IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR: CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS TO UNIVERSITY LEVEL FACULTIES

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Abstract

Pandemic Covid-19 has impacted the human life in each and every aspect. It has entirely changes the living style of people all around the world. Every sector in the economy is impacted due to this pandemic. One of the most and important sector which is changed entirely is education sector. For the very first time in education sector, leaning is done entirely through e-leaning platforms. Due to which people involve in the education sector like teachers and students are facing many challenges and opportunities. In this study impact of COVID-19 on higher education is assessed. The study analysis various challenges faced by teachers in this pandemic time. For the study 35 in depth interviews were taken from university level teachers and results are analyzed. The results of the study conclude that teachers are facing challenges like maintain proper work life balance, handling e- learning platform and managing students to attend classes whereas based on the challenges and recommendation of faculties some solutions are provided to minimize these challenges.

Keywords: *Challenges, COVID-19, E-Learning, Economy, Faculties, Higher Education, Pandemic.*

INTRODUCTION :

COVID-19 pandemic has affected the working of people all around the world. This virus was first stared from China and then spread to the whole world. By seeing it adverse impacts on human beings many governments taken steps like lockdown and temporary closure of every sector. Every service sector declared people to work from home.

In India also government declared complete lockdown for some period to protect people from the adverse impact of the virus. WHO declared it as pandemic and issue guidelines to people for their safety. These guidelines include avoid social gathering of people, avoidance of close contact with people and frequently washing hands with soap to reduce the affect of virus.

For the safety and security of students, government also had given instructions to temporary close all educational institutions. Closure of educational institutions has drastically impacted the students and their study. So to reduce adverse impact and education disruption all educational institutes start online study for students. Education institution starts teaching students through many online modes. In this time the learning has changed entirely and adopts new way to teach students. Initially every person involve in online teaching learning process faced many challenges and some of the challenges are still facing by many people.

Where students are facing many challenges in learning there also teachers are facing challenges in online teaching. Online teaching is a new phenomena for faculties and it taught that how to use technology in teaching leaning process. Entire process of teaching is changed from traditional classroom to online teaching. The quick step of online teaching learning develops new skills among teachers and students through technology. In this entire process technology played a great role and make teaching and learning possible.

The entire process of adopting traditional classroom to virtual classroom is not that much easy for the people those who are very new in using technology. But the huge educational gap is reduced through online learning. Otherwise as country is not free from the pandemic till now, students may have to bear huge loss without support of technology.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pandemic COVID-19 has reshaped the world and changes the perceptions of people in the entire world (Kramer and Kramer, 2020). COVID-19 has not only affect one sector or one country it brought drastically change the entire world and affect the whole world. From all the sectors, education sector is one which is impacted most due to the virus and lockdown in the country. Social distancing is the major precaution is the times of pandemic so it is necessary to close schools and colleges for the protection of students and teachers (Li, Rajamohan, Acharya et al., 2020). But due to closure of educational institutes learning can't be stopped so to continue the study virtual leaning is started by all over the world by schools and colleges.

The pandemic affects the people in two ways, one is through spread of virus by close contact of infected people and in another way it creates anxiety, depression and stress among people because of the stressful situation in the country (Roy, Tripathy, Kar, Sharma, Verma and Kaushal, 2020). To maintain the safety of students, educators and teachers technology plays a great role in learning. It ensures the wellness of people as if technology is absent from the society then it creates a great educational gap (Chick, Clifton, et. al, 2020).The society faced many issues due to COVID-19in terms of online leaning, technology, cyber security and social interaction. People face lot of challenges in e-leaning due to lack of technical knowledge. Social and culturel barriers are there in remote leaning and people have security issues in e-leaning (Dwivedi, Hughes et. al, 2020). In other terms teachers and students faced many challenges in technology adoption like fear of technology to operate, consciousness and anxiety in online teaching and learning. Many faculties resist to use technology in teaching but there was no way other than this (Shenoy, Mahendra and Vijay, 2020).

Due the pandemic many face to face meetings are canceled and virtual meetings are conducted in education field. In other fields of education virtual leaning is effective up to some extent but in medical field it faces many challenges. Face to face meeting experience is totally different from virtual experience (Shah, Diwan et. al, 2020). Due to e-learning or virtual learning educational institutions develop the content of teaching and learning according to needs of the students (Crawford, Henderson et. al, 2020).

Virtual learning also affected the way of working by teachers. The nature of work is changed and balance in work is more disrupted (Brammer and Clark, 2020). Many people lost opportunities available for them before the pandemic and student's personal development through traditional or classroom learning is disturbed (Ferrel and Ryan, 2020). Pandemic has made full transition in learning and mental health of students and teachers is affected badly. Faculty members are facing challenges like lack of training in virtual platforms and student's assessment (Sahu, 2020). The pandemic creates many new models for learning and new trends. The new ways are coming in teaching and learning process (Jena, 2020).

So it is clear that in the pandemic situation virtual learning is only the option to bridge the gap in education or students studies. Educational institutes needs to strengthen their practices in terms of curriculum and teaching process (Naciri, Baba, Achbani and Kharbach, 2020). No doubt that students and teachers are facing challenges in teaching through online mode but these challenges can be reduced by adopting strong practices and train teachers for the easy adoption of technology (Toquero, 2020). To strong the teaching process there should be voice in teaching process so that students can be indulgingin better learning. Educational institute's needs to strengthen the policies and teachers should be ready with emergency plans for the unexpected situations (Bao, 2020).

2.1 Research Gaps

The present study highlights the impact of COVID-19 on higher education. It specifically study the challenges faced by higher education institution teachers' challenges in the pandemic or lockdown time when colleges and universities are closed. Many studies are done on challenges faced by students in learning through virtual mode but very few studies talk about challenges faced by teachers. There is a need to explore the challenges faced by teachers in detail during this pandemic period. Very few studies only slightly touched the aspect of teachers but in this study the details challenges are explored through the study.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The present study fulfill following objectives:

- To explore the existing literature to know the work done on this particular aspect.
- To explore in detail the challenges faced by faculties of higher education institutions during COVID-19

period.

- To provide the solutions to overcome these challenges.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is qualitative type of study. For the study exploratory research design is used. Data for the study is taken through interview method (via. Telephone) and through various authenticated sources of internet. Various published research journals and research reports are studied for the study. In this study data is collected through simple random sampling method and sample size is 35faculties of higher education institutions. The location selected for the study is Punjab. Various college/university teachers are interviewed for the data collection. Based on their opinions and challenges faced by them the study is conducted. For more related information internet, authenticated reports and journal reports are used. For the study authenticated databases are used like Research Gate, Google Scholar, and JStor etc.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Based on the opinions and answers collected by higher education faculties following challenges are highlighted by the study:

i) Fear of using Technology: Initially faculties hesitating to use the technology. Some of the faculties are resisting coming in front of camera. This problem is mainly faced by camera shy people where they do not want to adopt virtual style of teaching. Some experienced faculties have fear while they were using technology. In the starting they were not aware about how to use technology. *One of the faculties said: "I had really a big fear that will I be able to speak in front of camera during online teaching".*

ii) Lack of Technical Knowledge: Some of the faculties faced problems like how to operate any online platform. They were not really aware about how to share content in online teaching. They face problems in operating Apps like they were not aware how to mute and how to share screen. Initially they face problems in creating meeting IDs and when students face any problem in operating link then they were not aware how to handle that. *One of the experienced faculties shared the experience and said: "For the first time when I came to know that we have to take classes of students through online mode I was lit bit confused that how will I operate and handle all such things. If I commit any mistake in operating I will not able to deliver and in this lockdown situation who will help me".*

iii) Problem in student Engagement: Many of the faculties are still facing this problem. Student's engagement is very necessary but through online teaching faculties are not able to see whether student is carefully listing or not. Engaging student all the time in content is a big challenge for teacher. Face to face measuring response and getting expressions of students whether they are carefully listing or not is not possible. Sometimes students join virtual classroom but physically they are not present at the moment. *According to one faculty: "One time virtually student was present but when faculty asked randomly that student to answer particular question that student was not there".* Sometimes students attend classes just for the sake of attendance.

iv) Non availability of Licensing Software: Some of the software which are provided for free to use by anyone. Faculties are taking classes through that software's but these software's have specific time limit to use and specific number of people can joint at particular time. When classes are going these software's or Apps stop working and start asking your specific time limit is exceed and you need to login again or you can purchase licensed version of this. In this type of challenges faculties are not able to perform well. *One of the faculties said: "Due to this problem the whole concentration lost and we have to recall where we were at the topic which is very much disturbing".* Educational institutions need to come up with licensed software for the smooth conduct of teaching.

v) Lack of Material benefits by Educational Institutions: Faculties of colleges/universities feel that they are not provided with the benefits like stationary charges, internet expenses, mobile calling expenses and other expenses which are essential for the virtual teaching. Due to online teaching their material expenses are increased and they feel they should be provided with these benefits. In this pandemic where salaries are not provide to them at the fullest where they should be given with these expenses which are necessary to teach in online platforms. *"One faculty shared their views and said in this pandemic where we are getting less salaries by colleges/universities there also we have to bear huge amount of extra expenses of internet etc".*

vi) Family Disturbance in Work from Home: When anyone work from home then it is possible that person

get some family disturbance. This challenge is specially faced by female faculties where they are fulfilling family needs and job requirements both. At the same time managing both aspects family and work is quite difficult for them. As all family members are at home so females have to fulfill their demands and take care of everyone. *"One of the female faculty shared the experience and said I usually finish all domestic work before online teaching starts but when I indulge in my work my child start crying and asked I have to sit with you and sometime in between he ask to give food etc".* All this process is very much difficult for them to manage.

vii) Work Life Imbalance: Every service sector individual almost works from home. So it is very difficult especially for females to manage entire show at their own. In this pandemic times they have no domestic helper for work so entire work females handle at their own. Almost every female feels that their responsibilities increase by double in this pandemic time. They even don't have time to manage their personal work. Entire day female faculties are busy in some or the other work because if domestic work finishes their job work starts if job work finishes they have to pay attention towards family etc. *One of the female faculties said: "In this pandemic and lockdown period work life imbalance is the big challenge which I have faced. My entire day is going where even I don't know. Sometimes I feel very much frustrated at the end of day".*

viii) Daily online schedules are Hectic: Due to pressure from educational institutions faculties feel that their daily online schedules are hectic. Setting at one place for the whole day is very much difficult. Otherwise in traditional classroom teaching, faculties use to meet and share their view with other faculties but in virtual teaching whole time setting in front to computer or laptop makes a person bore. It also affect the physical heath of people as they have less physical activities which further becomes the cause of heath issues. *"It is very difficult for me to every time setting at one place. In classroom when I teach students I use to take many rounds of the class so that I can closely interact with students and class becomes more interesting and interactive. It also adversely affects my physical health".*

ix) Lots of Communication and Coordination Issues: Due to virtual platforms it is very difficult to communicate and coordinate with other faculties. Face to face communication is more effective than any other form of communication. Sometimes due to network issues there are some problems in understanding the talk. Coordination with another person virtually is very difficult because at the time of some shared work another person may not understand the way what first person wants to deliver.

x) Disturbance after Working Hours: It is very challenging for the faculties when they have to work beyond the working hours. Earlier times working hours were fixed and no one disturbs them after working hours but now faculties feel that for them no working hours. Whole day and night are working hours for them. *One faculty shared the experience and said: "I can even feel no relaxation after completion of working hours. As I am class counselor for one of the class my phone has numerous phone calls daily from morning to night".*

xi) Unable to measure students' understanding of concept: In virtual classroom it is essential for faculty to map whether the student understands the concept or not. For each and every student it is very difficult for the faculty who is taking class. In traditional classroom teaching faculty can figure out from the facial expression that student needs more explanation but in virtual platforms it is a challenge for them. *"I enjoy the class when students are interactive and when I feel that students are getting what I am toughing to them but in virtual classroom it is difficult for me to figure out each and every student said by one faculty member".*

xii) Practical Subjects are difficult to teach: In online classroom platform it is very difficult to teach practical subjects to students. Despite of providing study material and video lectures students are not able to understand subjects like mathematics, statistics, financial modeling subjects etc. Until or unless when student is not trying to do himself he is not able to perform in subject. It is also very difficult for students to discuss their practical subject's doubts through virtual platforms.

xiii) Cheating in daily classroom assessment cannot be prevented: For the better performance of students and to check that whether students are getting what they are taught in the class some type of assessment sheets are prepared. But students are able to cheat very easily. They submit test sheets by copying the answers from book or internet. *One of the faculties said: "One of my students who is not good in studies but now he score good marks in his assessment. When I check her assessment sheet then I am well able to understand that student is not able to perform this much".*

xiv) Sometimes students feel boring in online classes: Setting in front of computer or laptop for whole day is not easy task. Sometimes students feel it bore as they do not find any friend for gossips etc. In starting classes they feel some freshness but afternoon classes they are not much energetic. In this situation faculty also

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put lots of efforts so that lectures can be make more interesting and knowledgeable. But it is quite normal for layman that if anyone sitting at same place for whole day would defiantly get bored.

xv) Challenges in Redeveloping Content: Faculties face challenge in redeveloping the content according to virtual classroom platforms. The entire structure of syllabus and content is revised according to the connivance of students. After redeveloping the whole content is uploaded on virtual platforms. *"One of the faculty said that this work is so challenging that I had take help of my husband to organize the material and finally upload it to the online portal of the university".*

SOLUTIONS TO OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES FACED BY FACULTIES

Based on the suggestions received from faculties during taking their interviews and past literature study following are some ways to overcome the challenges faced by faculties during online teaching:

- Educational institutes must provide trainings to all the faculty members to operate the online platforms to teach students.
- To engage the students in study faculty must prepare study content in a way that student enjoys the learning. For this initiative college/universities must provide the faculties with appropriate and required resources.
- For the smooth conduct of online teaching every education institute should arrange some licensed software so that study won't get interrupted in between.
- Faculties must be given with some essential benefits which are required to use in online classes like internet expenses must be provided so that faculty can teach students without any obstacles.
- Faculties must prepare their time table for each and every task and that should be communicated to all the family members so that family disturbance can be reduced to some extent.
- To improve the work life balance each and every work should be priorities according the importance of work. Faculties need to understand that they should not let the work burden on them.
- To improve the daily hectic schedules faculties must take breaks in between the classes.
- Communication and coordination challenges can be reduced by effective bonding between teams. Everyone needs to understand the situation and cooperate with other faculty members.
- To reduce the disturbance after working hours faculty should not check their emails and phone frequently as they check during working hours. This creates unnecessary burden on them.
- For the effective students understanding faculty must prepare some strict rules and guideline for the class so that students can actively participate.
- To reduce the boredom of online classes faculties should prepare content in a way that students enjoy the learning.

CONCLUSION

In higher education institutes teachers are facing many challenges in online teaching. Initially these challenges were more to faculties but now some challenges are reduced little bit. But still many faculties are facing these challenges. In education sector this type of teaching and learning is happening for the first time so coming challenges are common. Faculties have never faced this type of teaching before so this is very new experience for them. Some of the challenges are really very genuine like imbalance in work life, dual responsibilities of work, handling students and teaching them through online platform which someone have never think of this before. Some of the challenges can be reduced to some extent but some challenges are very difficult to handle.

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