubts of the students remain unanswered. In this scenario, it becomes the duty of the teachers to help students develop traits in them which will lead to success in online learning. Students must be very comfortable as active learners as compared to a time when they could afford to be passive learners during offline mode of teaching. This used to be common in a traditional classroom. Students as online learners must be motivated to assess, analyse and think critically. They must be pushed to give their opinions through various participative exercises and interactive assignments. They need to be trained to learn to apply new ideas in order to resolve problems. Teachers can create a sense of being connected if there are instant responses and replies to student queries. The role of a teacher also needs to change here with teacher becoming more active, adaptive and receptive to students' needs. The aim of a teacher here is to create and carve a transformative learning atmosphere. This means using innovative techniques and a variety of online links and videos, quizzes and polls where the students can feel active, vigilant and connected throughout during the classes. There are different strategies which can be implemented to make online teaching a success. These include the creation of a course site where students have access to all materials relevant to the course. The researchers agree that audio-visual material is useful in imparting successfully, especially in an online mode. The researchers support the use of technology and encourage instructors to seek out and use innovative learning techniques.

 Problem-based learning is one technique which creates teamwork and collaboration among the students and aids support critical thinking skills. All the students do not have the ability to work together to solve problems. It is up to the teacher to innovate ways and create mechanisms where they can be giving some assignments and group discussion activities which can instil team building and collaboration amongst the students.

Need to emphasize the Non-Verbal Parameters

According to Albert Mehrabian, the famous Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles, 93% of communication is nonverbal which includes paralinguistic elements 38% and body language 55 **%.**

In traditional offline teaching in class, Kinesics (Body Language), facial expressions, gestures and teachers' voice modulation (paralanguage) used to be the most important teaching tools. However, once the teachers shifted to an online mode of teaching, body language and nonverbal aspects came

under limitations as it is tough using these tools through screens, and only "voice" is fully functional. Therefore, in online teaching, faculty need to appropriately slow down their speech to allow students to capture key knowledge points. The paralinguistic elements like pauses, intonation, rhythm, pitch, etc. become very important elements in order to be remarkable and impressive as a teacher. The students also need to be told the importance of these paralinguistic elements in order to be learning effectively in online mode. Lack of incorporation of non-verbal essentials in students is making them more casual and laidback in approach which leads to the nonseriousness in their behaviour and overall attitude. This may have a long-term impact since the casual approach they are portraying now may become a part of their personality thus affecting their career later.

Human and pets' intrusions/ External Barriers

One of the most common challenges during virtual teaching is the unforeseen entrance or interruption of family members, or pets that may lead to disturbance or variation in virtual learning and attention of the participants thus, hampering the overall teaching- learning process. It was found on discussion with many teachers that interfering and intruding of the domestic animals during times when the classes and meetings are in progress was a huge hindrance and challenge to effective and impactful interactions in a virtual mode. Especially, noise of dog's barking becomes a very common hindrance for teachers teaching online.

Also, clatter from machines, vehicles and construction ventures from the sender's as well as the receiver's side acts as one of the biggest barriers to effective teaching – learning process in an online mode.

Little Digital Competence

According to A. Ferrari, "Digital competence is the group of skills, knowledge and attitudes needed when using ICT and digital devices to perform responsibilities, such as problem solving, information management, collaboration with respect to effectiveness, efficiency and ethics". Even in this modern era, we cannot expect the entire population to be tech savvy possessing digital ability in all the spheres of life including education. (Bennett et al., 2008). Students as well as teachers with little digital competence are likely to lack behind in online learning. Lack of digital competence can also lead to under confidence to perform and come out the best as teachers. For e.g., many teachers may not be well-equipped with using online google meet teaching tools like white board, doodle and PowerPoint presentations. They may still be tempted to teach in a plain lecture mode as they would do during traditional / offline teaching.

Lack of digital competence amongst students are visible when they face issues with respect to uploading assignments, accessing required material, the competition they face from technologically better skilled and proficient students, especially at presentation skills and demonstration of various assignments and project reports virtually.

Many teachers still face issues with respect to creating the student friendly portals, posting question formats and assignment questions, providing needful material and adoption of computer – based methods of teaching viz PowerPoints, doodles, demonstrations and simulations. So little digital

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competence also acts as a challenge in online teaching learning process for which much training to the teachers as well as students need to be imparted in advance so that they can come out best in their respective areas.

Income Disparity

Among the poor when there is a constant struggle to meet ones ends, a milieu favourable to e-learning cannot be expected. Till 2019, 22 % population of India was below poverty line according to RBI. The numbers have purportedly increased following the imposition of lockdown during COVID 19 pandemic. In this crisis situation, relying on free internet services in academic institutions was natural for the students especially who could not afford the same at home. When the institutions faced closure, the students with low socio- economic backgrounds belonging to rural areas found it difficult to learn through online mode.

According to TRAI report, only 75.5 crore (55.3% of population) in India has access to the internet event today due to the income disparity and gap which becomes the biggest challenge for online teaching – learning process.

Compatibility issues

Online learning is not compatible with all the streams.
Online learning is well – suited and effective for the disciplines of Social Science , Humanities, Management and Commerce while its appropriateness with Athletics, Engineering and Health Sciences is doubtful and uncertain as these streams require applied and real-world experiences as part of their teaching .Substitute workrooms in the form of distant virtual labs can only fill theory- to practice- hole since it cannot provide the students with the real practical experience and learning from lab activities. Since online learning cannot be applied across all the disciplines, this compatibility gap cannot be filled easily. This implies that online learning is can only be used to supplement direct training method and we all long for the time when we all will be able to go back to the regular and usual traditional setting.

Conclusion

It has been seen that technology has played a major role in moderating the COVID 19 pandemic effect on academic activities by being the only resort for teachers as well as the students globally. Despite online education being intensely dependent on adequate preparation and designs of instructions with several available theories and models, the process of shift for the universities from traditional to online education is uncertain since the educational institutions and the government still lack the preparation, strategy of proper implementation and extension of online teaching and mentoring programs due to the unprecedented pandemic. The pandemic has taught that the digital skills should be a part of teaching and learning process of all subjects for all times. There should not be a need for the educational institutions to design a distinct platform for learning digital skills – instead, they should be embedded in the curriculum uniformly. Since online education is fully dependent on technology and internet facilities, educational institutions can even think of collaborating with telecommunication companies. The telecommunication companies can be requested to champion the funding of net services or offer free browsing data to scholars and

educators as a part of the corporate social responsibility. There can be the designing of an even virtual learning prototype can be applied across all streams. This will solve the compatibility challenges to a great extent. The understanding and experience of online learning and the acceptance of the same globally will be a great moral booster to the teachers as well. The faculty will assist students in recognizing the values of learning via blended discussions and also expound on the incorporation of online discussion and conventional learning in classes which will help many students in coming out of their cocoons. They will become more confident. There can also be a setting up of the separate online learning studio / library where the human and pets' intrusions, noise etc will either reduced to the nearest minimum or eradicated successfully.

With every challenge comes a lot of opportunities and learnings for all of us. That is why, the challenges experienced by the teaching community faculty as well as the students during this pandemic were well explored and they got transformed into opportunities. Even when everything returns to normalcy, online learning will be sustained, it will continue and education will become hybrid everywhere. Further research can be taken up by future researchers on development of emergency remote teaching assessment instrument and the crisis-response migration methods along with the trials experienced by the students and faculty. This will help all of us to be prepared for emergency situations in education in future times as well.

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