

Hybrid learning: Opportunities and Challenges during Covid-19

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Introduction

The beginning of Covid 19 has changed the educational landscape around the globe and brought the entire health and economic system of the world to a standstill. As per UNICEF data, as of early April 2021, 897 million school children worldwide were affected by learning disruptions due to COVID-19 related lockdowns (UNICEF, 2021). In order to contain the spread of the pandemic, computer-mediated education was initialised to strike a balance between the educational continuity of the children with the safety and security of the children.

In India, during digital teaching, teachers witnessed myriad challenges which provided the opportunity to think and adopt different hybrid approaches (offline and online both) for better teaching and learning. This descriptive research study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches to identify the challenges during digital teaching which prompted the teachers to adopt different hybrid learning approaches to carry out the teaching-learning process.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to delineate the myriad challenges faced by the teachers which had impacted the online teaching-learning process during the pandemic and to highlight different hybrid learning strategies adopted by the teachers in overcoming these challenges.

Methodology

An unpublished research study by the investigator comprised of convenience sampling of 60 teachers from the school, university and professional education backgrounds from Government, Government-aided and Private Institutions in India was taken for the purpose of this submission (Pande & Dinakar, 2022). Accessibility and acquaintance were the criteria behind the sampling. A Google form questionnaire was used as a tool for the study which contained both multiple-choice and descriptive questions and was sent through online mediums. Percentage analysis was used to analyze the data.

Results and Discussions

General Information

As far as general information is concerned about the respondents of the survey, out of the 60 respondents, 69% were females and 31% were males. 81% of the respondents were of age between 30 and 50 years with varied teaching experience but a maximum of 29% had 5-10 years of teaching experience. 40% of the educators were dealing with professional education classes (Medical, Engineering, MBA, BEd, etc.) and around 24% were teaching Primary classes (1-8). Respondents from private/self-financing institutions were 57% and 31% from Government institutions situated in 55% of the rural areas and 26% of the urban areas. Approx. 41% of the respondents used smartphones and around 36% used desktop/laptop to carry out the online classes.

Challenges faced

In response to the questions given, the responses were collected and analysed which pointed out the following academic and social challenges fronted by the educators during the web-based teaching-learning process. The challenges were;

- Teacher-student connect
- Pedagogical
- Work from home
- Health

Maintaining connectivity with the students through the online medium emerged as the biggest challenge for teachers. **86 %** of the educators said “Yes” to the following challenge being faced by them during the online learning. Out of the responses received by **58%** of the educators, technological issues, like non-availability of smartphones/computers/tablets, lack of knowledge to operate them, and network issues were cited as the prime bases by **80%** of the respondents for the above challenge faced. The thing to be noted here is that **55%** of the total respondents were from rural areas and/or had institutions situated in the rural areas.

During online learning, **50%** of the respondents suggested changes in the pedagogy to suit the online teaching-learning requirements of the children. Educators viewed that activities should be flexibly designed as per the needs and learning styles of the learners to make online learning more fruitful and effective. Keeping in view the absence of the technological requirement and the above issues of the learners, suitable strategies were designed by the educators in the due course.

64% of the respondents admitted the myriad challenges being faced by them while working from home. Different reasons expounded by the educators were, maintaining equilibrium between household and teaching responsibilities, absence of conducive teaching-learning environment at

home, network issues, time management issues as ample time was invested in pre-preparations, taking student's feedback & checking their work apart from managing technical issues at both ends.

Health challenges were cited by **50%** of the educators in the survey. Problems in eyes, body due to increased screen time and continued teaching through the small screen, continued sitting all the day for the online classes, anxiety, stress, and reduced physical activity, unlike brick and mortar teaching.

Teachers strategies

Varied offline and online strategies were adopted by the educators to tackle or minimise the challenges faced by them during the pandemic. The specific strategies adopted were;

- Teachers used to visit the student's homes in the rural areas, visited schools and met parents and students once in two weeks for doubt clarification and/or to hand over the worksheets, homework and printouts of the relevant topics covered in the online classes which they missed out or couldn't attend due to unavailability of gadgets, network issues, etc. Considering the safety of the children, teachers used to hand over the relevant educational materials to parents when they were called to collect food grains as a part of a free public distribution system launched by the government for food security during the pandemic for economically weaker sections in the rural areas.
- To establish connect with the children during digital classes, maintain the digital classroom environment and conduct the online classes effectively, different activities were designed and implemented by the teachers. Ice-breaking, interesting and interactive activities like quizzes, puzzles, Audio-Video explanations of the class topics, using social media platforms like moodle, WhatsApp and Telegram to share content links, voicemail worksheets, short & engrossing videos related to the topics, establishing classroom rules, etc.
- Teachers also become technically creative during the pandemic and downloaded different apps like Inshot, Kinemaster etc., to prepare interesting videos to carry out the classes effectively.

Implications

As we can see above, educators faced considerable challenges in the digital learning scenario during the pandemic. They have slowly and steadily faced these challenges by adopting different strategies and adapting to a new style of teaching-learning during the lockdown. They have adopted different offline and online methods to make the educational journey of the children smooth and hassle-free during the pandemic. In my understanding, the findings of the study can be conducive to comprehending different types of challenges being faced by the teachers during the pandemic and the significance of hybrid learning approaches in facing the challenges and

minimizing them. It would also be valuable for the relevant institutional authorities to develop an effective action plan to provide better pedagogical experience in the wake of looming Covid and related health and academic uncertainties in future.

References

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