

PROBLEMS FACED BY THE SCHOOL TEACHERS OF UTTAR PRADESH IN THE TRANSACTION OF ONLINE CLASSES DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

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The dreaded Coronavirus created a panic situation globally, and most of the countries across the world declared total lockdown. In India also, shutdown of activities was declared across the country, which included educational institutions too. The teaching-learning process was disrupted due to educational institutions' closure, and online learning therefore was resorted to. The sudden shift of classes from physical to virtual mode impacted almost all education stakeholders, especially teachers, students, and parents. During online classes, the role, teaching style, timing, and norms also have been changed. A traditional classroom where no phones were allowed has now shifted to smartphones. The parents criticizing the demand of smartphones by children previously have purchased or given their own phones/tablets/laptops to their children to attend the classes. This haphazard shifting of classes from offline to online mode created chaos initially as guidelines were not clear. Some other issues were faced by the teachers at the commencement of the classes. The present paper explores the problems that Uttar Pradesh's school teachers faced during online classes. A descriptive survey method was used in the study, and responses of 156 school teachers were collected.

Keywords: Online classes, online educational platforms, gadgets.

Introduction

In future, the year 2020 will be remembered as a year of disasters. The year has witnessed all of them, be it geographical, hydrological, climatological, biological, geopolitical, and economical disasters. A year which started with the tragic bushfire of Australia (though bushfire was started in December 2019, it remained till January 2020) and followed by other natural/human-made disasters as devastating floods in Indonesia, and some parts of India (Assam, Bihar, Maharashtra), a volcano eruption in the Philippines, earthquakes in many parts of the world, locust swarms in East Africa, and Asia, cyclones as Nishagra and Amphan

in Bangladesh and India, forest fires in Uttarakhand, India, green snow of Antarctica and topping it all, the dreaded Coronavirus.

The outbreak of COVID-19 affected the entire world. People across the globe encountered an unseen problem. This novel disease originated in Wuhan, China, initially as an epidemic but spread rapidly within a few days. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a pandemic in March 2020 and issued safety measures and preventions to deal with this precarious spread. The whole world was under lockdown, including educational institutes from pre-primary to higher education. According to a UNESCO report, during March 2020, 150 countries

around the globe closed their educational institutes that affected more than 80 per cent of students. This sudden lockdown put everyone under pressure, including stakeholders of education, and the virtual or online classes came as an alternative for the in-person classrooms.

In the lockdown period, online teaching-learning has become a buzzword in education, finding no other alternatives for providing education to the students in the real classrooms. Online learning is not a new concept. It was part and parcel of some schools in the country with recent changes and innovations but not all schools. Online learning is a way of instruction that uses the internet, intranet, and multimedia (Hall, 2003; O'Neill, Singh and O'Donoghue, 2004). There are several benefits to online classes, such as accessibility, affordability, flexibility, learning-pedagogy, life-long learning, etc. (Dhawan, 2020). However, organised online classes during COVID-19 were not always a blessing to all the learners (Alam, 2020) due to the different problems associated with it, such as limited resources, network issues, poor technology literacy, time management, etc.

All educational institutes in the country were closed since March 2020 due to COVID-19. Despite its shortcomings in such a situation, online learning emerged as the only solution to save students' academic loss. The decision taken to save students' time was welcomed, which provided learning opportunities to the learners under their teachers' guidance even though they were outside the traditional classrooms. In times of pandemics like COVID-19, when every public place was closed, online classes did not allow students to get away from the teaching-learning process because of its immense features

that allow learners to learn in accordance with their pace and place (Jindal and Urvashi, 2020). However, at the same time, online classes are not within the reach of everyone. Gadgets like a smartphone or computer with internet facilities are prerequisite of online education. According to the National Statistical Office (NSO), Government of India (2019), only 8 per cent of all households with members aged between 5 and 24 years have a computer with an internet connection. About 66 per cent of the Indian population lives in the villages, and among them, only 15 per cent of the population had access to internet facilities. For the urban population, this was 42 per cent. NSO has found this difference based on caste, gender, region, and states. Such a situation puts a question mark on the success of online classes.

Apart from the required facilities/gadgets, teachers faced other problems like non-cooperation from the side of parents/students, lack of guidelines from the government and school authorities (Li and Lalani, 2020), unavailability of supportive material to teach children with special needs (CWSN), etc. (Jindal and Urvashi, 2020). In this sudden shift of the classes, the teachers with little or no knowledge of online teaching were under pressure, and the whole scenario is like an alien situation, and anyhow they were trying to deal with it (Alam, 2020).

Review of the Related Studies

The world has been exposed to a pandemic like COVID-19 only a few months back, and measures like lockdown have been taken from February or March, so the studies related to the problems which the stakeholders are facing are very few, but the

investigator has made an effort to mention those studies here.

Alam (2020) found that students and teachers had no prior experience in online classes. Other problems found by the investigator in online classes were poor and interrupted internet signals even in some urban places and complete lack of the same in rural areas, technical issues while handling computer and smartphones, no prior experiences of handling apps, the problem of time management, and difficulty for the teachers to get individualised feedback as well as engaging the students with the material.

The All India Forum for Right to Education (AIFRTE) has said that the government and private agencies are trying to promote distance teaching, learning, and evaluation in virtual mode during COVID-19 lockdown (Ref. 2). It was instructed to the teachers to complete the syllabus by organising virtual classes. It states that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed deep structural imbalances in the country regarding digital learning. With the current digital divide and inequality prevailing in education, the rush to expand online education will only deny access to learning for most previously disadvantaged and marginalised children.

Jindal & Urvashi (2020) discussed the effectiveness of online classes for CWSN while shifting from offline to online. They discussed several benefits of online classes as comfort of working from home, no unnecessary traveling which saves time and increases productivity, and keeps safe from the deadly disease. However, they added that it is not beneficial in the same way for everyone. Online classes are exclusionary for the CWSN. CWSN, as per their disability, are

struggling in different areas in online learning. Even SWAYAM classes that started on D.D channels did not take into consideration the needs of CWSN. Virtual learning is only within the reach of children who have good financial resources. Furthermore, the gender of the student also influences its reach. Girls get only half of the chance to attend the class compared to the boys.

Lall & Singh (2020) studied students' perception of online classes taken during lockdown due to COVID-19 and found maximum students were in favor of studying through online classes. Still, they complained about the lack of co-curricular activities in the online mode of classes.

Li & Lalani (2020) discussed that COVID-19 has resulted in a shutdown of schools worldwide, and over 1.2 billion children are out of the classroom globally. Students who have no reliable internet access or other technical issues struggle to participate in digital learning. This gap was visible across countries (developed and underdeveloped) and within countries (different income brackets).

Loeb (2020) in the article regarding online and offline classes wrote that online classes cannot take over offline classes because students' informal social interactions cannot occur in online classes. In-person classes are, on average, more effective. Further, he suggests that, whether synchronous or asynchronous, the teacher is supposed to provide students with opportunities to engage thoughtfully with the subject matter in both conditions. Students, in most cases, are required to interact with each other virtually. Online classes require a strong curriculum and pedagogical practices. Teachers should

realize the needs of students. Online classes are not as effective as in-person classes, but these are undoubtedly better than no classes.

The relevance of the study

The switching of classes from offline to online mode in the interest of education was commendable. However, the sudden lockdown and then haphazardly shifting to the online classes created problems for all the stakeholders. Online classes are not part of the course of most Indian schools. In such a situation, stakeholders' traditional roles changed, and they were not very much aware and comfortable with their new role. Additionally, even after starting the online classes, no feedback was taken by the government from stakeholders, and this communication gap exacerbated the problems. The All India Forum for Right to Education (AIRFTE) states that India's government is only dictating to the teaching community and not taking their insight, suggestions, and not using their real-life experiences to tackle the crisis (AIRFTE, 2020). It also says that e-learning is a substitute for formal classroom learning and shifts the individual's burden of education. In this situation, it is required to take the teachers' feedback and know their problems.

During online classes, teachers are struggling on different fronts. No training for online classes, ignorance of new technology, lack of resources, technical and safety issues, connectivity issue in the remote areas, insufficiency of internet data, indiscipline of students, non-cooperation from the side of parents/guardian, excessive household chores, are some of the problems which the school teachers are facing (Li and Lalani,

2020). With no treatment available for a disease like COVID-19, this problem can persist for a long time. In such a situation, schools may remain closed for an extended period. In this condition, online learning is the only way to keep students connected to the teaching-learning process to go to the next class with the required knowledge of the class and without losing their academic year. The success of online classes relies on teachers. In such a situation, isn't it necessary to know whether teachers face any problems in online classes? If yes, how can these problems be resolved? If such a situation appears again, the stakeholders can take proper measures to address the issue. Apart from this, Indian classrooms are very crowded, and there is a need to reduce class-load. According to agencies such as AIRFTE, the government is planning to reduce load of offline classrooms by shifting students to online classes. The study's findings may help resolve online learning issues, and with adequate steps, some classes may be shifted from offline to a smooth-functioning online class.

Uttar Pradesh was selected for the study. The primary reason for the selection of this state was the population size. Uttar Pradesh is the largest state in India in terms of population. The second reason was the status of ICT in the state before the lockdown. As per Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) database 2018-2019, only 12.53 per cent of schools had computers, and only 10.88 percent of schools in the state had an internet connection. Condition of government schools in terms of computer and internet facilities was worse than the private schools, especially at primary and upper primary level. However, efforts were made by the central and state government to avoid the educational loss of

students, and teachers were advised to take proper steps for it. However, whether these decisions and actions were equally supportive for the teachers or teachers faced any issue in the classes' conduction through online mode is the study's aim. The study's findings will also help address the problems faced by the state's teachers with the largest population in the country, which lacks in terms of computer-related infrastructural facilities so that appropriate measures can be taken. This study may help address the problems the country's teachers face in online classes.

Objective of the Study

To explore the problems of school teachers in organizing online classes during the lockdown due to COVID-19

Limitations of the Study

It has been tried by the investigator to be scientific and objective while conducting this study; however, the study contained the following limitations;

1. Due to constraint related to time and limited use of technology by the teachers, it was not possible to conduct this study with a large sample size of school teachers. Though it was planned to collect data from 250 school teachers of Uttar Pradesh as some teachers did not fill in the questionnaire, there was no time to send the questionnaire to more school teachers, so the study's sample size was reduced automatically.
2. Due to the lockdown, it was impossible to collect the teachers' data physically.

Thus, the data has been collected through a virtual medium.

3. Due to the limitations of sampling technique, it was not possible for the investigator to include teachers of each of the district of Uttar Pradesh in the study. However school teachers from 30 districts of the state were covered.

Methodology

Method

The investigator employed a descriptive survey method to determine school teachers' problems in conducting the online classes.

Population

The population of this study consists of all the school teachers of Uttar Pradesh.

Sample and Sampling Method

The investigator adopted a purposive sampling method to collect the data. There is a total of 75 districts in Uttar Pradesh. Out of these 75 districts, 30 districts were selected by the investigator for the study. The investigator prepared a list of districts in descending order based on the literacy and further 15 districts that had the highest literacy rate and 15 districts with the lowest literacy rate. A balanced status of problems related to online learning could be found in the state. The questionnaire developed by the investigator was sent to 250 school teachers (6-10 school teachers from each selected district) on different platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Gmail by using Google Forms, and the response of 156 teachers (4-7 school teachers from each selected district) was received. The details of the samples are given in Table 1.

Table 1
Description of the sample selected for the study

Gender		Location		Type of Management of the school	
Male	Female	Rural	Urban	Government	Private
54	102	70	86	53	103

Tools Used

The investigator developed a questionnaire, and due to the constraints of time and availability of respondents, only the content validity was established. The tool with the study’s objective was shared with ten teacher educators/school teachers for validation, and modification in the tool was done as per the their suggestions. The final draft of the tool had 21 items.

Findings of the Study

- All the school teachers reported that they were taking classes online at the time of lockdown. Teachers were taking classes through multiple modes. Forty-one teachers reported they used on the go recordings, 83 used audio/video conferencing apps, 47 teachers used YouTube videos of others, 39 teachers used PPT or PDF documents, eight teachers made modules/adopted modules on different teaching points and shared with students, three teachers made notes and shared images of that with students. Twenty-six teachers stated they were using some other mediums (as calling one student each day and discussing the teaching points where students were facing difficulty, sending voice notes) to conduct online classes during lockdown due to COVID-19.

- Proficiency in handling gadgets is a prerequisite to conducting online classes, and it was found that most teachers (75.64%) were proficient in handling gadgets.
- Teachers’ preference regarding the effectiveness of online/offline classes was taken. In the response, most school teachers (91.66%) considered traditional or face-to-face classes more effective than online classes. The rest of the school teachers favoured online classes and marked them as more effective.
- School teachers used multiple apps to conduct online classes. The majority of the teachers were using apps like WhatsApp (99), Google Meet (85), Zoom (34), Google Classroom (19). Other apps such as Google Classroom, Facebook, Go to Webinar, Cisco Webex Meet, Next Learning Platform (NLP), Diksha app were also used by some school teachers to conduct classes and other academic activities.
- School teachers used online platforms to take formal classes and organise multiple activities such as giving an assignment, assessing the learning of students, interacting with parents, and sending the reading materials.
- Lack of gadgets from the students’ side was also an issue in online classes’

successful conduction. The majority of the school teachers (58.33%) accepted that their students had no gadgets for attending the online classes. This finding is similar to the findings of Alam (2020) and Li and Lalani (2020).

- Online classes cannot be possible without desktop/laptops/smartphones. It is a precondition to run an online class. It was found that majority of school teachers (94.87%) had their gadgets.
- Majority of the teachers own a gadget. However, 55.13 per cent of school teachers have reported that they share their gadgets with the household, especially schooling members of the family who depend on the adults in the family for the gadget to attend their online classes. This dilemma becomes another challenge for the teachers to deliver online classes.
- The majority of school teachers (66.67%) conducted an online examination to assess students' learning.
- The majority of the school teachers (72.44%) faced problems during the conduction of online examinations. The problems they faced mostly were inappropriate materials by students, internet connectivity, internet speed, technical difficulties, security issues, lack of support system, lack of required question bank, communication issues during the assessment, etc.
- The majority of the school teachers advocated that online classes cannot be as effective as traditional classes because there is no scope for face-to-face interaction, verbal communication, peer interaction, practical work, and eye contact, which are essential for better learning.
- Multiple modes of involvement and representation are essential in the classroom for children with special needs, which was lacking in online classes. The majority of the teachers (55.13%) agreed that online classes are ineffective for the CWSN. A similar result has been found by Jindal and Urvashi (2020).
- There is a safety issue with the software/apps used for online classes, which is one of its hindrances. The majority of the teachers (62.18%) said there is a safety issue with the software/apps used for online classes. When it was analysed further, this issue was mostly with the female school teachers.
- The network and the technical issue were also major problems for the teachers. The majority of school teachers (86.54%) accepted that they face many technical issues while conducting online classes.
- During the lockdown, the salary was a big issue for the teachers. In response to this question for the majority of the teachers, the salary was an issue. 92 (58.97%) teachers informed regarding salary problems that they faced during the COVID-19 lockdown. For the rest of the 64 school teachers, the salary was not an issue.

- When investigated further, 57 school teachers said they received a full salary for those months when schools remained closed due to COVID-19. Simultaneously, 99 school teachers reported they did not receive a full salary for the months in which schools were closed. When it was analyzed further, all the teachers who reported the salary issues were from private schools, confirming that private schools did not pay full salary to the teachers during lockdown time.
- It also asked teachers regarding their mental readiness to take online classes. Out of 156 school teachers, 125 (80.13%) responded they were prepared for the online classes; at the same time, 31 school teachers were not prepared for the online classes.
- Some people call online classes monotonous. The majority of the school teachers (62.18%) reported online classes are monotonous for the teachers and students, and for 37 school teachers, it was not monotonous for both. Other teachers said it is monotonous either for students and or for teachers.
- Teaching-learning includes teachers as well as learners in the process. It was asked to the teachers what problems they faced from the students' side during online classes' conduction. The prevalent problem which the teachers faced to conduct the online classes was the unavailability of gadgets with students. 125 teachers reported that students had no required gadgets to attend online classes. The next issue was interrupted network from the students' side, and 87 school teachers reported it. The teachers' other issues were sending inappropriate material to the class group and inappropriate activities by students during class. However, at the same time, some school teachers said that there was no issue from the students' end. The teachers also said that taking instant and individualized feedback is not possible for them. The result is consistent with the findings of Alam (2020).
- Teachers were also asked regarding the problems faced by them. The teachers discussed multiple issues that they faced during online classes. 55 (35.26%) school teachers reported that long hours of sitting before desktop/laptop/smartphones were problematic. 84 (53.85%) school teachers reported that interrupted internet connection was the biggest trouble for them. During the lockdown, no movement was allowed, and because of this, teachers were also battling with their domestic responsibilities like household activities and tutoring their children. 44 (28.21%) school teachers said the excessive household workload was also one hurdle in online classes' conduction. Lack of technical knowledge, long hours of preparation for online classes, boredom, the anxiety of completion of the syllabus, and shortage of gadgets were other problems in the conduction of online classes.

Discussion

Due to the unexpected announcement of the lockdown and the nonexistence of online classes in most of the schools' education system and curriculum, the teachers and students were not fully prepared for the online classes. For the online classes, it is necessary for the teachers and students both to have gadgets and uninterrupted internet connections, which is one of the impossible things for the students studying in government schools and attending schools for a meal. Having gadgets like smartphones or laptops and expensive mobiles and additional subsequent costs to attend classes is not possible for people living below the poverty line. Most families in India have more than one child. Below-poverty-line and lower-middle-class families cannot provide gadgets to each child to attend classes in such a situation. The same applies to teachers also. In the case of the availability of single gadgets in the family, a teacher with issues/wards may have difficulty in organizing online classes.

This study's findings reveal that all the school teachers organised online classes for their students, and various mediums such as on the go recordings, audio/video conferencing apps, PPT/PDF files, YouTube videos, modules, images, etc., were shared with students. As the government directed it, the proper steps to conduct the online classes were taken by the school teachers to avoid any type of academic loss of the students, but multiple hurdles came in the way. The majority of the teachers informed their students had not owned gadgets which are indispensable to attend an online class. This problem was especially reported by teachers teaching in government schools. This

situation reveals that not all students got the benefits of online classes. This will double the problems of teachers at the time of reopening of the school because there will be at least two groups of students in the classroom; one who has attended online classes and whose syllabus has been completed to some extent and the other group which could not attend the online classes due to lack of facilities, and whose syllabus is not covered at all. Dealing with these two groups in the same classroom at the same time will be challenging for the teachers, and despite the conduction of the proper classes during the lockdown, the non-involvement of some students will put an extra burden on the teachers.

For any success, it is necessary to have a positive mindset. The results obtained from the study reveal that teachers prefer traditional/offline classes over online classes. The argument given by the school teachers in favour of offline classes in comparison to online classes were no room for verbal communication or lack of face-to-face interaction in online classes. However, the absence of a positive mindset among teachers was still a barrier to successful conduction of online classes.

In the absence of resources, the concept of online classes can never be successful. The success of these classes demands full access to the resources of all teachers and students. The obtained result shows that not all students and even teachers had full access to these resources. The majority of the teachers shared their gadgets with other family members, so it was not easy to easily organise online classes. Along with classes, the teachers also conducted examinations, and it was found that school teachers faced difficulties in conducting online examinations

as in the case with online classes. The primary reason was the absence of students from the assessment process, and the cause of their absence was the same as online classes—lack of resources. The school teachers' other problems while conducting the examination were communication problems, technical issues, safety issues, use of inappropriate materials, and lack of proper question banks. During the pandemic, organized online classes must be inclusive for everyone. The primary benefit of online class is allowing the learners to learn at their own pace. But massive exclusion has been formed by these online classes between privileged and unprivileged based on accessibility of facilities. The majority of the teachers reported that the online classes were not equally supportive for the CWSN, and the main reason is that they overlook these students' academic needs (Jindal and Urvashi, 2020).

The next problem which the teachers encountered was the salary during the lockdown. The majority of the school teachers reported that their salary was not regular at the time of lockdown. Also, they did not get their full salary for the lockdown period. When the data was further analyzed, it was found that mainly this problem was faced by private school teachers. Approximately 97 per cent of private school teachers reported irregular and comparatively less salary. Studies show that private school teachers get very less salary (Rao and Khadar, 2004; McGrath and Princiotta, 2015; Kingdon, 2017), and in the situation of this pandemic, when all the essential items became expensive, the less and irregular salary might have multiplied their problems and reduced the motivation to take the classes. Studies indicate that

online classes require a significant amount of self-motivation and discipline (Golladay, et al., 2000; Serwatka, 2003), but teachers faced problems like indiscipline among students, lack of motivation, monotonousness of online classes for teachers and students, excess of household tasks, technical problems, lack of technical knowledge, interrupted net connection, etc. which worked as a barrier in the success of online classes. Because of playing multiple roles, the condition of female teachers with issues was more challenging.

Based on the study's findings, it is the government's responsibility to take suggestions and feedback from school teachers for the smooth organisation and functioning of online classes without hassles.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in schools shutting down across the world. It is no different in India as COVID-19 brought India to a halt under a severe medical crisis. Educational institutions have moved their academic activities to online platforms and this sudden move has been a drastic change for the stakeholders. Before the COVID-19 crisis, online teaching was not a part of mainstream education. The sudden shift now poses a challenge as stakeholders learn to adapt to the new system. This study indicates that the school teachers have taken the required steps to teach in the digital classroom and yet face many challenges. The challenges faced by teachers have been associated with inadequate and insufficient infrastructural facilities, technical difficulties, lack of practical work, lack of interaction, socio-economic status of students, discipline-related issues,

etc. To ensure the effectiveness of online classes, upgraded infrastructure facilities, assistance from the government, and support from school authorities are needed. Training and orientation programmes for

all the stakeholders in regards to the tools, techniques, and strategies of teaching, learning, and assessment need to be organised on regular basis.

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