Online Teaching in Pandemic Situation: A Study on the Perception of Educators of Kamrup District of Assam

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Abstract

 Submerged in the volatile attack of Covid-19 pandemic, the entire world has witnessed a drastic change in matters related to life and living. From socio-political to economic, all sectors have been tremendously affected, including the education sector. The educational institutions have been bound to be under closure owing to the present pandemic situation. As an alternative to conventional teaching, digital platforms came to be beneficial for imparting education, being the only way to combat the interference of the disruption caused by the pandemic. As such, academicians of most of the educational institutions have started online teaching to connect with the students virtually. The present study aims to analyse the experiences of educators of Kamrup district of Assam who are involved in online teaching. While carrying out our study, we have found that different levels of educators of different age groups have adopted various modes of online platforms to connect with students in this pandemic situation. They have faced problems too while engaging in digital platforms because most of the educators were well versed with face to face mode rather than online teaching pre-pandemic. It has been found that technology skills need to be honed to cope up with the latest tools which are used in online teaching. Some of the educators, however, affirmed their use of online platforms before this pandemic situation, yet most of them preferred face-to-face teaching to online teaching.

Keywords- Online teaching, Covid-19, Education, Educators, Kamrup

Introduction

Approximately two years after the outbreak of the pandemic (Covid-19), the future of the educational scenario still looms in darkness. While there are various angles to the impact of the pandemic on education, one of the major aspects is the relationship between the students and the educators that has suffered a lot owing to various barriers like technology, poverty, etc. Therefore, this study holds significance for it attempts to participate in the dialogue of education during pandemic from the perspective of the educators.

With an aim to study the experiences of educators in online teaching, this study has been initiated. As a result of COVID-19, a drastic change has affected the lives of both teachers and pupils in terms of course delivery, syllabus completion, classes and most importantly guiding the students. All over the world the health crisis brought about by this pandemic restricted movement and close down of schools, colleges and universities, which resulted in loss for students to a great extent. As far as the sustainable goal of "Quality Education" goes, it has been difficult to impart even normal education in

this kind of crisis situation. Hence, to cope up and combat such a situation, online teaching-learning has become an alternative quickly adopted by all. In the context of Kamrup district, Assam also, online teaching has become the only way to reach out to the students, particularly school goers, and to some extent the students of higher institutions and help in guiding them in their study. However, it is seen that there is a certain set of challenges in this respect. Since the traditional mode of imparting education is face-to-face, the upsurge and demand of fully online mode posed a number of issues which are faced by both the educators as well as the students. In this paper, we have set out to address the issues faced by the educators while taking recourse to the online mode of delivery. The area to which the study has been confined is Kamrup district of Assam. The aim for taking Kamrup district for this research paper is manifold. Firstly, the headquarter of the state of Assam is located at Kamrup. Seeking quality education in the various higher education institutions, many students from different parts of the state as well as neighbouring states pour in to this district. Secondly, because of the large number of educational institutions, the number of learners as well as educators is very high compared to the rest of Assam. Thirdly, the rate of mortality and infection owing to Covid-19 is very high in Kamrup.

The Assam government has issued directives to continue teaching through online mode since the pandemic situation. As a result, the teachers are compelled to take online classes. While some teachers are tech-savvy, certain others are learning to cope up with the sudden emphasis on technology-enabled learning. In order to understand the experiences of the teachers, this study was carried out with an objective to highlight how online teaching is perceived, more particularly in this time of pandemic.

Objectives

The objectives of the paper are–
- To find out the educators' compliance with online teaching during pandemic
- To bring out the difficulties faced by the teachers especially of Kamrup district
- To study their perception towards online teaching in general.

Methodology

For this study, primary data have been used. Primary data was collected by an online questionnaire. The sample size of the study is eighty-six in total, out of which forty-six respondents are female while forty respondents are male hailing from both private and government educational institutions with the jurisdiction of Kamrup district.

Findings and Discussion

As noted earlier, we have received responses from both male and female educators which we have showed in tables and figures separately. This has been done with regard to record and analyse the experiences of both the male and female teachers. The findings of our survey is presented below:

While going through our survey we have found that majority of female teachers conducting online classes are in government sector. The data shows that among forty-six (46) female teachers, twenty-seven (27) work under government and nineteen (19) in private institutions.
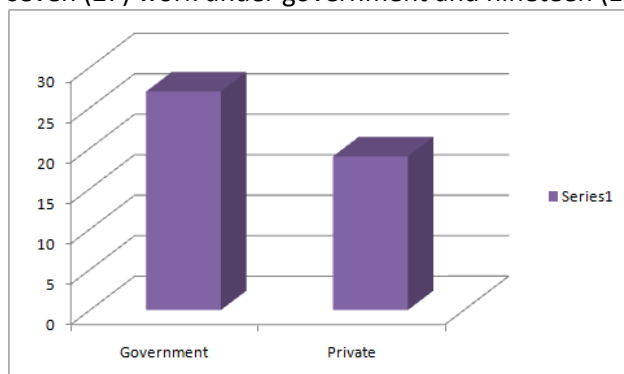

Fig. 1: Sector to which the female respondents belong

However, majority of the male teachers who have responded works in private institutions while only seventeen respondents works in government sector.

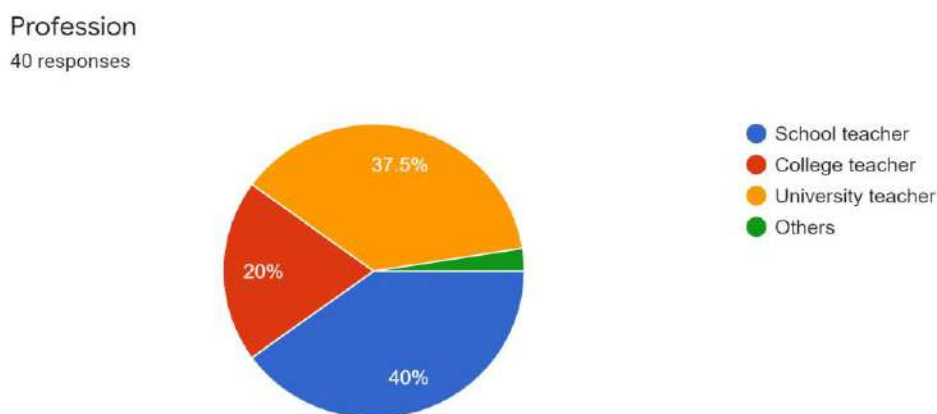| Male	
Private	23
Government	17

Table 1: Sector to which the male respondents belong

Most of the female responses we got in our survey were from the University teachers who comprised twenty-five (25) of our total respondents. The responses that we got from school and college teachers were almost same in number, that is, from twelve (12) school teachers and ten (10) college teachers.
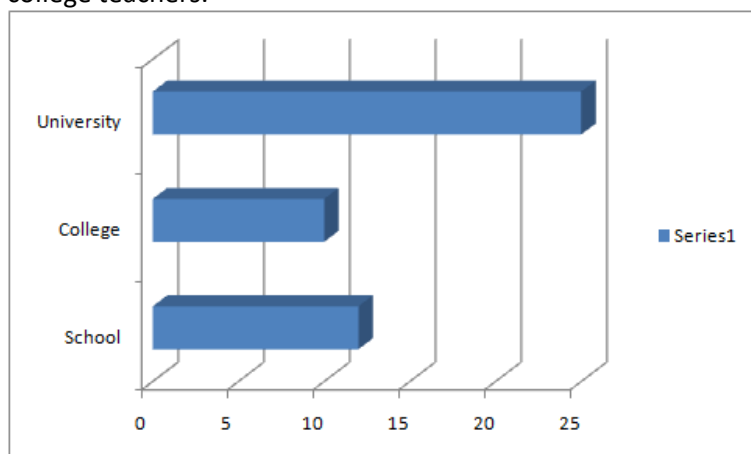

Fig. 2.1: Level of teaching (Female)

But in case of male respondents, sixteen respondents work in school, eight in colleges, fifteen in Universities and one in a coaching institution, which is diagrammatically represented in the following figure:


Fig. 2.2: Level of teaching (Male)

In order to analyse the use of online teaching strategies among teachers of different generations, the age factor was necessary to be addressed. During the course of our survey we have found responses from different age groups of female teachers. Among the total female teachers surveyed, it was found that most of them were from a younger age-group. Twenty teachers belonged to the age-group between twenty-five to thirty-five of age. Fifteen teachers were of age-group thirty-five to forty-five, nine teachers were of age-group forty-five to fifty-five. Only two teachers were from age-group between fifty-five to sixty-five. Similarly, in case of male respondents the majority, that is, 15 teachers are in the age group of 25-35; 13 in the age group of 35-45; 8 in the age group of 45-55

while only 4 in the age group of 55-65. Here, it must be brought into light that the younger teachers showed more inclination towards use of technology for educational purposes.
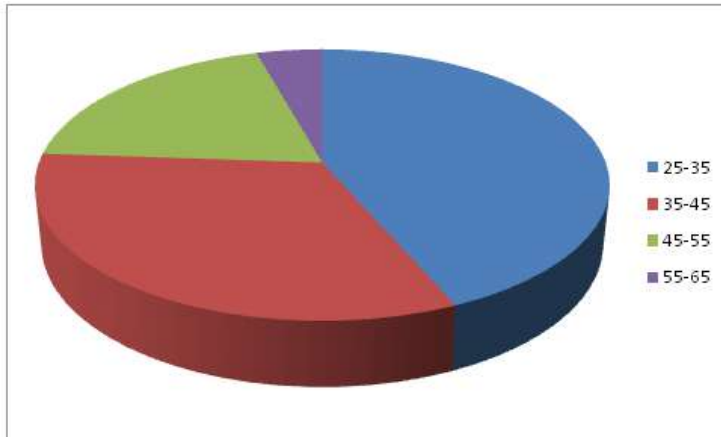

Fig. 3.1: Age of the respondents (Female)

Age
40 responses
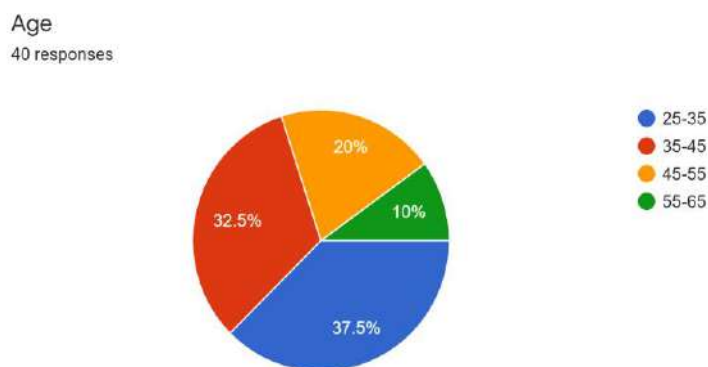
Fig. 3.2: Age of the respondents (Male)

Regarding the use of technology and particularly use of online platform, the respondents have expressed their views with regard to their level of comfort with certain online teaching tools, including social media and other online platform. In fact, the respondents stated that they have been using different modes or platform to continue classes 'online' with students in greater Guwahati during the pandemic. While some prefer taking online class in Google Meet, some others in Zoom or Cisco WebEx; maximum number of respondents, however, said that they opted for other medium like WhatsApp, Facebook Live, etc.

Among forty-six female teachers, we have found that twenty-eight (28) teachers were using social media like Facebook for conducting live classes as well as WhatsApp for sending audio lectures to students. Twenty-two (22) female teachers and 19 male teachers were found to be using Google Meet platform, sixteen (16) female respondents and 18 male teachers were using Zoom platform and only six (6) female teachers and 4 male teachers have opted for Cisco WebEx to conduct online classes. It is seen that for video conferencing, Zoom was convenient for many. However, social media is found to be the most convenient medium for imparting education. In the case of male teachers, 17 respondents took the medium of social media and other apps to connect with the learners. The responses from both male and female respondents are separately shown in figures 4.1 and 4.2 respectively.
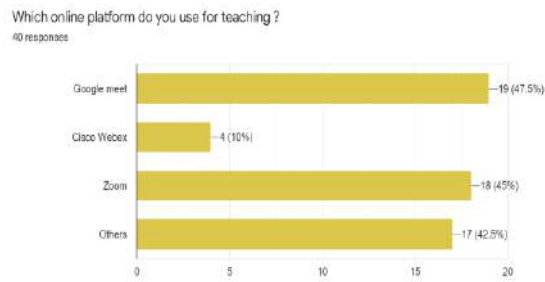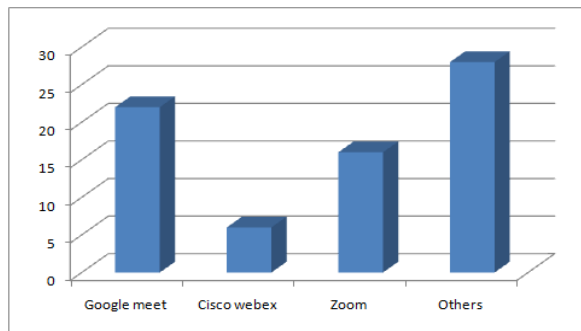
Fig. 4.1: Use of online platform for teaching (Female)   Fig. 4.2: Use of online platform for teaching (Male)

Online teaching-learning has its own set of challenges, along with its many advantages. Various types of problems were faced by the teachers during online classes. Most of the respondents stated that they faced connectivity issues while taking online class. Sudden internet disconnection owing to bad weather in Guwahati or other reason, and expiry of data pack during the classes made it difficult to take online class. Almost sixty-three percent of our total female respondents faced this problem as found in our survey. Another difficulty faced by the respondents was lack of motivation on the part of students. Some students were not comfortable with online classes and they got distracted easily. Some of the respondents expressed their lack of skill in handling technology as a challenge, especially when it comes to downloading of apps connecting to the links for class, use of recording devices, etc. As most of the teachers were accustomed to face-to-face teaching methods chiefly, it came as a challenge to them to adjust with the 'new normal' teaching strategies. As we can see that due to the pandemic, the only way to reach out to the students was through online mode. However, from our study, it can be stated that even though it was implemented in a short span of time and with a sudden urgency, a lot has to be done to make online teaching and learning more captivating, interesting and hence meaningful.
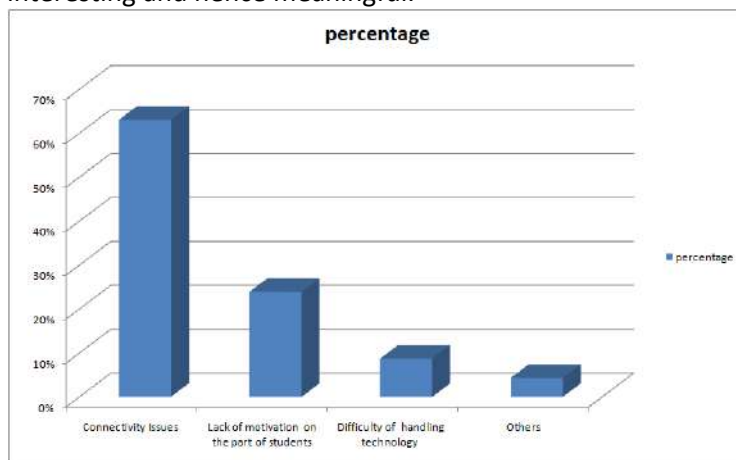
**Fig. 5.1: Difficulties faced during Online Teaching (Female)**

On the other hand, 65 percent of the male respondents similarly raised the issue of connectivity, 17.5 percent indicated lack of motivation, 7.5 percent stated the need to training in technology, while the rest 10 percent stated other problems like provision of smart phones for the economically downtrodden section of the students, government schemes to ensure ease of accessibility and so on. The following figure represents the difficulties that the male teachers faced during online classes.

What difficulty have you mostly faced while taking online classes?
40 responses

Connectivity issues
Lack of motivation on the part of students
Difficulty of handing technology
Others
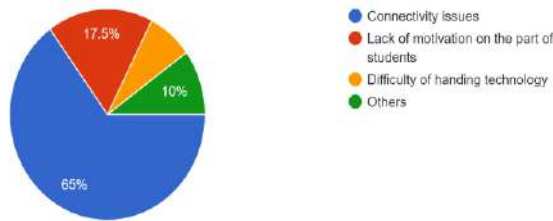
Fig. 5.2 Difficulties faced during Online Teaching (Male)

As regards the comfort of using online platform, maximum number of respondents pointed out that after taking online class they feel more techno-friendly than before as they have to prepare and be well-versed in various aspects of online teaching. Approximately 83 percent female respondents and 90 percent male respondents have commented that online classes improved their equation with technology. The following figures, 6.1 and 6.2 is representative of the technology-teaching aspect of the educators.


Did online teaching make you more techno-friendly
40 responses

Yes
No
no comments
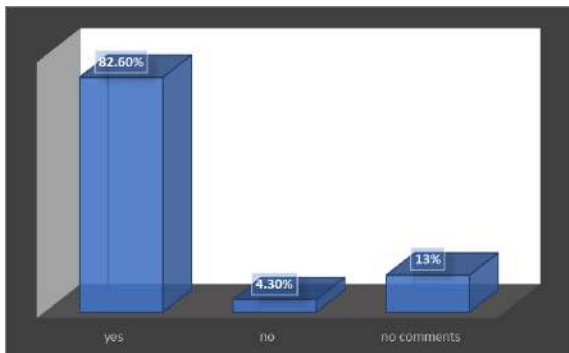
*Fig. 6.1: Role of online teaching as techno-friendly (female)*
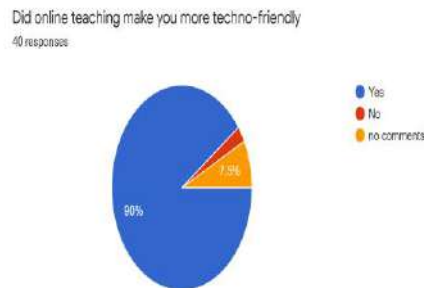
Fig. 6.2: Role of online teaching as techno-friendly (Male)

Maximum number of female respondents, that is, fifty-six percent, replied that they have used online teaching methods before the outbreak of COVID-19 and remaining forty-four percent noted that they had opted for online teaching only after the pandemic.

Similarly, maximum number of male respondents, that is, fifty-five percent, replied that they have used online teaching methods before the outbreak of COVID-19 and remaining forty-five percent noted that they had opted for online teaching only after the pandemic. The following figures indicates the use of technology by the teachers, before and after the outbreak of the pandemic.

Did you use online platform for teaching before the outbreak of COVID -19 pandemic ?
40 responses

Yes
No
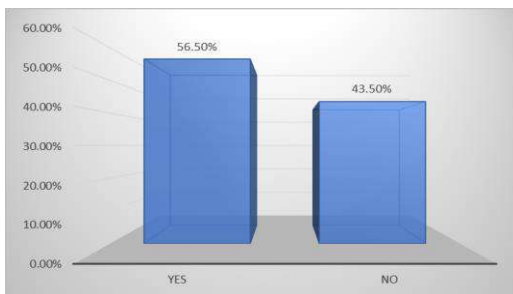
Fig. 7.1: Use of Online platform before the outbreak of COVID-19 (Female)
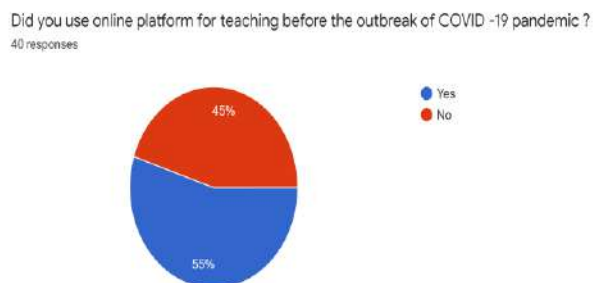
Fig. 7.2: Use of Online platform before the outbreak of COVID-19 (Male)

Perception of Respondents towards Online Teaching

Regarding online teaching chiefly during this pandemic situation, the respondents shared their perspective with regard to the same. For some it emerged a good alternative in this pandemic time

to continue teaching learning process by taking online mode. For some other respondents, online teaching-learning must be supplemented by face-to-face mode as digital technology has the problem of access and connectivity issues. Most of the respondents had expressed positivity with this new approach of adding technology in education and stated that they are trying their best for all-round development of students, especially in this critical kind of situation through online classes by providing them counselling whenever need aroused. Some respondents also noted that they are adapting to new challenges during the implementation of online teaching-learning methods. As a whole, it can be pointed out that online teaching had definitely enhanced the teaching-learning experience. But technological anomalies, uninterrupted power supply and net connectivity are the biggest challenges for online teaching.

Interestingly, majority of the respondents prefer face-to-face teaching. To them, it is more effective than online teaching while clarifying doubts of the students. However, in this pandemic situation, online teaching is a lot safer for all- the students as well as teachers. It is experienced that in past couple of years, online mode of education had witnessed its limitations because many students were not able to connect and hence were left out. If education is for all, then online mode is difficult for students coming from weaker sections of the society. So, until and unless all the students are provided with technology as well as gadgets, online mode of classes will not suffice for its inability to reach all sections of the society. It has also to be mentioned that "Blended" mode could be a useful way of teaching the learners as it includes both face-to-face and online mode within its ambit.

Suggestions to Improve Online Teaching-Learning

In order to improve online teaching, many respondents noted that an interactive forum could be helpful to improve online experience while teaching and learning for both the learners and the teacher. Also, better network and less connectivity issues have to be addressed; governmental intevention is needed to bridge the digital divide. Apart from other technology related aspects, computer knowledge is very important for both parents and students. In fact, online teaching may be regularised as part of the teaching activity. For instance, along with regular offline classes, assignments and presentations can be done online because it can help students develop interest in online teaching. As during this pandemic online teaching learning has been introduced all of a sudden in most of the institutions, many teachers as well as students could not make the best use of it. Technology should be used in such a way that it becomes easy to handle and is made learner-friendly.

Government must take initiative to improve online classes at policy level, especially in balancing the rich-poor divide of students by providing proper infrastructure like laptops and free net connection and by giving stress on developing rural economy. It must ensure equal access to all the students in online learning process. Hoisting of online portal like Swayamprabha at state level where teachers and students can participate and videos of lectures can be archived to be viewed later. There should be proper technical backup support teams from the authorities as often technical issues arise during online classes and the teacher is often at a loss to remedy the situation leading to class disruption. There should be proper training facilities for the teachers also. Orientation to teachers on use of various online learning platforms is necessary as most of the teachers are not used to technology based teaching; students must also be oriented towards online learning in a better way. Apart from these, matters like duration of online classes should be regulated and content presentation should be simple and interesting in order to motivate the learners. These are some of the suggestions put forward by the respondents.

Conclusion

Online teaching-learning is very useful, resourceful and effective during the pandemic situation. Indeed, online teaching-learning is beneficial and it is the need of the hour. It can connect people from one corner with other. But at the same time, one cannot deny the fact that technology has adverse effect on human biology. So we should know where to draw the line to get a proper balance. Online education is helpful during pandemic for higher education in a significant way. But for primary education, online teaching is not the only way through which moral values and social

responsibilities can be developed among the children. There are a number of challenges in India in the context of online learning. One of them is difficulty to keep an eye on all the students. It is good but has limitations in itself. Moreover, all the students do not get the access to gadgets or android phones. The pandemic has brought about drastic changes in society including educational processes. For uninterrupted flow of education, technology has to be used extensively and here comes the importance of online teaching-learning. It is essential as there is no other alternative keeping in view the present pandemic situation. Yet it cannot be a substitute for the contact mode of teaching due to many challenges associated with it, particularly for a third world country like us without any proper infrastructure for going online completely IT Infrastructure facility is very much necessary for both students and teacher. Technology has become an inseparable part of education and particularly in this critical situation, it has been most helpful. To conclude, the educators on whom the study was conducted had mixed reaction to online teaching-learning. There is no doubt that online teaching is essential but it has to be combined with face-to-face teaching mode for better learning outcomes.

Recommendations

As demanded by the situation and time, teachers are compelled to take online classes, so they have to be well-accustomed with the modern technology. For enhancing their skills, workshops are to be organised where emphasis can be placed on preparation of a lesson plan to make the online class easy, effective and student-friendly. Besides, training programmes can be helpful to develop some strategies on how to make the class lively and address all the queries of the students. For making the classes interesting, video links may be shared and puzzles, games, etc. may be provided to the students. There may be some interactive videos for all the students. Frequent Parent-Teacher meetings are very necessary to address any of the issues faced by the student while online classes.

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