ONLINE TEACHING: WHAT DO TEACHERS THINK?

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The teaching-learning process has been through a paradigm shift from face-to-face to online teaching using varied digital platforms in the current pandemic milieu. This transformation process was sudden and unscheduled and so has drawn attention towards the adaptation of the teaching community at large. The researchers aimed to explore the experiences of 100 school teachers towards online teaching. A self-constructed questionnaire was used to ascertain the experiences and perceptions of teachers towards online teaching. Teachers' responses brought to light that they are confident about online teaching and have adapted well to the situation. They highlighted the flexibility and reach to many learners as advantages of online teaching and challenges like connectivity issues and infrastructure.

Keywords: Online teaching, teachers' perception.

Introduction

The term online teaching and learning also finds itself clubbed under the umbrella term digital literacy, one of the most important 21-century skills for teachers and learners. As per Wikipedia, digital literacy is defined as: "...the ability to find, evaluate, and communicate information by utilizing digital media platforms." Digital literacy is considered one of the most important skills for teachers and learners because of today's scenario prevailing in the world. Most education institutions are integrating digital literacy training for their teachers and learners because they acknowledge how the world is already developing and understand the significance of online literacy and the role that collaboration and online engagement play in learning process and their future work environment.

Online teaching is not a new concept; in fact, its origin dates back to 1960 at the University of Illinois when it created an intranet for its students. It was a system of linked computer terminals where students could access course materials and listen to the recorded lectures. From then to now, online teaching has evolved so much that in a situation of complete lockdown across the world, learners from kindergarten to the ones studying in the university are receiving online classes. Teachers are using various online channels (like Zoom, Microsoft teams, Skype, etc., different tools, and pedagogical strategies to connect with their learners and ensuring that the curriculum is delivered within the given time. Teachers play a key role in the

successful implementation of any learning approach. However, in such a pandemic situation, online teaching is now considered one of a teacher's biggest virtues. The need of the hour is that we start integrating technology into the teaching-learning process so that delivering education is not limited to face-to-face classrooms.

Online teaching, in general, offers flexible timings, location flexibility, access to plenty of resources, variation in interaction patterns and information sharing, diverse and enriching experience, equal opportunities of learning for all, digital information literacy, and aids in proper administration. There are some restrictions, limitations, or considerations also with the usage of online teaching. Some of these are access to technical know-how, accessibility concerning the internet, lack of trained teachers, isolation, and information overload.

Review of Related Literature

Extensive online teaching adoption in such pandemic times is a newer feature, and so not many studies were available in this regard, especially to do with teachers' experience or perception. The researchers have compiled the limited work in the area in the following paragraphs.

Vonderwell and Turner (2005) examined pre-service teachers' experiences in an online course. The findings showed that the online teaching/learning environment requires a change in student-teacher roles, relationships, and practices. The study showed how factors like preparing students for active engagement in learning, understanding student expectations, and motivation support active learning. Peer

support was also considered an important factor for improved communication leading to active learning.

Ellis, Steed and Applebee 2006 explored teacher conceptions of blended learning and blended teaching. Twenty-two teachers from two campus-based Australian universities were interviewed, and the responses from them were categorized into qualitatively varied categories of conceptions and approaches. The results showed that teachers perceived blended learning as the best choice to achieve learning outcomes. Students also benefitsed themselves through the blended learning approach that resulted in new ideas, thoughts, and better understanding.

Agustina and Cahyono (2017) and Dja'far, et al. (2016) have highlighted that teachers should analyse what is currently presented and what is the better way to present a subject to completely understand course by examining faculty perceptions, training, mentoring and best practices.

Teachers at several points have opined that through faculty development programme one can become an effective online instructor, and he/she can develop the best career journey as mentorship (Billings, 2008), and Conrad and Donaldson (2004) highlighted the importance of building a sense of community in online teaching from teachers' perspective. Much research supports the point of 'Training and Development' for effectively conducting an online class (DiPietro, et al., 2008).

Redmond (2011) shared the experiences of two instructors who moved from teaching in a face-to-face environment to blended learning and then to online teaching. This study also explored the instructors' issues, perspectives, and practices and the resulting effect on

their pedagogical practices' online student engagement. The study showed a change in the instructors' beliefs and practices in online teaching to a dialogical approach to online learning providing impetus to student learning.

Sahin, et al. (2016) studied teachers' first-year experience with Chromebook laptops and their attitude towards technology integration. The researchers adopted a mixed-method approach. Quantitative and qualitative analysis was done to give a voice to teachers' concerns. They found that teachers' comfort of teaching is not significantly correlated with their years of experience. There was a statistically significant relationship between the number of technological tools they had and their comfort in teaching with technology.

Beach (2017) investigated elementary teachers' self-directed learning in an online environment. The methodology included think-aloud protocols with screen recording technology to capture cognitive processes from 15 teachers as they used a professional development website. Three-stage coding was used to explain how teachers use and learn from a professional development website. Findings offered deeper insights into how and why teachers used professional development websites. According to Ballew (2017), 74 per cent of the online instructors of K-12 opined that the promotion development programme must be added to the school programme to enhance the instructor's teaching ability.

The discussed studies highlight different aspects of online teaching-learning, focusing more on the technology part, while others on the experience part. Since the area is comparatively newer, especially in India – there are not many studies. It will not be

wrong to say that the onset of pandemic and physical closure of schools ushered in adopting the online teaching-learning model in Indian school classrooms. So, the Indian teachers would present an altogether different perspective to this aspect, which was the focus of this research.

Objectives of the Study

This research study aimed to capture teachers' present experiences concerning online teaching as it has become the norm of the day amid the present pandemic crisis. The researchers intend to study the readiness, confidence, attitude/perception of teachers towards online teaching. They will also highlight the specific challenges faced by teachers and suggest pragmatic recommendations/implications leading to effective use of technology in the teaching-learning process. This paper aims to:

1. survey the preparedness of teachers for online teaching amid COVID-19 situation,

2. gauge the extent to which teachers feel confident in online teaching,

3. explore their perception of online teaching,

4. analyze their views about the future of online teaching, and

5. study the benefits and challenges teachers faced in online teaching.

Methodology

This was a descriptive study as the survey was undertaken to know teachers' experiences while conducting online teaching. Details

of the methodology are being shared in this section.

Sample

A total of 100 teachers teaching different subjects in private schools were identified through snowball sampling from Faridabad and Delhi. The snowball sampling technique was adopted because the schools were physically closed, and there was no other way to approach the teachers formally. The snowball technique helped the researchers to reach a wider audience in a short period.

The teachers were asked questions on the different factors like confidence, preparedness, attitude, and skills required for online teaching.

Instrumentation

As the study focused on collecting data from teachers conducting online teaching, the researchers decided to use a comprehensive questionnaire with close and open-ended questions. Questions were put in a google form, and the survey took not more than 10 minutes to be completed by the respective teachers. Questions pertained to collecting the teachers' demographic information, experience-related information, and few questions had a five-point scale to gauge the teachers' confidence and questions on their attitude or perception towards online teachers. Researchers incorporated questions specific to the benefits and challenges of online teachers and how teachers foresee the status of online teaching compared to face-to-face teaching.

The questionnaire was submitted to three independent experts in the area of teaching and technology. These experts performed semantic and content validation. The items were considered valid in relation to the objectives and purpose of the research study. We also shared our tool with an analytical consultant who determined the factorial reliability as a precursor to using the tool with the target audience.

Data Collection

The study could not have adopted a linear approach because of the pandemic situation created due to COVID-19. Researchers had initially thought of conducting a comparative study between face-to-face and online teaching. But unfortunately, due to the lockdown announced post 22 March 2020, it became difficult to observe the face-to-face teaching and see the effect of certain skills being transferred to the online teaching component as well. So, it was decided to send in the e-questionnaire post 22 April 2020 specifically for the primary reason on account of the new session. By that time, teachers might have got an idea about online teaching, skills needed, and how to conduct the same. The link to the google form was shared with a few acquainted teachers, who then forwarded it to their colleagues. The access to the google link was closed once 100 teachers had filled in the form.

Data Analysis

The questionnaires consisted of several types of questions—there were close-ended questions, rating scale, and open-ended questions. A frequency count was done to analyze the responses to the close-ended questions. In the rating scale, there were ten items—Range and Mean were calculated on each item. The mean gave a good idea about the confidence of the respondents on different

aspects of online teaching. For open-ended questions, similar qualitative responses were clubbed together, and frequency was counted against them.

Findings and Discussion

Data collected from 100 teachers was analyzed, and findings have been encapsulated in the following paragraphs for better comprehensibility of the readers.

1. Demographic details: The sample comprised 76 females and 24 males. The sample's age ranged from 22 years to 48 years, with an average of 31.49 years. Out of 100 teachers, 44 of them exclusively taught primary classes, while 48 were handling secondary classes, and the rest 8 of them were dealing with both primary and secondary. When it comes to online teaching usage, 77 teachers used it for school teaching, while the rest used for both school and private tuitions or coaching centre. Majority (32) of the teachers who formed a part of the sample of the research and responded to the questionnaire were into language teaching, 27 were mathematics teachers, 34 were teaching commerce and economics, 30 were science teachers, 32 taught social science, and 7 were teaching some form of creative arts. There were multiple responses on this item because there are teachers who are handling more than one subject. There were 57 teachers with more than five years experience and 43 with less than five years experience in teaching.

2. Interface with online teaching: There were only 31 teachers who had done some form of online teaching before the COVID-19 pandemic. That means this was a new form of teaching for 69 teachers. Teachers were using different kinds of platforms/learning management systems for online teaching—Zoom was the most predominantly used platform as 65 teachers were using it. The Google Classroom was used by 11 teachers, followed by others like Microsoft Teams and Canvas. However, several (23) reported that they are planning to shift from Zoom because of security concerns. Teachers reported that they were given time to prepare for shifting to online teaching ranging from 2 days to 10 days. Some of the teachers felt that they should have been given more time to prepare for that. The teachers' responses to how their institution influenced their transition from face-to-face subjects/classes to an online platform were collected. The responses received are provided in Fig. 1.

- It was mandatory
- It was not mandatory
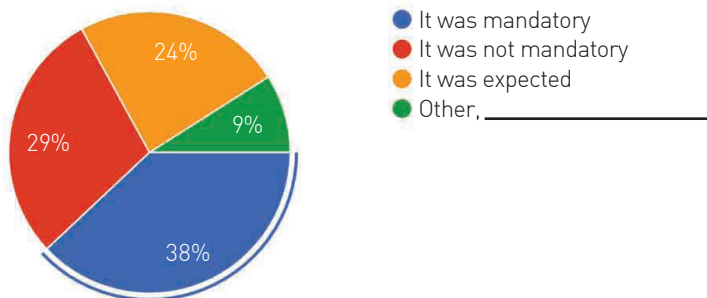- It was expected
- Other, _____

Fig. 1. Influence of institution in the transition from face-to-face mode to an online platform

The pie chart gives a clear idea that the schools had instructed the teachers to transit to online teaching. The school and teachers had well realized that education could not be hampered, and it needs to continue, so they have to resort to other ways than face-to-face teaching to continue the teaching-learning process. Many schools did not even wait for instructions from the government and started looking for alternatives. One of the teachers reported that their school started with online teaching from 20th March for their board classes. This was the usual time when their classes would have started if they would have been going to school. This, in a way, shows the concern on the part of the teaching fraternity for students' well-being and further the teaching-learning process.

A large majority (76) of teachers responded that they were given training to take up online classes, while 24 said that they learnt on their own. The school had supported them only through training, except for one. Only one teacher said their school gave hardware support from the school. This teacher said that their school provided them with infrastructural support like installing whiteboards in their homes and providing laptops to teachers who did not have them.

3. Confidence in online teaching: There were ten items to be marked on a Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The findings are provided in table 1.

The range in which their responses lie and the mean on aspects clearly shows that teachers are very confident about online teaching. The overall confidence (on all the ten aspects) is 4.17 (very confident), which is an optimistic sign of this mode of delivery in the education system. There was only one aspect on which the respondents felt not so confident, which was to do with online student assessment. This could probably be because teachers have not yet dwelled on formal assessment.

Table 1 – Teachers' confidence in online teaching

S.No.	Aspect	Range	Mean
1	Able to explain important course topics	2-5	4.89
2	Able to provide clear instructions to students on how to participate in online learning	2-5	4.38
3	Able to keep course participants engaged and participate in online learning	2-5	4.27
4	Able to focus discussion on relevant issues	2-5	4.37
5	Able to provide feedback to students	1-5	4.34
6	Able to implement the curriculum in an online environment	1-5	4.14
7	Able to implement different methods of teaching online	1-5	4.0
8	Able to encourage online interactivity among students	2-5	4.12
9	Able to use online student assessment to modify instruction	1-5	3.92
10	Able to meet overall demands of online teaching	1-5	4.03

4. Perception about online teaching: When asked about the ease of doing online teaching, 49 teachers found it easy, while 24 found it difficult, and 27 found it mixed depending on resources one has. Teachers, responses on the need for some special skills to teach students through online mode have been captured in Fig. 2.
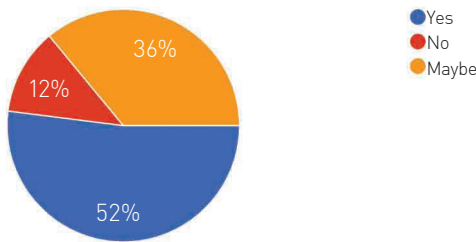

Fig. 2. Teachers' responses on the need for special skills in online teaching

Thus, more than half of them held that teachers dwelling into online teaching require some special skills, while another 36 of them were not noticeably clear on this aspect. Teachers had quite a different perspective on the interesting aspects of online teaching. Some of the aspects highlighted were – flexibility in timings, sharing of different kinds of resources, exposure of students to educative use of technology, focus on one topic, the possibility of involvement of parents, online record keeping, engaging fun resources, the novelty of method, professional updating of teachers, staying connected to our students, better classroom management. Some of them also pointed out certain non-academic reasons that make online teaching interesting for them; these were avoidance of traffic, more confidence in teaching, and opportunities for parents to see teachers' hard work, among others. One mathematics teacher did not find online teaching interesting because he could not directly and continuously see what his students were doing.

When asked about the transference of skills in face-to-face teaching to online teaching, 38 responded in affirmative, while 40 of them responded otherwise, and 22 said maybe. Teachers listed several benefits of online teaching: saving energy and time, comfort and focus, better time management, option for students to revisit the lectures and resources, and opportunities for parent involvement, among others. One of the teachers captured it very well by responding, "Anytime, anywhere and anyone means no demographic obstacles." Also, few other takes like online teaching are more eco-friendly as it saves fuel and paper also. Though teachers listed many benefits of online teaching, yet they differed on the ability and prospect of online teaching replacing face-to-face teaching; their responses have been captured in Fig. 3.
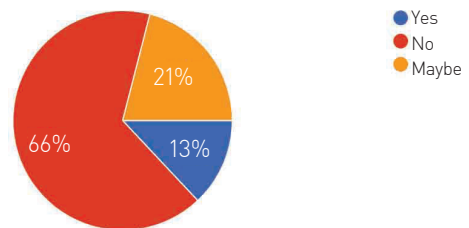

Fig. 3. Teachers' views on replacement of face-to-face teaching with online teaching

Thus, the majority believed in face-to-face teaching efficacy and held that it could not be replaced by online teaching. They ascertained points of differences in the two modes of online and face-to-face teaching

like interaction pattern between teachers and students, and among students; individual attention; personal relation with students—eye contact with students and personal touch; two-way communication and body language; assessment; dependence on technology; and preparation for teaching among others. One of the interesting replies by a teacher summates how they feel about online teaching, "I am a person who enjoys face-to-face teaching and conversations, so I think online portal does not give much space to that, though there is teaching through videos but still…" This would summarise how many teachers feel. Then there was another one who pointed out that the "affective domain does not work properly in online mode and also value education is not possible in online education."

The teachers also highlighted their challenges with online teaching, predominant among them are— connectivity and network issues, unavailability of teaching materials, environmental disturbances, non-availability of technology with students, no emotional connect with students, classroom management, interference of parents, balancing home and work simultaneously, cybersecurity and technical challenges, among others. Teachers pointed out that online teaching may not be the best medium for many learners, especially kinaesthetic learners. Some of them also pointed out that their working hours have increased, and it is taking a physical and mental toll on them as one of them said that "…. increased screen time leading to frequent headaches, sore eyes and stiff neck…." Some held that they faced challenges initially, but with time, they have got used to it.

Teachers were divided on the future of online teaching. Sixty-four teachers believe that online teaching is here to stay even after this pandemic period because it has shown a way that a much larger audience can be reached using technology. They hold that with proper training of teachers, this can be a good prospect and a game-changer in the field of education— "it can become a supplement to physical classrooms." On the other hand, 36 teachers pointed out this mode is not sustainable—higher costing involved, lack of infrastructure and can be used only for emergency purposes, while few pointed out that it is useful only for higher classes. One of them affirmed, "It is good that we have at least an option for teaching students during this lockdown period, but we cannot ignore the advantages of face-to-face teaching; online teaching can assist a teacher, but it can NEVER replace a teacher."

Discussion

Our study tried to explore varied aspects of online teaching—both physical and psychological. It was interesting to find how teachers very admirably adapted to this alternative form of teaching, i.e., e-learning, against face-to-face teaching. Most of the teachers agreed that though time was less for them to learn the nuances involved in online teaching, the present complex situation motivated them to come out of their comfort zone and work for their students' best interest through online support, engagement, and continuous assessment. Initially, it was challenging for teachers to face teething problems related to online teaching, like difficulty paying individual attention to all students, engaging students, and handling technical issues. With time and practice, teachers overcame their inner inertia and felt noticeable confidence in teaching

through online mode. Teachers believed that online teaching has both pros and cons, but considering the present pandemic situation, online teaching had a positive effect on student's learning. They could transfer certain face-to-face skills to online teaching but considered planning and assessment as the two major areas of further exploration. Teachers want to continue with online teaching post-pandemic but expressed their concern to sustain this aspect of teaching in the future and not as a replacement to face-to-face teaching.

Concerning the studies highlighted under review, if we look at the Indian context, teachers have been happy in routing through the alternative mode of teaching to achieve the desired learning outcomes. There is a need to prepare both pre-and in-service teachers to face a situation like the present, leading to a community of teachers to discuss and share their success stories and specific challenges. A blended learning approach can also be thought of as against only online teaching to cater to the diverse needs of the students and encourage an inclusive environment in the classroom.

Conclusion

"Technology alone is not going to improve student achievement. The best combination is great teachers working with technology to engage students in the pursuit of the learning they need," (Duncan 2010).

Technology or online teaching may be a solution in the present crisis but cannot be a permanent solution. For real and effective teaching, we need a blended approach, open-mindedness, quality training programmes, optimism, support from the

administration, support from parents, and last but not the least, teacher's well-being and critical reflection to prepare learners for the 21st century. Based on responses from the respondents and consequent data analysis,the researchers would like to put forward some practical suggestions:

- More skills-based training needs to be delivered to the teachers concerning online teaching like access to various online tools, how to handle technical issues, how to manage the audience through online mode, how to ensure cybersecurity, and most importantly, how to engage students effectively along with innovative ideas to do an online assessment.

- It is important to make the teachers aware of online resources' availability to make their teaching engaging, interesting and effective. In addition to this, the relevance of these materials should be one of the considering factors for the appropriate integration of technology into the teaching-learning process. They should be able to pay attention to the diverse needs of the students to encourage inclusive practice.

- Engaging students is one of the major challenges faced by teachers while teaching. Teachers should include tools and multiple types of learning approaches such as podcasts, videos (teaching channel, own videos, live classes), discussions, various forms of text through stories, activities, articles, and blogs and use different assessment methods (tests, quizzes, assignments, and projects), learning

activities and collaboration for better learning outcomes.

- Sometimes teachers are not given enough time for the preparation of content for their students. Moreover, some students avoid communication with teachers during online learning. Researchers suggest that teachers should conduct discussions for specific content among the students to effectively problem-solve and learn. Also, conducting a discussion on open-ended questions through pair/group work by the students can encourage collaboration, peer learning, and critical thinking among students.

- One of the challenges observed is the assessment which is the most important aspect of online learning for students and teachers. Therefore, whenever there are assignments or projects, teachers might face many questions from the students. As there is less communication between students and teachers, expectation from the students' performances also differs. Teachers should try to anticipate the type of questions students might ask and prepare FAQs. Teachers should give proper assignments and conduct formative assessments at regular intervals like performance-based tests, quiz and open-ended tasks like creating a poster, writing a story, making a comic strip, etc.

- Every student needs feedback for their performance for improvement.

Teachers find it difficult to give feedback to all students individually. Teachers need to understand how important it is to give feedback to the students for their growth and improvement. Teachers should make sure that they provide personalized guidance to all the students as per their learning abilities. This could be done by providing constructive feedback focusing on the strengths and areas of development.

- It is also observed that during such a pandemic situation, the teachers' mental health should be a top concern, and any additional work should not take a toll on the same. The future holds uncertainty, so motivation, encouragement, and support from the parents and the school organisations can work wonders for our teachers to do much better with utmost joy and happiness.

The researchers are not trying to generalize the results because the sample was small and because it was from Delhi-NCR; however, we largely feel that the teachers are going through the same changing times since the onset of online teaching in schools during the pandemic.

Acknowledgments

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