Challenges Faced by Social Science Teachers in COVID and Post-COVID times with reference to ICT based in-service programmes

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Abstract

This paper presents the teacher's experiences of teaching social science subject in COVID and post COVID times and what kinds of in-service programmes they have attended. The objective of the study includes: challenges faced by teachers in COVID and post COVID times and relevance of ICT based programmes organized for them. The data was collected from seven schools of south east District Delhi. 35 teachers were the participants of this study. Findings of the study show that insufficient programmes were organized for teachers during pandemic based ICT tools; teachers are facing challenges of lack of attendance, lack of interest and difficulty in content delivery in post COVID times; teachers believe online mode is not an appropriate mode of study in comparison to offline. Majority of teachers used zoom and meet platform for online classes however they were not given ample programmes for the same.

Key Words: In-service Programmes, teaching of Social Science, ICT based programmes, Online Education, Blended Learning

Introduction

School education is the most important part of our children’s life. The country has taken major steps like providing free and compulsory education to all children from 6-14 years of age under Right to Education Act, 2009. These steps are taken to ensure the access to all children so that every child can get at least elementary education however the country is still far behind in providing quality education to all. One of the reasons of not able to achieve the required quality in school education can be seen in terms of poor teacher education in the country. Teacher is the one who plays a lead role in any classroom setting as he or she has to design and implement the concept to students. That is why; teacher education and school education cannot be seen as two different areas of education but one supporting the other. Teacher education can be divided in two broad areas – pre service education which works to prepare teachers through different courses like D.E.L.Ed, B.Ed., B.Ed., M.Ed. etc and in-service education that intends to keep teachers updated with various pedagogical, technological and many more tools. Keeping the quality of teacher education aside, one can still find various universities and institutions that impart pre service education however in-service education appears to be less in number also. Vyas (2015) also shared about quality of in-service education as “It has also been reported that the quality of in-service training is often not personalised to the needs of the teacher, and they hence fail in enhancing teaching.” Need of regular and special in-service programmes was even more realized when the whole school education shifted to online mode during COVID in March 2020. The sudden shift from physical mode to online mode was new for everyone specially students and teachers. The situation got worse in government schools because they lacked behind not only in terms of educating themselves about the use of online platforms/technology but also the access to devices like smart phones and laptops. Teachers and students both faced several challenges in conducting and attending classes in an online mode. Teaching as a whole got affected with this including the teaching of social science. There was a need to educate teachers on mass level about ICT in the pandemic however the supply of the programmes seemed insufficient. Even after two years when the teaching has been shifted back to physical mode teachers are facing challenges on a regular basis due to the absence of quality discussion in the last two years with the students. Our in-service programmes could have been used as a great tool to educate teachers about ICT. Various education policies and commissions realized the importance of in-service programmes for teachers on a regular basis. National Education Policy (2020) regarding in-service education of teachers articulates that “The use of technology platforms such as SWAYAM/DIKSHA for online training of teachers will be encouraged, so that the standardized training programmes can be administered to large number of teachers within a short span of time.” This paper tries to study the challenges faced by social science teachers during COVID and post COVID times due to the lack of in-service education. The student who just entered class six and studied two years in online mode without required discussion he or she will not be able to grasp the abilities needed for social science subject. The teacher who kept on struggling with the use of ICT tools in this period will be less confident in her approach for a longer period. Here, the attempt is made to know how many programmes were provided and whether those programmes were qualitatively relevant for teachers or not.

Objectives
The objectives of the study are

- To study the challenges faced by social science teachers during COVID and post COVID times
- To analyse the relevance of ICT based in-service programmes for social science teachers during COVID and post COVID times

Methodology
The study is a part of the research which aims to know the role of in-service programmes in Delhi and Bihar however this mainly focuses on to study the in-service programmes organized during COVID and their relevance in present time. Seven schools have been used for data collection in South East Delhi. Five social science teachers from each school have been selected randomly as participants of this research. There were 20 male and 15 female teachers. 25 teachers have done Masters and B.Ed. whereas 10 teachers did graduation and B.Ed. Out of 35 teachers, 11 teachers had less than 5 years of experience, 13 teachers had 5 to 10 years of experience and 8 teachers had more than 10 years of experience. Questionnaire has been used to collect data from the teachers in which they shared their experiences regarding in-service programmes and challenges faced in social science teaching during COVID and POST COVID times. The analysis of the research is done qualitatively.

Analysis
The data collected through questionnaire has been analysed in following themes:

In-Service Programmes related to Social Science
Since the social science teachers were selected as participants for this study Teachers were asked about the in-service programmes related to social science subject they have attended pre- covid, during covid and post covid times. The following bar graph shows a comparative response of the teachers.

(Fig 1 In-service programmes related to Social Science attended by teachers before, during and Post COVID times)

 Majority of teachers have not attended any in-service programme related to subject during and post COVID times. 14 out of 35 teachers during covid times and 18 out of 35 teachers in post covid times have not attended any programme related to subject of social science. 7 teachers reported that they attended one programme and 6 teachers attended two programmes in post covid times that show steps are being taken to provide continuous professional development programmes to teachers. The system also feels the need to compensate teacher’s professional development that was harmed due to the pandemic. However, the number of programmes during pandemic could be increased. It has been 35 years since the NEP 1986 stated that “Teachers should have the freedom to innovate,[and] to devise appropriate methods of communication and activities relevant to the needs and the capabilities of the community.” In order to provide this freedom the government must also take steps to strengthen teacher’s capabilities through providing capacity building programmes regularly.

In-Service Programmes related to ICT Tools
The second question targets towards asking how many programmes were related to ICT. As we know that teachers faced difficulties in operating devices to communicate with students to provide them teaching learning experience during the pandemic. The need of ICT based programmes were felt all across the world. The responses shared by teachers of national capital Delhi are shown in the following graph:
The similar results can be seen here also because majority of teachers have attended zero programmes related to ICT which was a compulsory requirement for teachers to perform tasks in online mode specifically taking classes. Before, during and post COVID data of in-service programmes show zero programmes attended by 17 out of 35 teachers, 17 out of 35 teachers and 15 out of 35 teachers respectively. Very less number of teachers attended more than 2 programmes on ICT during pandemic that means teachers were not given enough support to transform their teaching for online mode. This surely would impact the students' learning in coming years because teachers might not be competent enough to hold discussion on platforms like meet and zoom. According to a survey by Learning Spiral, “84% of teachers face challenges in delivering education digitally. Nearly 50% of teachers face issues related to signal signal and data expenses. The teachers had no prior experience teaching online and the survey says less than 20% of teachers received orientation on delivering online classes.”

**Teaching of Social Science in online mode**

The teachers were firstly asked about the ways they connected with students in online mode. The following graph depicts the resources used by teacher:

(Fig 3 Online platforms used by teachers in the online mode of teaching)

As one can see in the graph almost all teachers took live sessions with students through zoom/meet and 25 of the total teachers shared resources on whatsapp. The use of google classroom was done by only 13 teachers. The reason might be that teachers do not know how to use it and students might not have an email account. It is also important to note that 13 out of 35 teachers used all three platforms to interact with students and 11 teachers used live classes along with sharing resources like worksheet and youtube link. We can also say that online platform opened doors of possibilities of digital education for teachers and students. Despite having minimal education of how to use technology, teachers and students both put efforts into learning through technology in the pandemic. However, the online education has much more than these platforms that can help teachers and students for educating themselves.
The next part discusses the satisfaction level of teachers in the online mode and following pie chart represents that data:

(Fig 4 Teachers' Satisfaction level with online mode of teaching)

With this new mode of learning, majority of teachers found it moderately and slightly satisfied. Only 23% found it very satisfied and 3% that means only 1 teacher shared that it was completely satisfied mode for her. Here we are only studying teachers’ responses and not including students’ experience of learning through this mode. Insufficient in-service programmes organized on ICT might contribute to the reason of not finding this way satisfactory for learning. Khan et al (2020) shared the positive aspect of online learning as, “Online education has led to flexibility in time and space, easy and rapid share of study material, quick feedbacks, more freedom to connect with faculty.” Connectivity issue can also be one of the reasons which is discussed in the next section on challenges faced by teachers.

While discussing about the challenges faced by teachers in online mode of teaching, teachers reported several issues including lack of digital devices and internet services, low attendance of students, problems in communicating with students, lack of interest from students’ side. All teachers reported that they faced these issues in different magnitude. The most faced challenge was unavailability of devices and internet on students’ end consequently teachers were not able to connect with all students as they could do so in physical mode. Arora and Srinivasan (2020) also shared that “There were several challenges faced by teachers during online teaching and learning process such as network issues, lack of training, lack of awareness, lack of interest, less attendance, lack of personal touch and lack of interaction.”

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The teachers shared that they have not provided any fund by the government for internet connection and data however 27 out of 35 teachers shared that government had given them tab few years back that they used during pandemic for online teaching. Joshi, Vinay and Bhaskar (2020) also shared, “Financial support to teachers like interest free loans to buy laptops, cameras, microphones etc will make the teachers well equipped to take sessions, even at home.”

When teachers were asked about the kinds of programmes that they attended during COVID, most of the teachers shared about the programmes conducted by Google to educate teachers to use various online platforms like Google Meet, Google Classroom, Youtube etc however the number of this type of programmes was very low i.e. only two. In order to transform the whole teaching to a completely new mode the teachers should be equipped with these tools by arranging required programmes on a regular basis. Besides this teachers reported about online learning programmes provided by SWAYAM /DIKSHA that they used to plan their teaching in the pandemic. Teachers found them useful as they could use them as per their level and time availability. Joshi, Vinay and Bhaskar (2020) discussed about government work in the field as, “Many initiatives have been taken to kick start the education covering all aspects, some of them are SWAYAM online courses for teachers to increase their knowledge and efficiency; e-PG Pathshala covering social science and arts subjects, MOOCs for technical and non-technical courses; Vidwan database to provide information to peers and potential collaborators, etc. SWAYAM PRABHA DTH added 12 channels to air the educational video on television to reach areas where internet connectivity is a concern.”

Teaching of Social Science in POST COVID times

It has been more than two months since the teaching at middle school level has been started again in physical mode completely after two years. The two years of online mode of teaching impacted the overall teaching learning process for longer duration. When teachers were asked about whether they are facing any issue in POST COVID times, 29 out of 35 teachers accepted that they are facing issues even in the physical mode now. The following pie chart shows this data:
When they were asked to share challenges that they are facing now, 6 teachers shared that they are facing the issue of low attendance in the class. Students are not coming to school regularly due to which the whole process is hampered. 8 teachers shared the issue of learning gap that took place due to COVID period. One teacher wrote ‘Students are not able to cope because that studied in online mode for two years’. Another teacher shared that ‘Students have lost the written strength due to the use of watching videos and studying through that’. One teacher even shared that students want online classes now. 3 teachers reported that students are now not taking interest in the class. One teacher shared that she is facing difficulty in content delivery.

Teachers were specifically asked about the students’ response in post COVID times to which majority of teachers told that students are more active in offline mode. The following graph shows their responses:

(Fig 6 Students’ response in social science class in post COVID times)

According to this graph, only 11% teachers find students passive in offline mode that means teaching in offline mode is considered to be more joyful learning by the teachers as students are actively take part in offline mode. There is no doubt that physical mode of learning provides a holistic experience to students and teachers in the teaching-learning process that cannot be fully replaced by online mode of teaching.

During COVID times, teachers were asked to share the worksheet or video link to students that they receive from Directorate of Education. The impact of that practice can be seen in present time too. When teachers were asked about this, 22 out of 35 teachers found this practice helpful in post COVID times also as they are able to use the same in their discussion with students. 7 teachers do not find them relevant now because they believe the learning gap cannot be filled with it. Three teachers shared that their students found this practice useful and took interest in completing the worksheet. Three teachers even found this practice negative for students’ understanding as they are facing challenges in connecting with students due to that.

Which Mode is better?

Teachers were also asked to share their preferences for online and offline mode to which no single teacher found online mode useful and they are not going to completely switch to this mode. 9 teachers preferred blended mode of learning and 26 teachers found only offline mode useful. The following graph represents their response to this question:
Conclusion
The teaching has been resumed in offline mode officially but it might take a number of months or even year to bring it to its original form. The time spent in pandemic impacted the teaching learning process a lot. Although an attempt was made to provide several in-service programmes to teachers during and after COVID however those were insufficient to educate them about transforming the whole education in online mode. Consequently, teachers have several challenges like lack of attendance, lack of interest from students’ side and difficulties in delivering content of social science to students in post COVID times also. Teachers want to take classes in offline mode as they believe it to be a better way to communicate with students. Online platforms like SWAYAM/DIKSHA helped a lot in professional development of teachers because the government could not provide enough training to deal with online mode of education. The focus was given to teaching of social science in the study however there was no subject specific observation except teachers shared that they want to have discussion with students in physical mode for better conceptual clarity. It can be stated that not only teachers but students also need to work hard to reach a common platform for discussing any concept of social science.

Reference