

INITIAL APPREHENSIONS ABOUT ONLINE CLASSES AT THE START OF THE LOCKDOWN IN 2020 AND PRESENT STATUS: A STUDENT - TEACHER PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

An important consequence of the pandemic resulted in universities to carry out their academic activities with students exclusively online. The sudden lockdown that was clamped nationwide in March 2020 came as a surprise. The lockdown in India have made online classrooms the primary source of educational instruction for students of all ages. There was apprehension regarding the online mode of teaching – learning. In this paper the initial apprehensions from both the teacher and students' perspective would be discussed.

Keywords: Online class, lockdown, Covid-19, pandemic, apprehension

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic brought extraordinary disruption to the education landscape with the campuses closing everywhere almost overnight. COVID-19 enforced the academic higher education universities across globe to cancel the traditional chalk and talk (in class face-to-face education) methodology and change to the online teaching/learning [1, 2]. The sudden lockdown that was clamped nationwide in March 2020 came as a sudden surprise. An important consequence of the pandemic resulted in universities to carry out their academic activities with their students exclusively online [3]. The Covid pandemic and the subsequent worldwide lockdown confronted teachers, students, and parents with an entirely new situation [4]. Teachers had to learn and implement new approaches to teaching and learning. They had to change to online teaching which required them to use various digital tools and resources to solve problems. The lockdown in India have made online classrooms the primary source of educational instruction for students of all ages.

Online Teaching

Very simply put online education is digitally supported learning that relies on the Internet to interact with teachers/students and to execute Teaching and Learning. Online learning is catalyzing a pedagogical shift in how we teach and learn. There is a shift away from top-down lecturing and passive students to a more interactive, collaborative approach in which students and instructor co-create the learning process. Online teaching was present

over many years but it was an alternative education along with traditional classroom teaching. Online distance learning meets the needs of an ever-growing population of students who cannot or prefer not to participate in traditional classroom settings. These learners include those unable to attend traditional classes, who cannot find a particular class at their chosen institution, who live in remote locations, who work full-time and can only study at or after work, and those who simply prefer to learn independently. E-learning offered many benefits for students because this type of learning was more flexible and involved student-centeredness [5].

Traditional teaching vs. Online Teaching

Use of ICT in educational institutions is not a new concept. Much before the pandemic it had been long thought that the school/college curriculum should increasingly be interwoven with ICT and students should be given opportunities to use advanced technological tools and digital resources for creative and innovative problem solving [6].

There is some basic difference between these modes of teaching viz. According to Nycz and Cohen [7], in the book ‘Principles of Effective Online Teaching’ published in 2007 it was mentioned that the differences between traditional and online learning may also be acknowledged in terms of principal sources of information, assessment, or quality of education.

While in traditional education, students are evaluated only by teachers, who also represent their main source of information, and the quality of education is dependent on teacher’s knowledge and skills, in online learning. The evaluation may be done with the help of tools and systems, students can procure information from various documents uploaded on the platform, and the quality of education is influenced by the level of training that teachers have in using technology, and also their teaching style.

It was in 2015 that Orlando and Attard [8] stated in the Mathematics Education Research Journal that “teaching with technology is not a one size fits all approach as it depends on the types of technology in use at the time and also the curriculum content being taught.” So it was important to examine deeper principles of teaching and learning and how teachers integrate technology in pedagogical contexts [9]. But it was seen that long before the pandemic that teachers were apprehensive about adapting to online teaching learning [10]. With the lockdown being imposed in March 2020 both teachers and students were faced with the reality that online classes was true and it was time to confront their apprehensions.

Factors determining online environment

In 2017 Cheung and Cable [11] discussed that the quality of the educational process in the online environment depends on multiple factors, among which are: the level of training that teachers have in using technology, their teaching style, interaction with students, strategies used to capture students’ attention, encouraging contact between students and faculty, collaborative learning, quick feedback, active learning, task time—encouraging students to allocate more time for completing tasks, high expectations—the teacher should communicate their expectations in order to encourage and motivate students, diversified learning, and technology application.

Initial apprehensions: Students' perspective

- a. When the lockdown first started for many students it seemed that they had finally got some amount of rest. No educational institution was open. There were no classes at the initial stages of the lockdown. However as the lockdown days turned into lockdown weeks and eventually months the situation became quite suffocating. There have been some studies on the impact of the pandemic especially on young adults in India as well abroad [12]. Soon there were research publications on the effect on the lockdown on the mental health especially of the students [13 -15].
- b. As the lockdown days stretched students missed the college campus more and more. The canteen, library and especially the classrooms, which many had thought they would never remember seemed very dear to them. They particularly missed the presence of their friends. Depression, anxiety, and sleep disturbance became common, especially when one was under quarantine or self-isolation. A study investigated students' social networks and mental health before and at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic and found out there was a negative impact of the pandemic on the mental health of the students [16]. It seemed that the effect was doubled, isolation plus the Covid situation. Physical distancing had a tremendous effect on the social bonding among people. The pandemic has shown the world how fundamental social contact is in our lives.
- c. Students of life science classes felt that they were missing the actual practical class experience. They also rued the fact that they were not been able to go for the long excursion. With this part of the curriculum being scraped many students felt cheated.
- d. It took a considerable amount of time getting used to the digital platforms for online classes. It took even more effort to understand the lesson being discussed during the online classes. Many practical classes got reduced to theory classes of the practical topics. Many students initially thought that studying a small portion of the syllabus was a good thing. However many students felt that the simultaneous learning and understanding of concepts of several topics was not happening, They 2020 graduation batch felt that no matter how hard they try and get good marks they will also seen as the 'lockdown graduates' and their exam scores may be questioned.
- e. Students were apprehensive how they would appear for the University Final examinations. Those students who were in their last year of graduation were concerned how they would get admission in post graduate courses. During the initial period of the lockdown it seemed that their examinations would be postponed for a long time and they were wondering if they would graduate at all.

Initial apprehensions: Teachers' perspective

When the lockdown was suddenly imposed in March 2020 the teachers were confronted with an unprecedented situation of adapting to total complete online teaching. Following teaching the challenges related to interaction, assessment and evaluation arose. Later additional apprehension of conduction online University level examinations surfaced. This apprehension has now been found to be common for many teachers. Pokhrel and Chhetri [17] in their paper in the journal Higher Education for the Future in 2021 have stated that 'the education system and the educators have adopted "Education in Emergency" through various online platforms and are compelled to adopt a system that they are not prepared for'.

- a. The first apprehension that was that teachers needed to get more technical know-how for taking the online classes. However this mode of teaching learning was not new, online learning could be viewed as a natural development of the concept of distance learning [18]. Researchers had conducted various surveys earlier to assess the acceptance of the online teaching and learning long before the pandemic and it was found that many teachers were reluctant to adapt to new methods of teaching [19, 20]. But in 2020 due to Covid 19 all teachers were forced to teach online.
- b. This online mode of teaching is not something new. Though it was around for several years there was a general apprehension regarding using technology to enhance traditional teaching. During pre pandemic research it was observed that faculty were reluctant to embrace different forms of online teaching. The research groups tried to find the reasons. They found it could be due to fear of change, concerns about the reliability of technology, skepticism about student outcomes in online learning environments, workload issues, and other factors [21, 22]. In March 2020 there was no choice. Teachers needed to teach online. Once the teachers accepted the fact that all teaching needs to be conducted online the search for upgrading their technological expertise came to the forefront. Many educational institutions came forward and offered free courses, workshops and faculty development training programs to interested faculty members to equip themselves to the task in hand.
- c. Assessment of the teaching learning process was yet another area of apprehension. Teachers had to devise ingenious ways by which they could find out whether the lesson was comprehended by all students. During class not all students could switch on their videos as they were concerned with the limited internet access they could access each day. Many educational institutions used Learning Management System which operates and encompasses many services that are meant to aid teachers in managing their lectures and courses [23].
- d. Teachers were concerned with the digital divide. They were not sure whether all their students would get access to a smart phone in order to access online education. In some families one smartphone had to be shared by many siblings for classes. In this emergency crisis, paradigm shift of Indian traditional chalk and talk method to online teaching still remains a big challenge.
- e. The other area where there was confusion and apprehension during the initial period of the lockdown was how the university examinations could be conducted. Teachers worried about how the question papers would reach all students at the same time and also how students would submit their answer copies.

Present Scenario

Nowadays, the challenges to access online learning are less because both learners and teachers have been experienced the excellent opportunity of knowing and interacting with educational technology tools such as mobile-based learning, computer-based learning, and web-based learning [24, 25]. It has been more than one year since educational institutions have been shut due to the Covid-19 pandemic. No one knows when it ends. Both teachers and students understand that this mode of online teaching will continue. Even after the pandemic is over this online teaching learning process might stay. A number of positive aspects of online classes have surfaced with of course some negative points.

Discussion

Time provides creates opportunities to solve problems. What seemed impossible in April 2020 now seems easily possible after one year and two months. Both students and teacher have adapted to this online mode of teaching-learner process. Google Meet, Gmail, Google classroom, Zoom are now used frequently by both teachers and students. There are several digital platforms which have been made free during the pandemic. A student can acquire knowledge of using different online tools and methods, pay much attention to recorded/live conversations of world class professionals, listen and watch classes many times and working at their own promptness.

Alanezi & AlAzwani [26] in their paper in the Journal of Education and Practice in 2020 had discussed about online learning post pandemic. They collected data via online questionnaire to assess the participant's perceptions and the analysis has revealed a positive attitude towards the utilization of online learning in higher education. Their study recommends accelerating the development of courses taught and incorporating mobile learning delivery. Adopting a blended learning strategy based on m-learning can motivate the students' learning and reduce the fears of adopting mobile technology within the curriculum.

The role of information technology (IT) and COVID-19 pandemic in hastening current and future e-learning entrepreneurship activation are considered a panacea at the time of crisis and difficulties [27]. Fred Davis developed the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which proved to be helpful in analyzing and comprehending the way students intend to use E-learning [28]. Users of this model believed that the extent to which people accept the integration of technology can be an essential factor for the success of information systems [29]. Previous research have revealed that the inability to have a face-to-face connect with students, facilitate free conversations, discussions, and mentoring have been seen as some limitation of online classes [30].

Conclusion

The pandemic will have a profound effect on our education system. Despite the initial apprehension both teacher and student have figured out a way to make the most out of the online teaching learning and evaluation process. For teachers, online classes allow new method of teaching with access of advanced tools and technology involved in it and can reach many students. Many positive points balance the negatives of online teaching. What matters is the attitude of both teacher and student. If there is a strong will on the part of the teachers they can motivate the students to have an interactive learning sessions. The content matter of the lesson needs to reach the student irrespective of whether it is online or offline teaching-learning process.

Limitations

The opinion of teacher and student on which this paper is based comes from a survey but it is limited in numbers. If the sample size is increased there could have been additional points.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this work.

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