

TEACHER EDUCATION IN THE TIME OF COVID AND BEYOND

Ms. Preetha George

Research Scholar, Farook Training College and Research centre in Education, Kozhikode, Kerala

Paper Received On: 25 SEPT 2021

Peer Reviewed On: 30 SEPT 2021

Published On: 1 OCT 2021

Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has shattered the lifestyle, daily routine, and especially the education system of the globe. The academic fraternity has been badly affected by this pandemic. Teacher educators across the different universities in India have been abruptly pushed into the chartered online classes since India went into lockdown on March 25, 2020. The traditional teacher training practices created chaos in the online teacher preparation and practice procedures. The first part of this paper focuses on the challenges of teacher educators and prospective teachers during online teacher education programme and the second part envisages the need for an updated curriculum and a few feasible solutions to the problems highlighted.

Key words: *Online teaching, Pre-service teacher education, Challenges*



Scholarly Research Journal's is licensed Based on a work at www.srjis.com

“It’s time to step up to the plate and get passionate about your work commit to making eLearning courses that don't bore people to tears, but instead inspire and motivate them to learn a new skill, change a certain behavior, or improve their performance.”

- Cammy Bean

From March 25, 2020, the Indian government temporarily closed educational institutions, when nationwide lockdown measures began to control the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. But the education scenario is not equipped for the paradigm shift to online mode mandated by the situation. The current situation is, of course, an unprecedented one. The issue is not of a few weeks of online teaching and online exams. It is still difficult to predict when the schools, colleges and universities will run normal. The online platform may be the only way to reach students during lockdown, but the digital medium comes with its own challenges.

“Even as governments increasingly rely on technology, the digital divide lays bare the limitations of this approach. Not all students and teachers have access to adequate internet connection, equipment, skills and working conditions to take advantage of available platforms” (UNESCO). Online education is not as easy as speaking into the microphone at one end, and connecting a laptop and listening in on the other; there are challenges faced at both ends of the spectrum.

Harsha (2020) indicates that online education is not a substitute but an appendage to classroom teaching and other methodologies. It is a temporary aid during the difficult situation that we are facing. Many of the teachers are digitally inept and more than that a large number of teachers have never used an online environment to teach. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2020) clearly stated that few months of the pandemic have taught us work organisation, collaboration among colleagues and with stakeholders, as well as the presence of an environment where entrepreneurship and progress are recognised and promoted, are necessary conditions for the adoption of innovative teaching practices. Teaching a course online requires preparation such as designing a lesson plan and preparing teaching materials with e-content. This has posed new challenges for many teachers. Teachers are advised to continue communication with students through virtual sessions or portals like Massive Open Online Courses. However, in the absence of physical classrooms and proper digital infrastructure, both teachers and students are facing unprecedented challenges. The disruption of academic fraternity is clearly reflected in the current education scenario. There are some deeper issues that require introspection.

Backdrop of online Education in India

There are many platforms created to enable online education in India. These are supported by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), and the department of technical education. There are initiatives like ePathshala (e-content), SWAYAM (online courses for teachers), and NEAT (enhancing employability). Other online platforms aim to increase connectivity with institutions, and accessibility to content. These are utilised for course materials and classes, and running of online modules. They include the National Project on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL), National Knowledge Network, (NKN), and National Academic Depository (NAD), among others.

Online education is conducted in two ways. The first one is through the use of recorded classes and the other is live online classes conducted via platforms like Google meet, Zoom etc. Universities or colleges require high-speed internet and education delivery platforms or learning management systems, besides updated IT infrastructure and faculty members who are comfortable and skilled in teaching online. Students also have access to the gadgets with good network connections.

Teacher Education in Kerala

Higher Education Department in Kerala ordered the institutions to start classes online from June 1, 2020 from 8.30 am to 1.30 pm in place of the usual time 9.30 am to 3.30 pm. The classes will be conducted by teachers from home or from institutions using online platforms such as Zoom, Google Classroom or Google Meet. The afternoon time can be utilized by students for enrolling in various open online courses and by teachers to carry out research activities or to pursue online courses.

Most of the teacher education institutions in Kerala have opted for online classes without much hesitation when they heard about the lockdown. One of the main reasons for this is the integrated technology in teacher education curriculum. But the design of teacher education curricula and course content presents challenges for most of the teacher educators. The perennial issues complementing knowledge transmission pedagogies associated with online teacher education programmes mirror the theory practice gap in teacher training programmes.

The academic year 2020-2021 witnessed the adaptation of online teaching- learning strategies in pre-service teacher education. Different universities in Kerala hosted series of webinars and workshops on addressing the ways of implementation of B.Ed Curriculum in the Covid-19 pandemic scenario. Even though we move into the next academic year, the challenges remain unchanged.

Research questions

- What are the major challenges of teacher educators during the lockdown period online classes?
- What are the student related challenges of online classes in teacher training programmes in Kerala?

- What are the perspectives of Teacher Educators on a redefined teacher education curriculum?

Method

The case study aims to understand the perspectives and challenges of teacher educators in Kerala during the pandemic time online classes and includes 30 teacher educators of different universities in Kerala.

Data Collection Design

The study involved the development and online distribution of a 32 item survey designed to help the researcher gain better understanding of the perspectives and challenges of teacher educators. The first 14 items of the survey enquired about the challenges of teacher educators, next 13 items meant to assess student related challenges and the last part consists of 5 items related to teacher educators' perspectives on a redefined teacher education curriculum.

Teacher related Challenges

The teacher educators suffered the most in the online classes because of the adaptation of present teacher training curriculum and traditional teacher preparation and practice procedures. The major challenges are listed below:

1. Difficulty in Conducting Practical Sessions

B.Ed is a course with more focus on the practical sessions and most of them are expired in the online pedagogy of teacher education. Universities in Kerala offers a practical session in microteaching during its first semester, discussion, demonstration and criticism classes in second semester and a long teaching practice session in the entire third semester. The teacher educators found it difficult to conduct and observe all these sessions online.

2. Failure in applying the psychological principles online

Educators can utilize psychological principles in real-time classes where face to face interaction is possible not in online.

3. Online classes only supplement real classes

Online classes cannot be a substitute for the real classes. There are so many practical difficulties should deal with.

4. Assessment Practices

Online assessment is a widely debated and controversial subject before the pandemic itself. Some educators do not trust students and assume they will cheat in the online assessment practices. Some subjects require more strict measures.

5. Connectivity Problems

Most of the teachers in the rural areas complained about the internet connectivity issues especially in the raining season.

6. Lack of confidence

Teacher educators found it difficult to prepare and deliver quality lectures to the students when the teaching is in online mode. They have rich knowledge in online resources but not been trained for the effective use of web resources for teaching. Some of the teachers specialized in conventional teaching found it more difficult to cope with online methods.

7. Home environment

Women teacher educators found it difficult to conduct online classes from their home when they have their kids with them and all the household things to manage.

8. Time consuming

Online teaching learning strategies takes much time when the teachers are novice using it.

9. Lack of experience in effective online pedagogy

Universities conduct workshops on the preparation of e-learning strategies prior but the B.Ed curriculum is not flexible to provide a chance for teachers to practice the learned skills and get immediate feedback.

Student related challenges

1. Connectivity issues

Most of the students get connected when the session begins, but they may be forced to leave due to poor connectivity or communication gaps.

2. Difficulties in ensuring the gadgets on time

It is really difficult for the students to ensure gadgets on time when their siblings or parents need the same.

3. Lack of online study skills

Online study skills affect the quality of teaching-learning process.

4. Poor Socio-economic conditions

Covid-19 pandemic has adversely affected the socio-economic status of many students. This may lead to loss of interest in the teaching-learning process.

5. Technology aversion

Some students have technology aversion.

6. Less interaction

Majority of the teacher educators have the opinion that student teachers are interested in online teaching-learning process but most of them don't know the proper interaction strategies and the teachers feel negligence from the part of the learner.

Perspectives on a redefined teacher education curriculum

1. Teacher education programmes should equip the future teachers to teach online and real classroom equally.
2. Assessment practices should be flexible to meet the demands of online teaching.
3. The existing pedagogy is a bit difficult to teach online.
4. The current teacher education curriculum is not suitable to teach online.
5. Techno-pedagogy is more suitable for future classrooms

National Education Policy 2020 envisages that pre-service teacher preparation programmes emphasise the development of sound knowledge in pedagogical aspects of education by incorporating recent trends. A common guiding set of National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) will be developed by 2022 by the NCTE, in consultation with NCERT and SCERT, which will inform the design of pre-service teacher education programme to be adopted by states. All these reforms are made with a vision to raise standards, and restore integrity, credibility, efficacy and quality of teacher education system and there lies the need for updating the B Ed Curriculum and existing teacher preparatory and practice procedures.

References

Beam, C. (n.d.). *What are the most effective uses/tips to become an eLearning Pro?* [Web log post]. <https://elearningindustry.com/free-ebook/become-elearning-professional/cammy-bean>

UNESCO. (2020, March 13). *COVID-19 educational disruption and response*. <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-emergencies/coronavirus-school-closures>

Harsha,Raju (2020). *Covid -19 Lockdown-Challenges To Higher Education*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340502199_covid_-19_lockdown-challenges_to_higher_education

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2020). *Teachers' Training and Use of Information and Communications Technology in the Face of the COVID-19 Crisis*. OECD Publishing.

Carmen Carrillo & Maria Assuncao Flores (2020).*Covid-19 and teacher education: a literature review of online teaching and learning practices*, *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 43:4, 466-487, DOI: 10.1080/02619768.2020.1821184

National education policy 2020.
(n.d.).https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/nep/NEP_Final_English.pdf.