

*Full Length Research Paper*

## **Challenges for teachers during COVID-19**

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**The year 2020 has been noted in the history of education as the COVID-19 pandemic that spread all over the world compelled the authorities to close down all educational institutions indefinitely. Meanwhile, the governments have decided to start education in an online mode which has become an emergency need for the continuation of students' education. The starting of online classes created new challenges for teachers in making the classes equally available to all students. Teachers find it difficult to take classes due to problem associated with nonavailability of resources, high-speed internet, uninterrupted power supply and maintenance cost of the equipment in the context of online education during the pandemic. The present study conducted on a sample of 120 school teachers by administering an online questionnaire to identify and list out the major challenges that they are confronted with. The challenges were noted around the difficulties associated with conducting online classes, compatibility, social exclusion and assessment.**

**Key words:** COVID-19 pandemic, online classes, compatibility, social exclusion, assessment.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Recent developments in the field of education all over the world have been tuned on the basis of cure, prevention and protection from Corona virus. Since the dawn of 2020, mankind has been stuck on the routine activities that have been practicing and also accustomed to, leading to chaos and dilemma in every walk of life. The major difference between COVID 19 and other epidemics is the global reach of COVID 19 and its severe impact on human beings by the former.

Lack of resources in health care system for preventing the pandemic, restricting personal freedom, growing financial crises and uncertainty in the preventive measures of corona virus have contributed to large scale conflicts and distress leading to psychological ill health among individuals in all sectors. Consequently, everyone

has to readapt to the new circumstances and tries to become the new normal in their behavior and attitude. The present study focuses on the challenges faced by teachers to adapt to the new normal.

A review on the major impacts of the pandemic can be useful so as to identify the problems and finding suitable remedies. Lockdown measures have led to the cessation of industrial and commercial production in most sectors, with job reductions and layoffs. Recently an editorial in the newspaper The Economist (2020) revealed that approximately the cessation of economic activity produced by the lockdown and reduction of movement, will lead to a total of 420,000,000 people to absolute poverty with incomes of less than USA \$1.90 a day. If looking at the first world countries, the United States

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(USA) has reported a gradual increase of 3.5% in unemployment in February versus 14.7% in April 2020. Similar condition also exists in almost all countries.

The COVID-19 is undoubtedly one of many pandemics that humanity has had to face throughout history. Never before has the fear of death been so pronounced, because people are reminded daily that people are dying in alarming numbers around 100 deaths per minute and 150,000 deaths per day. This fear of loss, coupled with social distancing, lockdown, economic instability and uncertainty, will result in a strong psychosocial impact that will have to be addressed (Brooks et al., 2020).

Regarding school education and special education, as a response to COVID-19 school closures, the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. DOE, 2020) declared that schools were allowed to provide special education services to students through distance learning. In rural reservation communities during COVID-19, special education services for students with disabilities were significantly disrupted. Contributing factors were high rates of poverty, lack of adequate funding and staffing for health care, populations with higher rates of chronic illness, high percentages of homes with no running water or electricity, shortages of certified special educators, and barriers to alternative forms of education due to lack of access to high-speed internet and technology (Bear et al., 2021).

Uncertainty in the preventive measures of the virus prompted many countries to resume the functioning of educational institutions through online classes. Government of India also decided to open schools wherever possible and conduct online classes for students of lower classes and functioning of offices with minimum staff abiding to COVID-19 protocol.

Full autonomy was given to states to take measures in opening educational institutions. As a result, Kerala government decided to open higher education institutions and conduct all examinations that were pending due to lockdown. Schools were opened for final year students to prepare them for public examinations at secondary and senior secondary level. Measures have been taken to avoid losing an academic year for all categories of students, consequently how far teachers are equipped and what are the problems that may encounter is to be studied properly.

### **Academic functioning during COVID-19**

Technology has penetrated almost every sphere of life during this pandemic; it has become a boon for many, to overcome the problems related to loss of academic time and professional engagements. But many a times, as far as students are concerned, virtual and online classes did not work. Lack of internet access, computer facilities, data consumption charges and even the fear associated with health crises were the contributing factors. Education

being a social process, lack of socialisation and peer group interaction has resulted seriously towards an isolated learning and life.

In order to keep pace with the changing scenario, online learning tools have been widely explored by teachers and students. E-learning tools have played a crucial role during this pandemic, helping schools and universities facilitate student learning during the closure of universities and schools (Subedi et al., 2020). While adapting to the new changes, staff and student readiness needs to be gauged and supported accordingly. The learners with a fixed mind-set find it difficult to adapt and adjust, whereas the learners with a growth mind set quickly adapt to a new learning environment. There is no one-size-fits-all pedagogy for online learning. There are a variety of subjects with varying needs. Different subjects and age groups require different approaches to online learning (Doucet et al., 2020). Online learning also allows physically challenged students with more freedom to participate in learning in the virtual environment, requiring limited movement (Basilaia and Kvavadze, 2020). Even though online learning helped to meet the emergency, it has posed several problems and that is the aim of this study.

### **Challenges for teachers**

Teachers have faced significant stressors in relation to their work. The pandemic required a very sudden shift to remote learning, and teachers were called upon to support students' academic development and well-being throughout this shift, while also navigating adversity and stress in their own lives. In many countries, students have returned to classrooms and teachers have been called upon to make this return as smooth as possible. Given prior research on the negative impact of major societal disruptions on teachers' well-being (Malinen et al., 2019), the potential for teachers to experience maladaptive outcomes during COVID-19 is heightened. The teachers can overcome their problems with their own personal resources like workplace buoyancy leading to resilience. Workplace buoyancy refers to the ability to effectively deal with the challenge and adversity that are part of work, and that occur for many (Martin and Marsh, 2008).

During COVID-19, most teachers would have experienced challenges at work, including potential difficulties in rapidly shifting in-class learning to remote settings, challenges with making online software work effectively for remote learning, setbacks in maintaining a work-home distinction, and difficulties in differentiating learning for diverse students. There are widespread challenges that require teachers to navigate competing demands and high workload, which may be supported by workplace buoyancy. At the same time, workplace buoyancy also has a role to play in helping individuals

navigate major adversity. When individuals have greater workplace buoyancy, this puts them in a better position to handle any major experience of adversity because they are not overrun with the more common work-related challenges (Martin, 2013). Thus, workplace buoyancy has an important mitigating role to play in helping teachers deal not only with work-related challenges but also the broader impact of the pandemic. It is proposed that teachers who are able to effectively overcome adversity at work are able to avoid the physical or emotional load of that adversity, resulting in fewer somatic symptoms, less stress related to change, and less emotional exhaustion (Chang, 2013).

### **Positive effects of COVID-19**

COVID -19 has opened new avenues for learning, creating and sharing. Family bonding and involvement of parents in their wards' education has significantly enhanced. Teachers could try new mode of teaching and learning and teacher- parent interaction has improved than ever before. At a global level, man has realised the futility of life and wealth, became more conscious about nature and earth, realised the potential hazards associated with the destruction of natural environment, supremacy of man over other creatures and the value of freedom enjoyed by every individual. It helped to rejuvenate the environment, but doubtful of sustainability of these thoughts and insights. This has created a new way of living with public care strategies including hand washing, wearing face masks, physical distancing, and avoiding mass gathering and assemblies. Lockdown and staying home strategies have been put in place as the needed action to flatten the curve on occurrence of COVID-19 and also the control of transmission of the disease (Sintema, 2020).

Based on the study conducted on Native American students with disabilities living in rural and remote areas, it was noticed that teaching and learning activities have acquired new momentum after the pandemic as COVID-19 required new thinking and creative procedures to complete the classes when schools were closed. During the pandemic, everyone was forced to think differently. This provided the impetus for teachers, students, and family members to acquire adaptive skills and learning that would not otherwise have been available. These new skills and knowledge can provide unique opportunities for the education of students with disabilities (Bear et al., 2021).

### **Initiatives from Kerala Government**

Kerala is one of the most literate states in India and has unique mode of people participation and governmental intervention in education and health care systems. The

fewest cases of death due to corona virus after the outbreak of the pandemic have been reported in Kerala. It is the first state in India that conducted public examination for secondary and senior secondary students strictly abiding the COVID-19 protocol and the successful completion of the course in the midst of lock down period. The cooperation and awareness of the public including teachers, students, parents and society is noteworthy in this context.

In the educational sector, Kerala government initiated many programmes to bring classrooms into the home by starting classes through Kerala Infrastructure and Technology for Education (KITE) Victors Channel under the name 'First bell'. State Council of Education Research and Training (SCERT), provided guidelines and Samagra Shiksha Kerala and SIET (State Institute of Education Technology) prepared the modules for the classes ([www.education.kerala.gov.in](http://www.education.kerala.gov.in)).

A survey has been conducted to identify the problems and to establish neighbourhood study centres to meet the expenses of education and that should be met by Kerala State Financial Enterprises and local self-government.

Financial resources were identified; free laptops, mobile phones and television sets were distributed by voluntary agencies and the public to those students who are not able to afford them. In spite of these initiatives, research has not been conducted on the problem of challenges faced by teachers.

The 'first bell' was a success in many ways as it brought the classroom into home and children with their parents watched the daily classes with great enthusiasm. It was really a shower in a desert for many because, teachers could take classes, students could be brought back to education in the midst of the fear of pandemic, parents and even grandparents could recollect their school years and shared the nostalgic moments with teachers and shared through social media.

In the initial stage, it was identified that 2.6 lakh students did not have access to the virtual class. The government took immediate steps for this, to enhance the accessibility of classes among students with the help of local self-governing institutions, libraries, Akshaya centres, and community centres, block resource centres, anganwadis, kudumbasree and started neighbourhood study centres. Further, the number decreased to 17,774 by the end of June (source: [kite.kerala.gov.in](http://kite.kerala.gov.in)).

Even though efforts have been made from every corner to provide education in the critical period of pandemic, there is no dearth of chaos and confusions among students due to the social exclusion and digital divide. Incidents of even suicide of a girl student occurred in Kerala due to the stress caused by nonavailability of internet and other devices for attending her classes. Apart from the nonavailability of

**Table 1.** Shows a summary of the data collected from teachers.

Category of challenge	No. of teachers responded as yes	Percentage
Online classes	116	96.66
Compatibility	98	81.66
Social exclusion	102	85
Assessment	86	71.66

resources, high-speed internet, uninterrupted power supply and maintenance cost of the equipment are also significant concerns in the context of online education during the pandemic. It is in this context that the present study was conducted on a group of teachers to find out the problems faced by teachers in academic activities during COVID-19 pandemic. The study focused to answer the question on four major components including online classes, compatibility, social exclusion and assessment.

Regarding online classes, the teachers have many problems related to individual attention to students, providing group activities and arranging collaborative discussions to students as it was a novel situation to both teachers and students.

Compatibility with respect to the easy access of internet and the universalization of educational opportunities to all students is a serious issue. Education is not complete unless the theoretical and practical skills are acquired by students.

As children are locked up in home, the problem of lack of socialization and play activities among students has created many psychological problems from moderate to severe level. Less teacher pupil interaction added the severity among students.

A very important challenge that was faced was regarding the assessment of student performance. As online evaluation system is not much used and the lack of sufficient tools among teachers has to be met properly to complete the education process in their school.

## METHOD USED FOR THE STUDY

The study used survey method on a sample of 120 school teachers all over Kerala. Due to lockdown and other restrictions to travel, it was difficult to conduct the data collection personally and the investigator sought the help of 40 post graduate students to collect the data. Each student collected from three school teachers from their area by conducting interview and listed out the problems and challenges for teachers in conducting classes during the pandemic. As the students belong to different regions of Kerala state, the sample represents a cross section of school teachers in Kerala. Interview schedule is used to collect data and the responses obtained were scored with percentage analysis based on four components such as online classes, compatibility, social exclusion and assessment. Table 1 shows a summary of the data collected from teachers.

The findings revealed that a great majority (96.66%) of the teachers have difficulties in conducting online classes as effective as the regular mode of instruction due to the connectivity problems

and pacing of lessons by all students. Four teachers mentioned the positive aspects of online classes and they could manage the classes well, as all students were from urban area and children of educated parents. Compatibility issue was noticed by 81.66% teachers. 85% of teachers raised their concern over the emotional stress and anxiety as a result of the students is locked up in the home.

The rest of the sample highlighted the opportunities and advantages associated with staying in home for the studies and the parental support that could lessen the isolation of students.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed the nature and extent of problems faced by teachers in Kerala state while conducting online classes and the difficulties in meeting the academic and personal needs of students. Since the outbreak of corona virus by the end of 2019, Kerala is far more effective in the prevention, transmission and cure of the disease than many of the other states in India. Only but a few cases have been reported and the public health system was strictly monitoring and took necessary measures for the health management of people. A complete lockdown was needed only by the end of March 2020 as a prelude to the national lockdown in the whole country. In the midst of lockdown, public examination was conducted for students and even then, the situation was under control. As everyone knows, the pandemic has severely affected the economy and education globally than anything else. All are locked in their homes and the children enjoyed the holidays for a short period, but the uncertainty in opening their schools has created a stressful condition and the vast majority of students who are isolated felt distress. Kerala government has taken decision to start the academic year in June itself and sought alternative mode of learning with the help of very efficient teachers in the form of 'first bell'. The parents and public have wholeheartedly accepted the classes and it is still continuing in schools other than final year students. Many teachers got wide acceptance and reach which was a boosting factor to others also. But as the classes became online in a regular manner many problems and challenges also emerged.

### Online learning

Online learning is the educational usage of technological devices, tools and the internet (Means et al., 2009),

Tallent-Runnels et al. (2006) stated that the persistent increase in technological innovation and internet accessibility has increased the motivation for online learning since the beginning of the millennium, and Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) suggested that online learning will be more sustainable if the challenges during the pandemic are transformed to opportunities. But Joshi et al. (2020) commented that the instructional achievement of online learning is debatable because it causes absence of face-to-face relationship among learners, learners and instructors.

Students have to attend the online classes as scheduled by the public education department and the problems of accessibility of internet and technological devices among students were a major challenge. This is not only the case of school education, but higher education also. When digital transformation of knowledge is considered, Kopp et al. (2019) gave five common assumptions that are considered more of hindrances to digital transformation of higher education institutions as against contributions to its realization and these assumptions are related to (i) change, (ii) pace, (iii) technology, (iv) competences and (v) financing. The present study highlights the problems related to the adaptation to the changing need, difficulty in following the same pace by a heterogeneous group, technological support, digital competencies of teachers and students and the financial requirement too.

Online education has become an emergency need to tackle the problems of losing academic year and proper planning and design of the instruction is an essential factor in the success of online instruction. Many teachers expressed their concern over the fruitful design of teaching learning process due to lack of exposure to the new mode of instruction and insufficient resources. It has been confirmed that effective online learning is a by-product of cautious design and planning of instruction with the application of organized model for designing and development of instruction (Branch and Dousay, 2015). The absence of the cautious design and development process in the migration process gave birth to the rejection of the contemporary online education experience during this pandemic as effective online education but rather as emergency remote teaching (Bozkurt and Sharma, 2020; Hodges et al., 2020; Vlachopoulos, 2020). Hodges et al. (2020) differentiated adequately planned online learning experiences from courses presented online as response to crisis.

### **Compatibility**

Virtual learning environment is not that much effective for many disciplines especially those involving physical and direct contact and other practical works. Teachers expressed their dilemma in making the online learning universal to all disciplines. This has been reported by

many research studies. Leszczyński et al. (2018) reported that the compatibility of online learning with social science and humanities has been proved effective while researchers have also contested its compatibility with sports sciences, engineering and medical sciences where hands-on practical experiences are required as part of instructional activities. Remote laboratories are used as alternative laboratories in online learning and such virtual laboratories offered by online learning can only fill the theory-to-practice hole (Iqbal et al., 2015). Online learning cannot be effectively and efficiently applied in some disciplines and this compatibility gap is yet to be filled (Leszczyński et al., 2018).

According to Murphy (2020), based on the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) recommendations, medical students were directed to abstain from having direct contact with patient in the middle of March 2020, medical-trainees of Brown University were in clerkships and the school were able to “augment” medical students training by migrating some aspects of clinical education to online platform. However, those students are to go back to the wards to complete the direct-patient interaction that is required in clerkship as soon as the suspension due to the Covid-19 has been lifted. This implies that online learning is not compatible with clinical but can only be used to augment face-to-face training method pending the time there will be chance to go back to the normal traditional setting (Leszczyński et al., 2018). Boczkowska et al. (2018) recommended that e-learning programs are necessary systems of continual education and to advance the value education in emergency nursing, additional work need to be directed to the enhancement of online learning programs.

Moreover, education is a socialisation process where more face to face interaction and interpersonal relationships are to be strengthened through direct school experience. Students are lacking proper communication, sharing, cooperation and a feeling of loneliness is dominating and would be seriously affecting their personality development.

### **Social exclusion**

The global acceptance of social distancing policy, as announced by World Health Organization (2020) as a measure to curb the spread of Covid-19, has forced schools to close their doors, and this has caused unexpected disruption of traditional teaching and learning method. Students who are unable to interact with their teachers and friends feel isolated and often lack their motivation in learning. Teachers commented on the emotional and psychological issues that loom around the whole student community due to this social exclusion need to be addressed properly. Pandemic related anxiety among students was more than expected level and teachers expressed their concern over this matter

seriously.

In the current pandemic, the home confinement of large people for indefinite periods, differences among the stay-at-home orders issued by various jurisdictions, and conflicting messages from government and public health authorities severely intensified distress. Pfefferbaum and North (2020) reported that those who are affected the SARS virus in 2000, emotional distress was very common and many tempted to consider violating the quarantine orders. Similar is the case during this pandemic that many people have emotional distress due to the economic, social and health issues and hence affect their life which would have serious impact on student community too.

### Assessment

The most severe problem that was encountered during this context is the assessment of students and the effectiveness of the education they received online. On the one hand proper strategies were not available to make a transparent online evaluation to the mass and on the other; students are often engaged in examination malpractices while conducting online evaluation by corresponding teachers. Both these factors contribute to the limitations in assessment of learning outcome. Many often students are attending online classes for the sake of attending only and the right kind of learning is not happening, as reported by teachers.

In online learning, assessments are often carried online whereby instructors are limited to proxy supervision of learners making it impossible to regulate and control cheating (Arkorful and Abaidoo, 2015). There are several students testing formats that are applicable with e-learning and according to Osterlind (2002), such ICT-enhanced testing formats include constructed-response, performance-based formats, sentence-completion or short-answer, matching, true-false and cloze-procedure. Flaherty (2020) added that Kevin Gannon, the Director of Centre for Excellence in Teaching, Grand View University in a contemporary publication, has opined that he's a strong advocate of considerable modification of grading systems during this pandemic because it is unimaginable to claim that learners are getting the same learning experiences and chances through online learning during this pandemic and this will make assessment more complicated.

### Conclusion

The unprecedented effects of COVID-19 pandemic are more than reported. It has affected every phase of human life through the novel issues and restrictions like quarantine, lock down, social distancing, wide spread use of masks and sanitizers that curtailed the so far enjoyed freedom of man. Never before in the history of mankind

that this kind of a catastrophic situation occurred. As man has the capacity to adapt and find new modes of business in every sphere, this will also be managed to overcome the challenges to become the new normal. The study reported the common problems that the teachers faced during their academic activities and the difficulties experienced directly from their students.

Though the problems noted are almost same among the different groups of teachers, the major issue remains the access of internet and the problems associated with social isolation, compatibility and assessment. Murgatrottd (2020) identified similar challenges with e-learning that include accessibility, affordability, flexibility, learning pedagogy, life-long learning and educational policy. There occurs a digital divide among students and students from low socio economic status are more marginalised in this issue. As parental involvement is emphasised by many teachers in the effective monitoring of their students in the home classroom low parental education also become detrimental to student learning. Parents are even ignorant of the activities in which their children are more involved while using internet as a medium of learning poses serious problems especially among adolescents who are prone to misuse.

It is suggested to apply well designed learning structure, proper guidance and monitoring of student learning, frequent interaction with parents, blended learning opportunities, low teacher student ratio, resource sharing among teachers, reducing content overload, transparent online assessment tools and strategies, opportunities for creative expression of students, regular interaction with counsellors for meeting psychological issues, ensuring safe and effective use of internet and the team based learning for making the education during the pandemic, more effective.

### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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