

TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

My experience of Online Teaching

Dr Twinkle Pal,

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Hindu College, University of Delhi.

C OVID – 19 pandemic has deeply impacted all areas of life. Work from home is the new buzzword. The pandemic has brought about drastic changes in the field of education. When the lockdown was first imposed, most saw it from the perspective of an extended vacation. But the situation took a completely different turn as the pandemic worsened and people were asked to work from home. Schools and colleges also closed down. Within fifteen days or so, teachers were asked to start teaching online. The teachers were directed to continue teaching in virtual mode. The usual classroom teaching and learning were replaced by not familiar online teaching and interaction. Blackboards gave way to whiteboards, tablets replaced notebooks. This drastic shift came almost unannounced and unexpected. With the sudden switch to online teaching, most faculty members had no prior experience to fall back on. Transitioning the course from an in-person to an online version meant a lot of work. This shift also included learning new online tools, interacting with students on the screen, and adjusting to the poor internet connection. The journey wasn't smooth with online teaching tools, with little or no familiarity with online teaching tools. After a few chaotic weeks, teachers and students adjusted to new ways of teaching and learning. While teachers got trained to handle online classes, bringing students together was a challenge due to their socioeconomic backgrounds.

Undoubtedly, online teaching came in handy to arrest the disruption in learning caused by COVID -19. However, the transition to a virtual classroom wasn't a smooth one. Online teaching is challenging both for teachers and students. With colleges closed, taking online classes from home brought many complexities. Many teachers, especially female teachers' work-life balance, became quite tricky. Children who had never seen

their mothers work from home took some time to adjust to the new arrangement with their mothers being around but unavailable. The female teachers also struggled to bring forward

their work commitments with many distractions. Making students understand that you are not available 24X7 without sounding rude and less responsible did not come easy. During the online class, retaining students' attention became quite a challenge. It wasn't easy to keep students focused. Another challenge most teachers encounter in online teaching is knowing how much students have understood. The unconventional set-up of online classrooms makes it difficult for teachers to monitor the actions and behaviours of students as many students switch off their video and/or audio. The black screen of the laptop is not at all appealing. After some time, it became nearly impossible to persuade students to keep their cameras on or initiate any interaction. While technological glitches such as the internet and connectivity issues hamper online learning, the lack of face-to-face interaction with students often makes the assessments more difficult. We all miss physical interaction with the class. WhatsApp has become a second-tier response after official online teaching platforms.

Last year when we received communication from college directing us to begin our classes online, the idea of taking classes from home was highly comforting. Being a mother of two small kids, this arrangement seemed more feasible and practical. Well, this notion of conducting lectures



from home would be far easier and more sorted was shattered soon. With my kids walking in and out of the room, sometimes shouting during a lecture or even fighting with each other in the same room where I was taking my lecture was quite a distraction. Moreover, the shift to online classes meant that teachers had to be present and available 24X7. I became busier than before, and the work seemed never-ending. Students were dropping texts and writing mails at odd hours. As a teacher, my role now expanded. I was now not only teaching the students but mentoring them. I would connect with them and know about their well-being. All of this took place while simultaneously supervising my son, who too was attending online classes in the adjacent room. So, while taking lectures, I would take a break and move to the adjoining room to check on my son.

On the other hand, my younger one would wait restlessly to finish my classes and come out of the room. Soon I realized that taking classes from home was not feasible for me. So, I began conducting online classes from my husband's office. His office became my new classroom. Soon, we all realized that this online teaching model was bound to continue. Returning to the classroom seemed a remote possibility. So, I

started preparing PowerPoint presentations and looking for YouTube links to make my lectures more interesting. However, online exhaustion set in after a point, and students missed classes. Indeed, it hasn't been easy for the students either. Students learning exclusively through online instruction do miss out on a lot. I often tell my students that one of the limitations of online teaching and learning is that students lose out on peer interaction and many experiences and life skill development that they would have benefitted from while attending college. Also, the bond that the teacher and students share in a conventional classroom setting cannot be replicated and established in a virtual mode no matter how hard both parties try.

The COVID 19 pandemic has changed education drastically. There is no denying that online classes came in because we all were thrust into the situation. There is a distinct rise of e-learning, whereby teaching happens remotely and digitally using various online platforms. Online teaching has many advantages and disadvantages. It has its fair share of challenges. But there is no denying that it is here to stay, and it is the new normal.

