

Challenges and Insights from Teachers on Online Teaching: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract

An unprecedented global shift from traditional classroom instruction to online teaching was brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, with synchronous modalities of delivery emerging as the main educational approach in Mizoram. This study highlights the difficulties with recommendations while examining postgraduate teachers' experiences with synchronous online teaching during the epidemic. A qualitative data collected through open-ended questionnaire questions their experiences with online teaching. Results show that while teachers demonstrated adaptability in transitioning to online teaching, the process was hindered by persistent technological challenges, inadequate digital infrastructure, and a lack of training, particularly in rural areas. Pedagogical adjustments were necessary but often difficult due to reduced student engagement, limited feedback, and the absence of non-verbal cues. Teachers faced increased workloads, time-management struggles, and emotional strain, compounded by isolation and the blurred boundaries between personal and professional life.

Keywords: Teacher experiences, Synchronous Online Learning, COVID-19 Pandemic

Introduction

The swift shift to online teaching especially during the COVID-19 pandemic transformed education globally, offering continuity but also exposing significant challenges. Teachers frequently encountered issues like unstable internet access, weakened engagement, and diminished classroom interaction barriers that amplified concerns around motivation, interaction dynamics, and technological readiness (Ro

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et al., 2024; Fernando, Luis & Luis, (2025). In the Indian context, disparities in access to gadgets further exacerbated these problems, varying levels of digital literacy, and socio-economic differences between urban and rural learners. Understanding teachers lived experiences in navigating these challenges is critical for informing policy decisions, enhancing online pedagogy, and ensuring equitable access to quality education (Roa et al., 2024).

Objectives of the Research

1. To explore the problems faced by teachers during synchronous online teaching process.
2. To propose solutions for overcoming the challenges encountered in the synchronous online teaching process.

Research Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study using an open-ended questionnaire is to investigate Mizoram teachers' experiences with synchronous online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. For the purpose of the study, Disproportionate Stratified Random Sampling was employed where different departments of Mizoram University (MZU) and Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts of India (ICFAI), Aizawl, Mizoram served as strata.

Findings related to Objective No. 1: To explore the problems faced by teachers during synchronous online teaching process.

A. Challenges faced by teachers during synchronous online teaching process:

Following is the analysis of teachers' response for open ended items of the questionnaire:

1. What is that one thing that you dislike about online teaching?

Teachers dislike several aspects of online teaching which were - internet issues on both sides (teacher and student) and difficulties in ensuring students' attention due to connectivity problems. Teacher struggle to gauge students' understanding and manage their behavior effectively due to lack of physical interaction which limits eye contact and classroom control. When students turn off their cameras, teachers cannot observe their reactions, making it harder to assess engagement. Rapid feedback is challenging, and body language cues are lost, making it difficult to determine if students truly comprehend the material. Student participation is often minimal, with many remaining idle and insincere. Online teaching tends to be one-way communication, as students do not engage actively. Distractions from family

members further hinder focus, making lessons feel monotonous. Communication barriers affect learning, making online teaching resemble distance education with minimal student interaction, ultimately reducing its effectiveness.

2. What is that one major problem you faced with students from rural origin?

Teachers face several challenges when working with students from rural areas which include frequent power cuts and internet connectivity issues on the students' end, as well as limited access to essential resources such as high-end mobile phones, Wi-Fi, laptops, and stable internet connections. Rural students often experience more network disruptions during online classes, leading to difficulties in learning. Additionally, there is a noticeable disparity in digital literacy, with some students lacking the necessary training and familiarity with online platforms. A lack of interest in online learning further compounds the issue. Moreover, language barriers arise as some students struggle with English, which could have been clarified in their local language in a physical classroom setting.

3. What are the easiest to handle online teaching-learning platforms used by you?

The most user-friendly online teaching-learning platforms reported by teachers include Google Meet, which allows easy access to upload study materials where students can download based on their internet availability, WhatsApp is convenient for clarifications and discussions and Zoom is ideal for teaching. Other widely used platforms include Google Classroom, Google Drive and Telegram.

4. Mention one major problem you encounter due to only virtual presence of students in classes?

Teachers face several challenges due to the virtual presence of students in online classes. These include internet issues, minimal interaction causing students to feel shy or hesitant to ask questions, and difficulty in assessing students' understanding. Building personal connections is nearly impossible, and teachers cannot verify if students are genuinely attending. The absence of facial expressions and body language reduces engagement, making it hard to gauge attentiveness. Identifying students is difficult, and many lack motivation, concentration, and classroom etiquette. Power cuts, background noise, multitasking during lessons, insincerity, and widespread cheating in online assessments further hinder effective teaching. Additionally, online teaching lacks the dynamic, interactive nature of traditional classrooms.

5. What is one major challenge in teaching online classes?

Major challenge in teaching online classes reported by teachers are as follows - difficulty in capturing students' attention, lack of technical equipment, and frequent

connectivity disruptions. Limited student-teacher communication and insufficient student responses make engagement challenging, often resulting in one-way teaching. Teachers struggle to assess student attentiveness, as many are unwilling to participate. Unfamiliarity with technology reduces student interest, and unequal internet access creates learning disparities. Interactive sessions are often missing, and delivering practical knowledge requires more effort than offline teaching. Additional issues include lack of study materials, inadequate online infrastructure, power cuts, and exhaustion from prolonged screen time. Teachers also find it difficult to address individual student needs. However, some educators have adapted to the system by adopting a more motivational approach.

6. What is the major lack in student's performance as a result of online learning?

Major lack in student's performance as a result of online learning reported by teachers are as follows - Connectivity issues hinder focus, and students struggle with in-depth understanding, especially in technical subjects like programming. Online exams are taken less seriously and are often ineffective. Student interaction has declined, with many unwilling to engage with teachers or respond to questions. Poor time management, lack of resources, and ethical concerns in academic performance further impact learning. Creativity and manners are lacking, along with issues like late attendance and reduced self-motivation. Many students neglect acquiring knowledge, affecting their dedication and seriousness. Shy and introverted students struggle to clarify doubts, leading to superficial learning. Additionally, sincere students often go unrecognized, while less dedicated learners pass easily.

7. What is the most essential online etiquette to be followed by the student in online learning according to you?

The most essential online etiquette to be followed by the student in online learning as reported by teachers are as follows - students should always respond to questions or discussions initiated by teachers, even with a simple answer like "yes" or "no," as it contributes to engagement. Knowing when to participate and when to listen is crucial, along with maintaining active involvement in discussions. To minimize disruptions, students should keep their cameras on, face the screen as much as possible, and mute their microphones during lectures and attend classes in a quiet, vacant room. Students should prepare themselves in advance on the topic to be covered enhances comprehension. Prompt responses or feedback when asked by the teacher are essential. Silent attendance is expected, as unintentional activation of audio or video can disrupt the class. Punctuality is important, and students should avoid interrupting or disturbing the teacher while they are delivering the lecture.

Maintaining classroom decorum, focusing on key concepts, and staying attentive are vital. Additionally, students should dress appropriately, and ensure a stable internet connection for uninterrupted participation.

8. If you have suffered with any health issues while teaching in online classes please specify it and do you have any suggestion to overcome it in online classes?

Teachers face various health issues while conducting online classes, including throat irritation, headaches, migraines, back and neck pain, wrist pain, and eye strain due to prolonged screen exposure. Continuous sitting for long hours also leads to backaches and tailbone pain. Teaching for extended periods, often exceeding six hours a day, results in mental exhaustion and fatigue.

To mitigate these issues, teachers suggest keeping sufficient water to relieve throat irritation, taking short breaks during classes, and informing students about health concerns. Breaking sessions into smaller intervals can also help reduce strain and improve overall well-being.

B. Thematic analysis of teachers' experiences with online instruction during the COVID-19 epidemic

Teachers' experiences with online instruction during the COVID-19 epidemic were conveyed by a number of recurrent themes that emerged from the questionnaire data's thematic analysis. These themes are presented below.

1. Technological Preparedness and Accessibility

Teachers reported varying levels of familiarity with online platforms at the onset of the pandemic. While some adapted quickly to tools such as Google Meet, Zoom, and WhatsApp for classroom interaction, others struggled with the lack of technical training. Unstable internet connections, power outages, and the absence of adequate digital devices posed significant challenges, especially in rural areas. These limitations disrupted class continuity and hampered effective delivery of lessons.

2. Pedagogical Adjustments

Making the transition from conventional in-person techniques to a purely online mode required teachers to redesign lesson plans, adopt digital resources, and modify teaching strategies. Many acknowledged difficulty in assessing students' comprehension due to limited feedback mechanisms and the absence of non-verbal cues. Some attempted innovative approaches, including recorded lectures and interactive quizzes, but noted that these required extra preparation time.

3. Student Engagement and Participation

Maintaining active student engagement emerged as one of the most challenging aspects. Teachers observed reduced participation, especially from students lacking stable internet or conducive home environments for learning. Distractions at home, camera-off tendencies, and reluctance to speak during class were common, leading to reduced interaction and limited collaborative learning.

4. Workload and Time Management

Teachers indicated that online teaching increased their workload due to the need to prepare digital materials, troubleshoot technical issues, and follow up individually with students. Balancing professional responsibilities with personal obligations at home proved difficult for many teachers.

5. Emotional and Professional Well-being

Many teachers experienced feelings of isolation, fatigue, and stress during prolonged exposure to screen and prolonged periods of online teaching. The absence of in-person interaction with colleagues and students negatively affected morale. However, some expressed that overcoming these challenges enhanced their adaptability, digital literacy, and resilience as educators.

6. Challenges in Teaching Students from Rural Areas

Teachers noted that children in rural areas had restricted access to gadgets like computers, smartphones, and Wi-Fi, frequent power outages, and inadequate internet connectivity. Participation was hampered by many people's low levels of digital literacy and inexperience with online platforms. A lack of interest in online learning and language barriers, particularly the difficulty of understanding English without the option for local language clarification, further affected engagement. These factors combined to widen the learning gap between rural and urban students.

7. Essential Online Etiquette for Students

Teachers emphasized that students should actively engage by responding to questions and participating in discussions while knowing when to listen. Keeping cameras on, facing the screen, muting microphones during lectures, and attending from a quiet environment were considered crucial to minimize disruptions. Preparation before class, punctuality, and maintaining classroom decorum were highlighted as key to effective learning. Teachers also stressed the importance of appropriate dress, stable internet connectivity, and avoiding interruptions during lectures.

8. Problems in Online Examinations

Teachers observed that students often approached online exams with less seriousness, leading to compromised assessment quality. Issues included superficial preparation, reliance on unfair means, and lack of genuine effort. Connectivity problems disrupted test-taking, and the absence of strict monitoring reduced accountability. As a result, online examinations were seen as less effective in accurately evaluating student knowledge and skills.

9. Technological Issues

Teachers reported that frequent internet connectivity problems, coupled with limited access to essential digital devices such as laptops, high-end smartphones, or stable Wi-Fi, significantly disrupt the flow of online classes. In addition to resulting in missed classes and delays, these technological limitations also make it more difficult for students to access course materials, engage fully in class, and turn in assignments on time.

10. Parental Disruptions

It was also observed that many students face frequent interruptions from family members while attending online classes at home. Such disturbances break the students' concentration, cause them to miss important parts of the lecture, and make it difficult to maintain a focused learning environment. This lack of a dedicated, quiet study space ultimately diminishes engagement and overall academic performance.

11. Language Barriers in Online Learning

Teachers reported that language barriers posed a significant challenge in the online learning environment. Some students struggled to comprehend lessons delivered in English, leading to gaps in understanding and reduced participation. Teachers noted that, in a physical classroom, such difficulties could have been addressed more effectively through immediate clarification in the students' local language, which is harder to facilitate in virtual settings.

Findings related to Objective No.2: To propose solutions for overcoming the challenges encountered in the synchronous online teaching process.

The major challenges encountered by teachers and their proposed solutions for overcoming the challenges encountered in the synchronous online teaching process are highlighted below:

TABLE. 1

Challenges faced by teachers during online teaching and their suggestions

Sl. No.	Challenges	Suggestions / Solutions
1	Technological Preparedness and Accessibility – Teachers had varying familiarity with online platforms; unstable internet, power outages, and lack of devices disrupted classes.	Provide structured digital training for teachers; supply devices to under-resourced schools; improve rural internet infrastructure; offer recorded sessions for students who miss classes.
2	Pedagogical Adjustments – Difficulty in adapting lesson plans and assessing students without non-verbal cues.	Use interactive tools like polls, quizzes, and breakout rooms; incorporate formative assessments; encourage use of recorded lectures for reinforcement.
3	Student Engagement and Participation – Reduced interaction, camera-off tendencies, and distractions at home.	Implement engagement policies (camera-on rule); introduce small-group activities to sustain attention.
4	Workload and Time Management – Extra time required for material preparation and follow-up with students.	Provide collaborative lesson planning support; reduce non-essential administrative tasks; offer time management workshops.
5	Emotional and Professional Well-being – Feelings of isolation, stress, and fatigue from prolonged screen time.	Organize peer-support groups; schedule regular breaks; promote blended teaching models when possible.
6	Challenges in Teaching Rural Students – Poor connectivity, lack of devices, low digital literacy, and language barriers.	Set up community learning hubs with internet access; provide bilingual resources; train students in basic digital skills.
7	Essential Online Etiquette for Students – Lack of punctuality, camera-off habits, inappropriate dress, and noise disruptions.	Conduct online orientation on etiquette; enforce classroom rules; encourage parents to support a distraction-free study space.

8	Problems in Online Examinations – Superficial preparation, unfair means, lack of monitoring, and connectivity issues.	Use proctoring software; design application-based questions; split large exams into smaller timed segments; provide mock tests.
9	Technological Issues – Frequent internet disruptions and lack of devices for students.	Provide affordable data packages for students; set up school-managed device loan schemes; maintain offline-accessible resources such as recorded lessons and PDFs.
10	Parental Disruptions – Frequent interruptions at home during class.	Educate parents on the importance of uninterrupted learning through Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) meetings; suggest creating a dedicated quiet corner for online classes.
11	Language Barriers - Students face difficulty understanding lessons delivered in English.	-Use bilingual explanations, combining English with the local language. -Provide supplementary study materials or summaries in the local language. -Encourage students to ask questions in either language to ensure clarity and understanding.

Summary of Findings

The findings show that the shift to online learning brought diverse challenges and adaptations for teachers. Technological preparedness varied, some adapted quickly to platforms like Google Meet and Zoom, while others lacked training. Poor internet, frequent power outages, and limited devices, especially in rural areas, disrupted lessons.

Teachers redesigned lesson plans, tried to engage students in the most practical way, but still problems surfaced. Overall, technological, pedagogical, social, and emotional challenges collectively shaped the effectiveness of online education during the pandemic.

Conclusion and Implication

The findings reveal that while teachers demonstrated adaptability in transitioning to online teaching, the process was hindered by persistent technological challenges, inadequate digital infrastructure, and a lack of training, particularly in rural areas. Pedagogical adjustments were necessary but often difficult due to reduced student engagement, limited feedback, and the absence of non-verbal cues. Teachers faced increased workloads, time-management struggles, and emotional strain, compounded by isolation and the blurred boundaries between personal and professional life. Rural students were disproportionately disadvantaged by poor connectivity, device shortages, low digital literacy, and language barriers, widening the educational gap. Assessment quality was weakened by problems with online exams, such as absenteeism and poor student attitudes. Language barriers in online learning reduce comprehension and engagement, but bilingual teaching, local-language materials, and flexible questioning can improve understanding and participation. Furthermore, frequent disruptions from parents and home environments, along with the need for better online etiquette, highlighted the importance of structured, distraction-free learning spaces. These challenges collectively indicate that while online education offers flexibility, its effectiveness depends heavily on technological readiness, student discipline, and strong institutional support.

However, it is important to note that teachers' technological skills can improve over time through proper training and continuous professional development. With structured workshops, hands-on practice, and exposure to various digital tools, teachers can gradually build confidence and competence in using ICT. Ongoing support, peer collaboration, and institutional encouragement further enhance their ability to integrate technology effectively into teaching, ultimately making online instruction more engaging and impactful.

Furthermore, online teaching-learning remains a crucial and relevant aspect of education, as emphasized in UGC Guidelines and NEP 2020, which promote digital platforms and blended learning to enhance access and quality in higher education.

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