IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION IN INDIA: CHALLENGES AND DETERMINANTS OF TEACHER ENGAGEMENT IN REMOTE TEACHING

Rebecca Sumita Wason[1] (Research Scholar)
Dr. Gaurav Sahni[2] (Research Supervisor)
Department of Management
[1,2] Sikkim Professional University, Gangtok, (Sikkim)

Abstract

This paper focusses on the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on Indian school systems, particularly focusing on the challenges faced by teachers in transitioning to remote teaching. It also aims to explore the determinants of employee engagement among teachers teaching remotely, with a specific emphasis on the quality of student involvement. The study highlights the stress and effort teachers are experiencing due to the shift to online platforms like Zoom, Teams, and Google Meet, and how environmental factors such as work stress and workload can affect teacher engagement. It also emphasizes the importance of instructor-student communication and active student engagement in predicting teacher work engagement. The research suggests that further investigation is needed to understand engagement in online education and its influencing factors to improve teacher commitment and ensure the long-term viability of the Indian education system.

Keywords *remote teaching, determinants, employee engagement, student involvement, online platforms*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a substantial overhaul in education systems globally, especially in India. The need for remote teaching, especially in areas with deficient technical infrastructure, has become vitally important. The Indian education system encountered the task of promptly formulating remedies to guarantee educational opportunities, particularly in underprivileged populations that lack contemporary communication technology. Remote learning, assisted by platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams, became popular tools for online teaching. Teachers bore the full impact of these demands, forcing them to modify curriculum for online education and quickly acquaint themselves with new technology crucial for remote teaching.

In the face of difficult social conditions marked by few social connections and the psychological stress caused by the pandemic, educators had to adapt quickly to the new professional requirements. This paper aims to analyze the effects of these expectations on teachers' professional activities in India and determine the elements that influence their job engagement. Considering the continuing ambiguity over the length of the epidemic and the growing inclination towards online learning as opposed to conventional classroom approaches, it is crucial to investigate the characteristics that contribute to success in distance education.

This research seeks to explore the determinants of job engagement among teachers who teach online classes. It examines the elements that influence work engagement and determines the predictors of engagement, with a specific emphasis on the quality of student involvement. The primary goal is to provide valuable information for initiatives that seek to improve teacher commitment and guarantee the long-term viability of the Indian education system.

Literature review

Factors that impact work engagement

An essential component of the interaction between employees and their jobs is work engagement. This encompasses cognitive, emotional, and behavioral characteristics. It is defined by three components: vigour, devotion, and absorption. In the context of educators, vigour refers to their passion and dedication towards teaching, devotion is shaped by their satisfaction with teaching and interactions with students, and absorption assesses their active participation in teaching and preparation activities (Kirkpatrich, 2007). A favourable work environment can increase employee engagement, as it is closely associated with the attainment of educational objectives, favourable work outcomes, and exceptional academic performance among students (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010). However, work engagement can be adversely affected by factors such as work activities not meeting expectations, new procedures, a large number of job demands within a limited time frame, and social isolation (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014). Highly involved instructors lead to improved student engagement. The adoption of remote work platforms like Google Meet and Zoom has significantly impacted educators' level of work involvement (Minghui et al., 2018). In the Indian educational environment, job engagement continues to be a problem resulting in diminished student engagement (Shernoff, 2013).

"Social and professional contextual factors"

Professional contextual variables refer to the specific needs and demands of the teaching profession, which have been shaped by societal development. Teachers have experienced occupational stress requiring increased effort, and the need to work additional hours due to transitioning from in-person teaching to remote work (Kyriacou, 2011). Research shows that a lack of equilibrium between work demands and leisure time can result in occupational stress (Sousa et al., 2019) . Factors contributing to job disengagement include limited resources, lack of drive, inadequate support from superiors and peers, disparity between professional aspirations and rewards, and the inept handling of major workplace transitions (De Carlo et al., 2019). Stresses can be categorized into weariness, depersonalization, and a lower need for personal achievement. Multiple research papers have highlighted the influence of stresses on the effective accomplishment of professional activities "(Pandey and Saxena, 2015)". To evaluate how instructors dealt with the contextual issues of online education, a specialized scale consisting of four indicators was used.

Comparing education methods

Conventional education relies on face-to-face interaction and intimate connections between educators and learners, facilitated by elements like eye contact, facial expressions, and body posture. This interaction enhances communication, facilitates learning, and promotes professional social bonding. Virtual education, on the other hand, is conducted in physical isolation, requiring teachers to miss out on effective interaction with students. Eye contact is crucial for creating a stimulating educational environment, and online learning largely restricts visual cues like facial expressions and gestures. This study will highlight the importance of these interactions in evaluating students' emotions.

Research methodology

Questionnaires were sent to about 400 educators from different educational backgrounds in India to compile this data set. A variety of quantitative scales were designed and validated especially for the Indian context for the online survey. A Likert scale with the following numbers: 1 (completely oppose), 2 (disagree), 3 (neither oppose nor agree), 4 (indicate), and 5 (very much in agreement) was used to test the level of the student involvement criterion and the impacts of the other factors.

Factor	Variables
Instructor	- The instructor's zeal for online instruction; - The clarity of the instructor's explanations in online mode
	-The instructor's skill in using online instructional platforms
	- The instructor's accessibility to students while interacting virtually
	- The instructor's willingness to participate in virtual education
	- Using student feedback to enhance classroom experience
Course Design	- The surroundings being conducive to online learning;
	- Suitable student assessments to accurately evaluate student understanding of the subject matter
	- The use of illustrations, online discussion forums and other tools that help make the content more engaging;
Course Content	- Enough materials supplied for comprehending the topic;
	- The course material satisfies the learning objectives outlined in the syllabus
Learner Environment	- The hardware and software is sufficient for online learning
Technology/Admin Support	- The institution offers technical and administrative assistance for online learning;
	- The institute clearly outlines the benefits of remote learning to both the teacher and the student
	- The institution clearly explains all online learning methods;
	- Technical support ensures the ease of participating in online student assessment including assignments and quizzes
	- Ensuring technical support to ensure the clarity of the instructor's lectures in online mode
	- Training the instructor to enhance their skill in using the online instructional platforms

Source- self

Results and discussion

This paper discusses the professional attitudes of Indian teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on their attitudes towards remote work. The majority (71.7%) acknowledged the benefits of technology in teaching but felt the Indian education system was not equipped to adapt quickly to online learning. A significant percentage of educators believed prolonged online instruction negatively affected student academic achievement. There was a split in attitudes about instructors' readiness for online teaching, with 45.8% expressing lack of adequate training for the transition and 46.3% having divided perspectives. The research also highlighted the limited availability of vital technology for online learning in underprivileged areas.

- **Platform used for Online education**
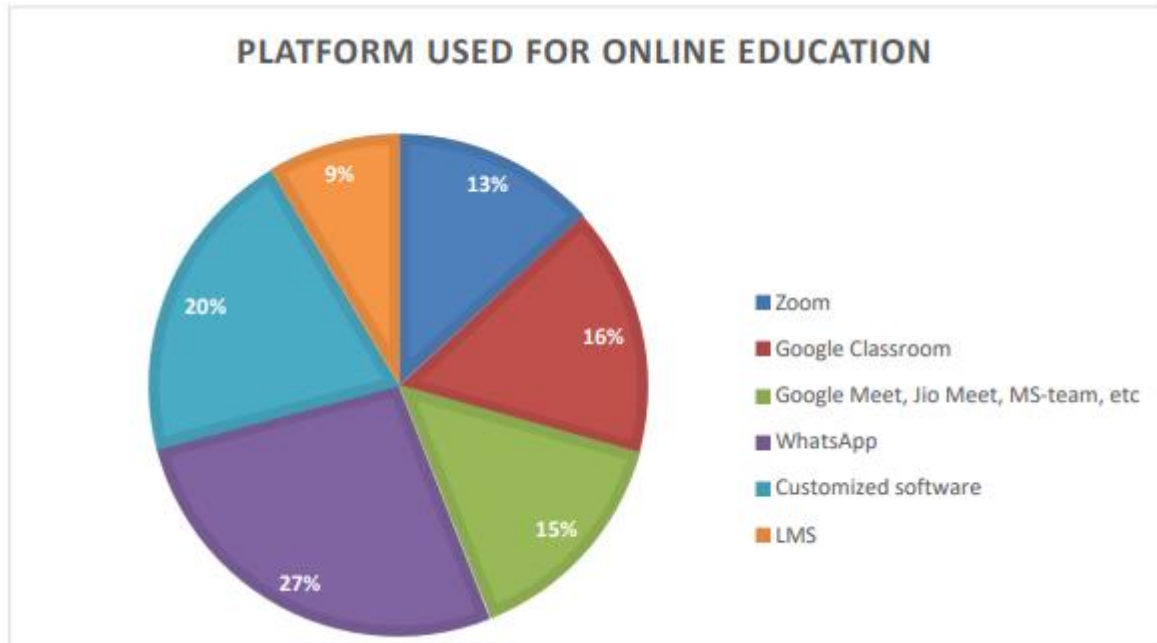
Source- Self

It is important to note that WhatsApp, a messaging program not specifically created for online education, has been widely used for this purpose. Additionally, it is noted that many schools fail to use the benefits of "learning management systems", which are crucial for delivering a comprehensive student experience in online education.

- **Frequency of Online Classes**
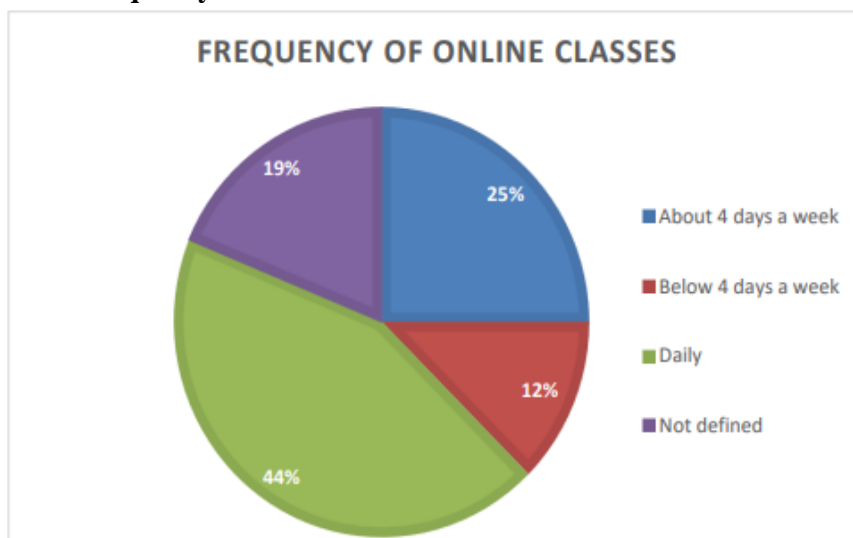
Source- Self

The acquired data gives conclusive proof that the bulk of sessions occurred on a daily basis. There are instances when classes are poorly structured and carried out without sufficient notice or preparation. Some lessons were only planned for four days per week, which seems to be a substantial reduction in the number of classes from traditional in class learning.

- **Teacher Work Engagement (ANGP)**

Indian teachers achieved favourable ratings on four out of the five measures of job engagement. Although facing professional limitations, a significant proportion of individuals reported being satisfied with their employment (50.3%), displaying enthusiasm towards teaching (66%), feeling inspired and creative (58.2%), and having the ability to have a positive impact on their students' lives (50.3%). Nevertheless, a significant minority (17.1%) indicated experiencing an lack of energy throughout this timeframe.
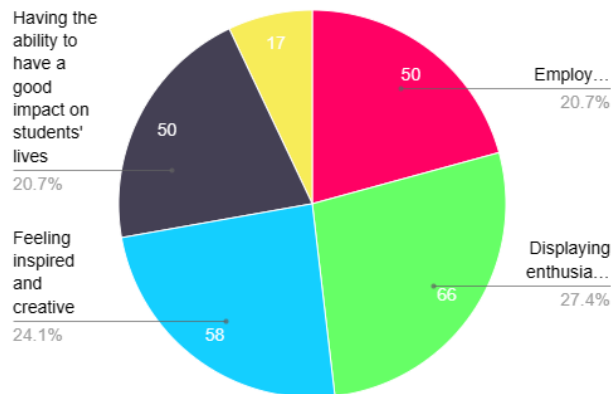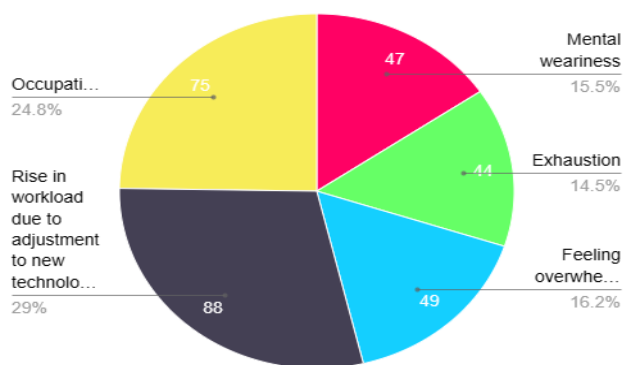
Source-Self

- **Professional factors that are specific to the context in which one works (CONTEXT)**

Source- Self

Remote teaching resulted in a significant percentage of Indian instructors experiencing mental weariness (47.4%) and exhaustion (44.2%). Approximately 49% of individuals had a sense of being overwhelmed due to the amount of work they had to do. This burden included tasks such as adjusting to new technologies and creating instructional materials for online instruction. 88.1% of the participants indicated a notable rise in their workload, leading to occupational stress for 75% of the instructors.

Conclusions

India's teachers are grappling with the transition to remote teaching on platforms like Zoom, Teams, and Google Meet, causing increased stress and effort. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation, with educators feeling overwhelmed by the workload and time constraints. Higher education teachers show more adaptability, possibly due to prior experience. Environmental factors like stress and workload negatively impact teacher engagement, but strong connections to the profession through continuing education programs, technology training and team building activities with fellow instructors can increase engagement. Future research is needed to fully understand teacher engagement in online education engagement and its influencing factors.

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