

Key challenges of teaching online in this pandemic scenario: A micro-study in Bhangore Block, West Bengal

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Abstract: *The sudden massive global pandemic COVID 19 has stopped the normal system and changed the traditional teaching-learning process over a night radically. Formal classroom setup has turned to a great paradigm shift and there is no other alternative to continue the teaching-learning process only through online mode with the help of digital technologies and to adjust their new roles the teachers are trying best to make the system smooth in this critical scenario. This micro-study explores the challenges faced by the Secondary school teachers while they are conducting online classes with the students of Bhangore Block in South 24 Parganas, West Bengal. This study was adopting a qualitative method and purposive sampling technique to choose its samples. A number of 30 school teachers were selected for the collection of data. A survey was conducted over telephonic conversation and video calling and some with face-to-face contact with a semi-structured questionnaire schedule and all the data are analysed qualitatively. The major findings of the study that the challenges faced by the secondary school teachers are mainly technical issues, lack of digital devices, lack of ICT training, teaching and assessment method, technophobia, communication gap, inappropriate home environment, etc. followed by some recommendations that the teachers, as well as the stakeholders and Government, should follow to cope up with this critical situation.*

Key Words: *Secondary school teachers, online class, new challenges.*

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY:

The global scenario of the dawn of the 21st century is changed radically by this pandemic Coronavirus (COVID 19) which has suddenly stopped the heartbeat of the Earth at a time. Daily activities of every sector are postponed, and all are under lockdown. People are at their homes, self-isolation, quarantine centres, and an individual who is going outside for any purpose has to maintain physical distancing. Every time and every moment all are in a panic of being infected by this severe touchable Coronavirus. Though at first, it becomes comfortable for most people to stay at home and spend quality time with their family members, relatives, and near once by different sorts of activities but gradually this scenario turns into a great turmoil because the nation cannot move with this. If people are at their homes how the destiny of the nation will be fixed and how the nation will be developed? For this, many sectors have decided not to stop their daily activities but to work from home and in course of time Govt. has decided to unlock some sectors step by step with some essential criteria.

But the current scenario is that all the educational institutions are still under total lockdown, no bell rings in the morning, and in the afternoon, students and teachers are forced to remain at their homes. UNESCO estimates that over 1.5 billion students in 165 countries are out of school due to COVID-19 (Tripathi & Amann, 2020). A recent article explores that nearly 1.3 billion secondary and tertiary school- age students worldwide are unable to attend school due to the ongoing crisis, which is likely to have a huge impact on global education; current UNESCO statistics put this figure at over 1.5 billion (Now, 2020).

Raghav Poddar, Chairman, Poddar Education, Mumbai states that teachers are the next level of COVID warriors, fighting for the nation and shaping the future of tomorrow, people are still not aware as to when everything will be back to normal. So, instead of leaving everything to the future, teachers should plan ahead, keeping one thing in mind- that learning should not stop (Ourselves et al., 2020). The pandemic has forced the global academic community to search for new ways of teaching and learning, including distance and online education (Tripathi & Amann, 2020). Therefore, the teachers have to conduct online teaching-learning environment with the help of digital technologies to continue the system smooth for the development of students- teaching-learning and Students' assessments process have moved from the formal classroom to virtual online to the millions of households (Wills, 2020) and after going to this process the teachers have to face various new challenges to cope up with this current scenario.

2. KNOWLEDGE REVIEW:

Vardhaman (2020) conducts a study and points out that one of the biggest challenges that the teachers are facing is how to keep students on board and also difficult to avoid distractions from other social networking sites during the learning session. Turning teaching-learning materials into digital format at a short notice has been a challenge for the few teachers as they have no strong ICT skills and every student has no affordability to access a laptop or an internet connection. Teaching et al. (2020) point out the challenges that the teachers face during the online classes are mainly technical difficulties with online teaching tools, lack of motivation among learners, psychological state of mind of the students, time-consuming resources, setting online learning activities of the students, etc. Tamrat & Teferra (2020) argue that low and irregular attendance, lack of attention of the students; the fear of technology (especially among older teachers), poor internet connection, and the additional pressure of household activities, have made online teaching a dreaded task. Quevillon (2020) presents three unique challenges that the teachers are facing mostly in online teaching are related to the passive attitude of the students, staying connected with students, and encouraging collaboration with the learners. Punit (2020) in his study focuses that the teachers who mostly face challenges in their online teaching situation are extremely technological issues. In this study, Ely & Education (2020) point out that the problems related to networking issues and learners' inactive involvement are the main challenges that the teachers face in the online teaching-learning process. In their study, Webex & Eduserve (2020) stress that the lack of human contact is the most and extreme challenge in online teaching. Team (2020) in his study points out that various technological issues, students' lack of motivation, and indifferent attitude are the common challenges for the teachers in teaching online in this situation.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Now teachers are conducting the classes through online mode. Various studies are there related to the problems faced by the teachers in Higher Education both in government and private sectors but the teachers who are working in Government secondary schools and facing various problems to continue their online classes in this pandemic scenario are not studied yet, so it creates a research gap to continue this micro-study related to the major challenges of secondary school teachers in online teaching.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The study conducts with the following objectives:

- 1) To explore the challenges that the Government Secondary school teachers are facing in online teaching in this pandemic situation.
- 2) To find out the situations that force the teachers to face difficulties in online teaching.

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The case study develops with the research questions:

- 1) What are the challenges that secondary school teachers are facing in online teaching?
- 2) What situations force teachers to face the difficulties in online teaching?

6. SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE:

The micro-study is conducted with a purposive sampling technique as the main concern in the qualitative research is to select the participants who would provide the best information for the research due to the availability and suitability of the data in this pandemic situation. The researcher had chosen 30 teachers who are working in the government secondary school, among them 18 were male and 12 were female.

7. METHODOLOGY:

The study is conducted with a qualitative paradigm and exploratory in nature. A survey was conducted over telephonic conversation and video calling with the respondents and some with face-to-face informal interview with the semi-structured questionnaire schedule.

The procedure of data collection:

The researcher first, tried to contact the respondents purposively from the target population by collecting their contact numbers, then some data were collected by arranging face to face interviews with the respondents and some over through telephonic conversation and online video calling conveniently with a semi-structured questionnaire schedule. The responses are noted by collecting different statements and opinions irrespective of genders and their interaction with the students in online teaching.

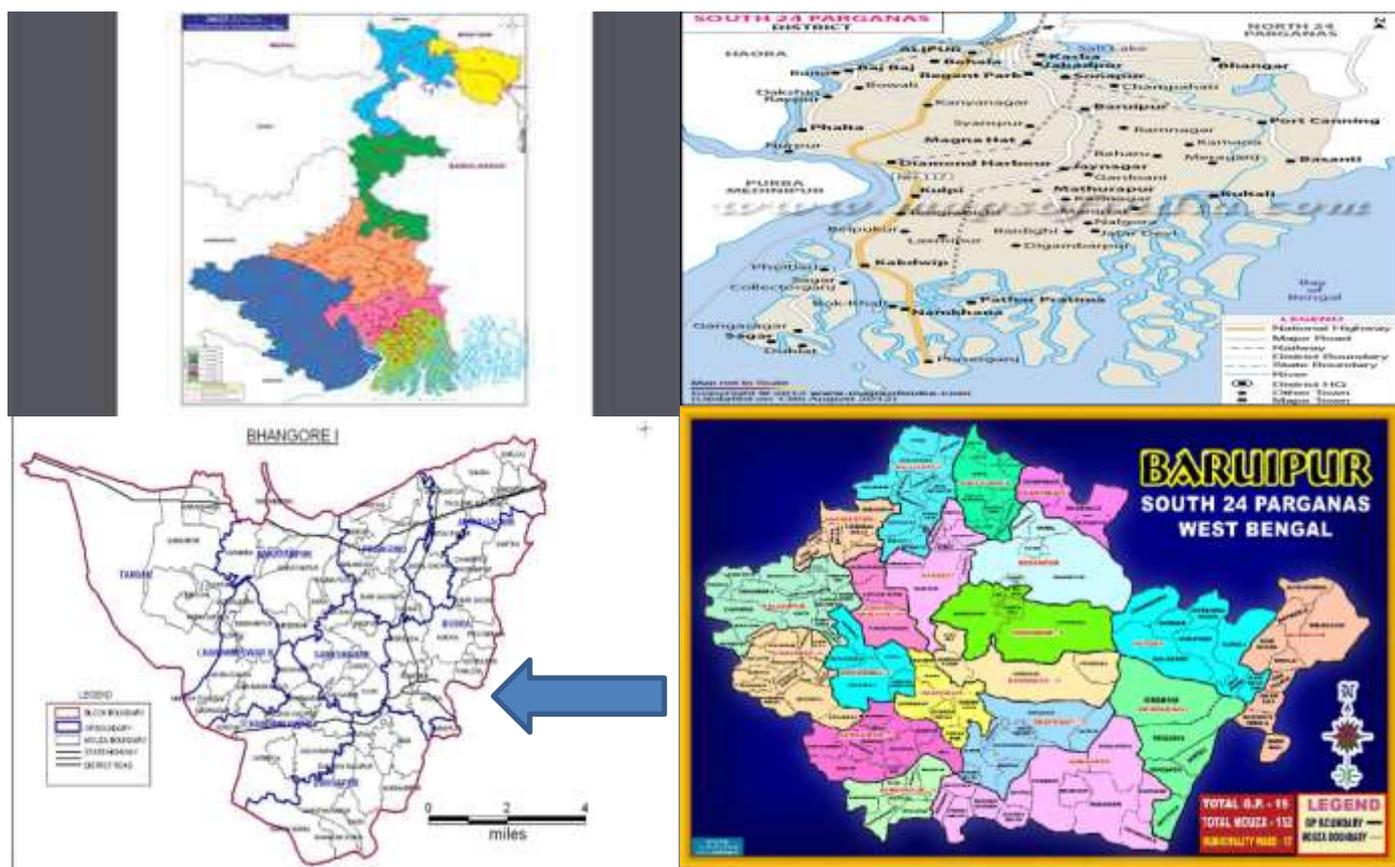


Figure-1 indicates the area where the study is conducted

8. ANALYSIS AND MAJOR FINDINGS:

An in-depth analysis of the data is done followed by thought processing. All the collected data of the interviews are translated into English and then analysed qualitatively as the number of participants was small. Some notes were written to prepare a coding scheme. Various responses have emerged concerning the challenges faced by the respondents. Then core categories of responses are developed by making the connections among the different sub-categories by some common information with the own verse.

The major findings of the micro study are: -

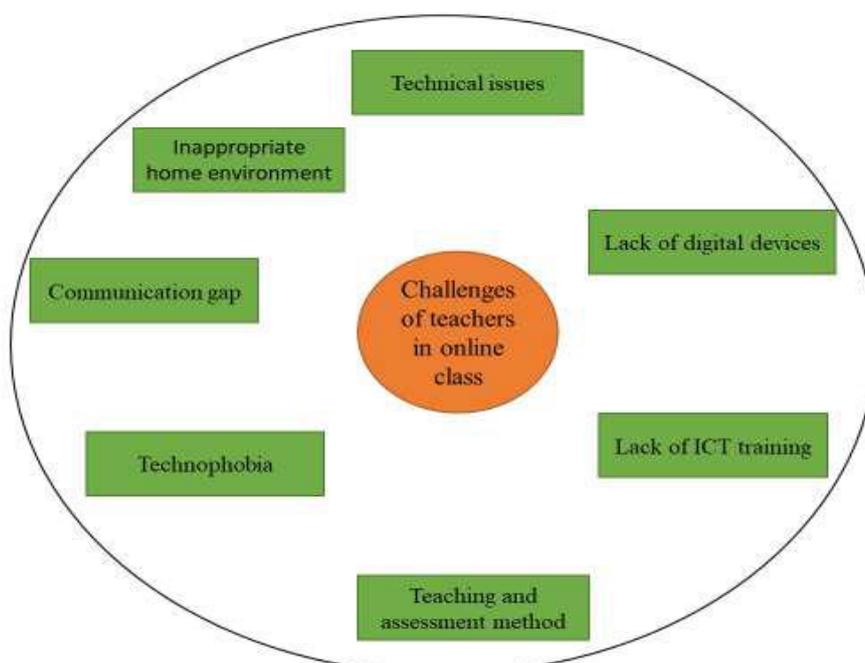


Figure-2 indicates the challenges that the teachers face in online classes during this pandemic situation.

Technical issues:

This pandemic has forced people to stay at home and very individual passes their time by scrolling the smartphone, PC, laptop, or involving in any other digital media. At a time, huge pressure in the internet browsing slows down the data speed. So, during the online classes, both the teachers and the students are facing various types of networking problems like poor data speed, continuous buffering, etc. Besides these, it becomes a major problem to conduct the online class with the students of rural area as there always connectivity problem and this become severe range after the super cyclone Amphan. *“How we can take online classes if there are lots of networking and technical issues, besides most of the students have the least idea about the technical system,”* said an assistant teacher of Ghatakpukur High School (H.S). Students are not technically sound enough; they have incompetency about various applications. Therefore, it becomes a major problem for the teachers to conduct online classes, and to bring the attention of the students to the class, taking online classes have become new challenges for the teachers.

Lack of digital devices:

Most people of Bhangore Block in West Bengal belong to the lower middle class and are below the poverty level so, it is quite natural that every parent cannot afford a smartphone or any other digital device for their children. Many guardians become jobless. Without any sufficient income, it becomes a major challenge for them to satisfy their daily needs. At this moment participating in the online classes or to connect with the teachers synchronously becomes a nightmare for the students who have no smartphone, or cannot imagine any digital devices. *“In this critical situation what the teacher will do? How will I connect with them? If students have no digital devices or at least a Smartphone...!”* said an assistant teacher of Bhangore High School (H.S). Another respondent of that school said, *“It becomes a major problem for us to conduct an online class if students have to Smartphone”*. Yet with a few students, the teachers are conducting the online classes, but a large number of students are beyond this boundary.

Lack of ICT training:

This sudden lockdown, suspension of traditional centuries' chalk duster method, and switch to digital technology and taking online classes make the teachers very much confused. Most of the senior teachers have the least knowledge about modern devices and are not accustomed to various applications like Zoom cloud, Google meet, Jitsi meet, Webex meet, Go to meet, Skype, Hangouts, etc. through which they can connect with the students. Most teachers face difficulties at the time of sharing content from their devices or browsing from the internet during their lecture sessions. A senior teacher of Bodra High School said, *“We were in a traditional flow of teaching-learning cycle, so it would take some time to be habituated with this system...what I would do if I have no proper ICT training”*. This kind of lack of efficiency creates a new challenge for the teachers in their online teaching now.

Teaching and assessment method:

Teachers also face many problems in their teaching method while they are conducting online classes, the adaptation of continuous lecture makes the students boring- it becomes exceedingly difficult to follow question-answer or any other methods. Hazards arise in the question-answer method because the students are not accustomed to the Application, they do not follow the instruction. And in the case of assessment the teachers face another problem, they didn't decide how to assess them and what would be the suitable method, whether it may be a Google question format or word file or any other format, etc. and how will be evaluated them. *“It becomes very problematic whether to decide how to assess the development of students. If any document of a worksheet is provided, they do it by coping notebooks or providing Google form they cannot access, or we cannot arrange any online assessment procedure...!”* said a Physical Science teacher of Narayanpur High School (H.S).

Technophobia:

Whatever development has brought technology in this Century there is some digital division and technophobia irrespective of gender, habitat, and economic status. Teachers are not beyond this. Some of the responses are quite noteworthy. A senior teacher in Physical Education of Chandaneswar High School said- *“.... taking an online class! No no no no! I ever used any keypad phone, where an online class is now a daydream to me!”* Another respondent (teacher) of Tardaha High School said, *“my daughter always forced me to use a Smartphone; if I bought the device, it would be useful in this situation”*. Because of this technophobia, some teachers are much beyond this online system and some are facing various challenges in this critical situation.

Communication gap:

As we know that communication takes a major part in the teaching-learning process. Conducting online classes and giving lectures make this gap to a severe stage and gradually increasing the distance between the teacher and the learners. An assistant teacher in History of Bhojhat Sarada Vidyapith said: *“....we are gradually detached from the students,*

some students are very trouble-making, it seems to them just to pass the time with the digital devices, I have no proper control over them or I cannot eliminate them from the online session, if I mute their audio and video they become totally inactive". Gradually this gap turns to a severe range. Teachers have less control over the students and some pupils become totally inactive during the session. This is one of the major problems that the teachers face in this current scenario of online teaching.

Inappropriate home environment:

The pandemic situation changes the home environment of every family. People become anxious about their lives, become frustrated, a sense of depression comes to every individual. Various types of domestic violence turn into new shapes that hamper normal life also. *"If I do not take the online classes, I cannot realize how extreme the domestic violent environment is...parents are quarrelling with each other, lots of private conversations and disturbances are there during the session!"*- said an assistant teacher of Kharamba Bani Vidyapith in Bhojerhat. At this psychological crisis, most of the students do not get any appropriate family environment and comfortable situation for joining the online classes, or if join they get no concentration to involve mentally with the class and the teachers who are also not beyond this situation. Lack of an appropriate home environment becomes a new challenge to the teachers and the students for the online teaching-learning environment.

9. DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY:

This micro-study has some delimitations, as the sample size is limited to only 30 teachers who are working in the Government secondary schools of Bhangore Block in South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, and some data are collected from the respondents through telephonic conversation, video calling, and an online interview with semi-structured questionnaire schedule. It is restricted in nature due to the critical situation of pandemic Coronavirus and time constraints as well.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS:

In this pandemic situation, though COVID 19 has changed the normal system of everything with some severe effect on mankind in this globe, nothing can stop the way of thinking and studies- it is a continuous process and to continue this process the only way to develop the future generation there is no other alternative to close with the students through the digital platform.

Though teaching in this atmosphere has proven to be extremely challenging. Most of the teachers have had to adapt to technology that they were not familiar with, overnight. And as a result, the working hours would be increased. Teachers' smartphones never seem to stop buzzing. It is the teacher who can do everything and who will change the world by developing future generations. The teacher must adapt to new technology and will be accustomed to the new devices and their technical systems. A weekly short-term assessment would be a suitable method of evaluation in this critical situation.

The Government should take the initiative in these facts to overcome the severe challenges in this pandemic situation, especially in secondary education. Learning management software should be developed; innovative mobile-based learning, quality assurance, and quality management in E-learning and necessary step for short term online ICT training for the teachers, strong network connectivity, or hotspot zone- all these may reduce the challenges that the teachers are facing during the online classes. Besides these with precise planning and suitable teaching methods and positive thinking and optimism teacher will go forward to teach the students for their future development.

11. CONCLUSION:

Therefore, it can be concluded that in this critical situation there is no other alternative to conduct the classes and to involve the students in their studies through online mode. Obviously, it has some important facilities both to the teachers and the students but the practical scenario shows the different pictures, especially to the teachers in the secondary education in the Government schools and that, is very much noteworthy. Not only the teachers but the students are in critical crisis also in this system of the online class. Whatever the difficulties may be, the teachers' positive attitudes and necessary arrangements will try to reduce the problem along with being the authority on their subjects, teachers have had to play technology trouble-shooters and at the same time to develop the future citizen and to shape the 'destiny of the nation' Government's necessary steps will be more effective to cope up with this situation to see the Century a new dawn after this COVID 19 global pandemic.

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