

Covid, A Great Teacher: New Challenges For Teachers

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Abstract

Till the Corona Virus pandemic befell on this world, majority of the members from our teaching fraternity were not so well versed with the terms e-learning, e-teaching and blended teaching and blended learning. Until a few months ago, we were much worried about the adverse effects of over use of smart phones among youngsters. But the entire situation turned almost topsy-turvy overnight after the locked downs occupied the whole world. The surge of the use of advanced communication technologies in the learning process over the last decade in higher education is now evident during this pandemic situation since last few months for its effectiveness as an important, inevitable teaching tool. In this post-Covid-19 world, teaching-learning has undergone a rapid transformation. This pandemic has insisted teachers to adopt a virtual world of teaching. Among teachers, some who are pre-e-literate and others who use the internet for their regular classroom activities. Teachers must introspect their underlying assumptions about teaching, about the learning process, and, most fundamentally, about their role as educators. History reveals that pandemics have always brought about a huge transformation in social, economic and political activities. COVID-19 may also leave us with a virtual world of teaching and put a big question in our mind “Could e-learning be the well accepted and transformed version of our chalk and talk, traditional method in this post COVID-19 era?”

KEYWORDS: Blended, E-learning, E-teaching, post-Covid-19 teaching, virtual teaching.

INTRODUCTION

The good old traditional teaching system in academic institution for a long time has been a classroom with a teacher giving lecture and the students listening and taking notes. Communication between teacher and students has been identified to be an essential learning component in this delivery platform. But with the advancement of technology a complete revolution has taken place recently. Technology suggests many new novel tools that can be applied to make teaching- learning phenomenon more interesting to learners. Many proponents of e-learning are of opinion that everyone should be equipped with the basic knowledge of technology as well as its utilization as a means for getting educational aims (Harandi, 2015).

Though we are quite familiar with e-mail, e-commerce, e-business and e-trading, even well acquainted with e-banking, before the Corona Virus pandemic majority of the members from teaching fraternity were not so well versed with the term blended learning, e-learning and e-teaching. This E-learning is commonly referred to the deliberate inclusion of networked information, communications and technology in teaching and learning process. A number of other terms are also used to describe this mode of teaching and learning viz. online learning, virtual learning, distributed

learning, blended learning, network and web based learning (Pushpanathan, 2012). As this letter “e” in e-learning stands for the word “electronic”, e-learning would incorporate all educational activities that are practiced by individuals or groups working online or offline, and synchronously or asynchronously via networked or standalone computers and other electronic devices. Each student gets in contact with a world-class education, which is not easy to impart by the long-established chalk and board method of teaching.

In our Indian teaching system the teacher-student relationship is supreme in which teachers are not just knowledge-providers but also mentors to their students in every aspect of their lives. But at present in a COVID hit world, the education scenario, not just here in India but across the globe turned upside down making all the education stake holders completely dependent on modern technology. Schools colleges and universities are now striving to adopt the online mode of imparting education and developing measures to integrate e-learning in their methodologies of teachings. This new learning is more interesting, personalized and enjoyable (Kasrekar&Tapaswi, 2020). India is recognised as one of the nations that is developing at an exponential pace in terms of technology. With more than 1.3 billion population, with the availability of high-speed internet and smart-phones, India has the most number of technologically driven people. The instant rise of the internet has drastically changed the way of life in India (Eduxpert, April 2020). The world today is facing the biggest public health risk and the Corona virus pandemic had spread to over 185 countries and resulted in the closure of over 90 percent of all schools, colleges and universities impacting nearly 1.38 billion students. The speed of the spread of the epidemic, the closure of all educational institutions and the transition of traditional mode of teaching to online teaching mode to online teaching was so hasty that it hardly gave any time to plan and to reflect on the potential risks or opportunities that such a sudden change could bring. The sudden shift to online learning without any planning, especially in countries like India where the backbone for online learning was not ready and the curriculum has no compatibility with the online teaching format, has created the risk of most of our students becoming passive learners and they seem to be losing interest due to low levels of attention span. (India Today, 2020, May12)

PARADIGM SHIFT

E-learning challenges the traditional ways of training and learning, and provides new avenues of the existing education system. The role of teachers is probably changing from importers of knowledge to expeditors of knowledge (Haverila&Barkhi, 2009 ;Tamrakar& Mehta, 2011). Academic institutions like school, colleges and universities will shift to a model of blended learning where both face to face delivery along with an online model will become a norm. This requires all the teachers to become more technology savvy and go through some skill based training to bring themselves to the level that would be required. The teaching community to a large extent has been very insulated in India. There is a new opportunity where collaborative teaching and learning can take place in new forms. India is not just going through a reform in the higher education sector, but now it will go through a major transformation in all aspects. The lockdown has accelerated the adoption of digital technology in all streams of life. This is an ideal time to go for various experiments and deploy new tools to make education delivery meaningful to students who cannot go to the educational institutions. It is a chance to be more efficient and productive while developing new and improved professional skills and knowledge through online learning and assessment. The growth of e-learning is directly related to

the increasing access to information and communications technology, as well its decreasing cost. It is also a fact that use of technology in education is resulting in different concepts in the system, like the move from teacher-centric education to student-centric education.

Looking at this challenge of higher educational institutes and schools being shut, Government of India, as well as different state governments and private players have regularly been publishing information on every initiatives undertaken by ministries like MHRD, Department of Technical Education, NCERT, UGC and others to support and benefit students. Our national institutions like UGC and MHRD are at the forefront of provisioning and providing various platforms like technology-enabled learning through audio-video mode or through e-books and journals. Some of the initiatives are SWAYAM online courses for teachers, UG/PG MOOCs for non-technology courses, e-PG Pathshala or e-content containing modules on social science, arts, fine arts, natural and physical science, UGC YouTube channel, Vidwan – a database of experts who provide information to peers and prospective collaborators, NEAT – an initiative by AICTE based on the PPP model to create the employable students with enhanced skills, in collaboration with Education Technology Companies and National Digital Library (NDL), a repository of learning resources with single window facility. Ample free and open source software for education has been already in the web, like e-Yantra, Google Classroom, Google Meet, Skype, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc that are making easier for teachers to conduct virtual classes. All these initiatives enhance our ability to connect easily with institutions and enhance our access to learning resources (Sharma, 2020, April 15).

E-LEARNING AND ITS IMPACT ON TEACHERS

Education through virtual teacher is a type of teaching and learning in which the teachers and learners are geographically separated from each other (Hadadnia et al., 2012). Therefore, to provide educational services, one needs electronic means such as android phones, computer and internet to provide them. This new internet-connected world has expanded the opportunities for teaching and learning in ways that we are only beginning to understand. According to Baras (2000), increasing development of science and technology of today demand new methods of teaching and learning. The use of the conventional theory of "the teacher, the only knowledgeable on the scenario" is already an old and rejected belief. Learners must play a more active role in teaching and learning, and the teacher must turn into the guide and facilitator by the side. Implementation of e-teaching is therefore challenging for many teachers who are asking to teach using modern technology in such a way in which they have never been taught during their academic career. They are compelled to work in an environment in which they have never been learners and may have had few first-hand experiences. Rutherford and Grana (1995) have identified a few areas of fear of teaching staffs from making changes that would enable them to integrate technology into their teaching, like fear of change, fear of time commitment, fear of appearing incompetent, fear of techno failure, fear of not knowing where to start, fear of rejection or reprisals, etc. Teachers need to be able to adopt a range of roles and skills to suit specific situations, often during the same teaching session.

Effective tutors are essential to ensuring that small groups work effectively and efficiently. Any teaching event will be more successful if the teacher is enthusiastic and has organized the session well. They have to be prepared to context and classroom (virtual) events and teach with their preferred teaching style. They also

have a wide range of skills in their teaching repertoire, including questioning, listening, reinforcing, reacting, summarizing and leadership. A gentle shift from teacher as expert to facilitator is sometimes seen as diminishing a teacher's power and authority, but this should not be the case. Facilitating effective learning is empowering for both the learner and the teacher.

ADVANTAGES- DISADVANTAGES OF ONLINE CLASSROOMS

Advantage:

E-learning makes education more available. It makes the whole process more entertaining. Many teachers think that the more diverse the educational process is, the more interesting students find it. Virtual learning allows students to study from any place where they have a stable internet access. It also allows them to study at any comfortable and convenient time they find. This makes the learning process easier for people living in different time zones and allows them to combine online education with work or getting a college degree.

One significant advantage is that the virtual classroom can help the teacher to be more organized. All the areas for course documents, assignments, class notes and other information can be readily categorized. The plethora of information on the Internet can provide faculty with a method for quickly updating and revising course content.

Next advantage is in the social and intellectual partnership created by technology of the virtual classroom. Student using the equipment engaged additional social skills when they spontaneously took leadership roles in relation to their peer group (Husu, 2000). This technology used increases group cohesion and mutual support especially in the remote classroom.

Cost is also considered to be an advantage. Online teaching is cost saving, both for the educational institutions and students. Students save money by not having to travel to class thus saving time, health and travel expenses. In India where a huge number of colleges have infrastructural problems to accommodate large number of students enrolled, they don't have to provide students with space for learning. Next add on advantage of the virtual classroom is time. The students who are motivated and/or quick learners may be allowed to move ahead at a faster rate than in a normal in-class setting. Communication is considered as a benefit because most contact with instructors will be done via email, messages can be sent at any time day or night.

Disadvantage:

The biggest problem is the network connectivity. E-learning depends a lot on technology. Large number of students who comes from rural area of our country does not have stable internet access, computers or android phones which are the most necessary equipments for online learning. These amenities create differences between students of rural and urban societies.

Training is obligatory especially to teachers who are not comfortable with computers or the Internet. In order for the college to be represented professionally, teachers must undergo training. The more familiar the teacher is with the online service, the more effective and efficient their curriculum will be. The use of the internet causes many teachers to step out of their comfort zones because internet/online teaching goes against the traditional or conventional method of teaching. They are required to adjust their curriculum to meet the standard requirement for providing the right resources for the students. It can require more time than teachers want to exert or afford to give up.

Adapting a conventional non-online course to a modern online courses can be tough or challenging. Although many classes have performed well with the online course, courses are also there that have not. An example is the laboratory portion of a science class. Practical classes require a great amount of hands-on work. Online courses cannot offer the hands-on experience that an in real laboratory class could offer. Moreover, Internet cannot duplicate the hands on approach students experience with an in class lab (Posey, 2010).

CONCLUSION

The internet is a very unique, powerful and modern tool that has a huge effect on all the teaching and learning activities that are done in the classroom. It plays a major role in reforming our Indian education system. Teachers must adapt themselves to a changing technological society to prepare productive citizens. The flexibility, availability and adaptability of the web environment must serve the needs of both e-teachers and e-learners. Adapting to this gentle shift requires educational organizations to adopt new approaches for defining faculty work and securing funds for new technology. In spite of the drastic changes and lingering uncertainties, distance education is a key to dissolving learning boundaries. Making the shift from teacher as an expert to facilitator is sometimes seen as diminishing a teacher's knowledge, power and authority, but this should not be the case and this facilitating learning is empowering both the learner and the teacher. Finally to conclude, considering all the pros and cons of e-learning, we are still in doubt about the affordability, adaptability, accessibility and feasibility of the paradigm shift from traditional teaching to e-teaching in the Covid-19 and post Covid-19 scenario in a developing country like India.

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