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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE TEACHING STRATEGIES IN
KERALA, INDIA BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

MA thesis

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting collapse of educational institutions entirely caught India's higher education off guard. Even while some elite private universities have almost ten years of experience with online and remote learning, the great majority of them were unprepared and sought out quick fixes for various teaching-learning components depending on the situation. This thesis compares how English Literature was taught in Kerala, India before the pandemic using traditional ways of teaching, how it evolved into an online or blended form of teaching during the lockdown and how it is now in a post covid situation. I will be using questionnaires and interviews to understand the experience of the teachers through the above-mentioned period (2020-22). The Technology Acceptance Model will be applied to account for the teachers' perspectives.

Keywords: pandemic, Indian education, pedagogy, teacher perspective, technology acceptance model.

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown measures implemented in India in March 2020 caught higher education institutions off guard, as they were unprepared for the sudden shift to online learning. While some top-tier and private institutions had prior experience with online and distance learning, the majority had to quickly find temporary solutions to continue teaching. India's educational landscape is characterized by its vastness, cultural diversity, and historical achievements, which necessitates careful consideration of contextual factors when examining the impact of pedagogical approaches during the pandemic. This research aims to explore the changes in pedagogical approaches that occurred before, during, and after the pandemic and their implications for English literature education in India. By examining the experiences and perceptions of teachers, it seeks to shed light on the challenges faced, the strategies adopted, and the potential long-term effects on pedagogy in the field.

India's higher education sector is comprised of a large number of universities, colleges, and independent institutions. In 2021, there were 1,113 recognized universities and over 55,000 higher education institutions listed on the AISHE portal in India. Additionally, there were 11,296 independent institutions offering diploma certifications and 43,796 colleges associated with or recognized by universities (Kanwal, 2023). With such diversity and a population of close to 1.4 billion, India exhibits significant cultural, linguistic, and regional variations that impact its educational systems.

In the Indian educational system, certain traits are commonly observed, although there is no single "Indian way" of learning. Memorization and rote learning are often emphasized, especially in private and government colleges. Subjects such as math, physics, and language arts are given more priority than practical courses. Student performance evaluation relies heavily on standardized examinations, and experiential learning and collaborative activities are typically given less emphasis, with textbooks and lectures serving as the primary teaching methods.

Comparing the Indian educational system to global norms is challenging due to the significant differences among educational systems in different countries and regions. The University Grants Commission (UGC), as the federal regulatory organization for higher education, holds authority over general education curriculum matters in India. However, the education system in India faces significant challenges and has room for improvement.

India has made significant progress in its higher education sector, with a high primary and secondary school attendance rate and a substantial number of universities and colleges. The country has a rich history of intellectual achievement, with many Indian students excelling in science, technology, engineering, and math. However, limited access to the internet and e-learning remains a barrier, with only 450 million people having such access out of the total population (Jena, 2020). The formal regulations for online courses were published by the UGC in 2018, but prestigious private colleges had already been experimenting with online education prior to that. Institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) collaborated on the development of web-based courses and e-learning materials in specific disciplines (Bansal, 2014).

The sudden shift to online learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted both the potential and the challenges of incorporating technology into education in India. Kerala, a state located on the southwest coast of India, has a longstanding reputation for placing a high value on education and consistently boasts some of the highest literacy rates in the country. The government of Kerala has demonstrated a strong commitment to education, making significant investments in teacher training programs and school facilities. This emphasis on education has created an environment that nurtures learning and encourages educational attainment. The state has also achieved high enrolment rates in both primary and secondary institutions, ensuring that education is accessible to a wide range of individuals. Kerala has established a well-regarded teacher training program, attracting skilled and competent educators to the region. The state's reputation for quality instruction has further enhanced its educational standing.

Language proficiency is another area of emphasis in Kerala's educational system. Students are required to study multiple languages, including English, as part of the curriculum. This commitment to language learning fosters strong communication skills and broadens students' educational horizons. Despite the significant achievements in education in Kerala, approximately 70% of students in the state still attend public and state-supported institutions (David, 2014), highlighting the continued reliance on these educational institutions and their role in contributing to the state's high literacy rates.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about significant changes in the teaching of English literature in Kerala. Teachers have had to adapt from traditional classroom-based instruction to a more technology-driven approach. This seismic shift in the

education system has created both challenges and opportunities for English literature teachers.

This thesis aims to explore the experiences and perspectives of English literature teachers in Kerala before, during, and after the pandemic. The objective is to examine the challenges and opportunities that have arisen from the shift to technology-driven instruction and the impact of these changes on teaching practices and experiences. Interviews will be conducted with English literature teachers to gain insights into their perspectives and experiences. A defined set of questions will guide the interviews, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their teaching experiences during different phases of the pandemic. Additionally, a questionnaire will be distributed to the teachers to gather information about their preferred mode of teaching - whether offline, blended, or online. This will provide valuable insights into their comfort levels and preferences regarding different teaching modalities.

By exploring the experiences and perspectives of English literature teachers in Kerala, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the impact of the pandemic on teaching practices in the field. It will shed light on the challenges faced, the strategies employed, and the potential long-term implications for English literature education in Kerala. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted higher education institutions in India, necessitating a sudden shift to online learning. India's educational landscape is characterized by its vastness, cultural diversity, and historical achievements, which require careful consideration of contextual factors when examining the impact of pedagogical approaches during the pandemic. Kerala, a state known for its commitment to education and high literacy rates, has faced challenges in adapting English literature education to the technology-driven environment. This research aims to explore the experiences and perspectives of English literature teachers in Kerala before, during, and after the pandemic to gain insights into the challenges and opportunities that have emerged. By understanding the implications of these changes, educators can work towards improving teaching practices and ensuring quality education in the field of English literature in Kerala.

1.1 Theoretical Overview:

To understand how teachers embraced and utilized technology in education during the pandemic, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Fred Davis in 1989 will be employed. The TAM has been widely used to explore teachers' adoption and usage of

technology for remote teaching during this unprecedented time. According to the model, the intention to use technology is influenced by two main factors: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Davis, 1989).

Perceived usefulness refers to teachers' perception of the technology's value and benefits in the context of remote instruction during the pandemic. Many educators have come to recognize the immense usefulness of technology in facilitating communication with students and delivering online lessons. Learning management systems like Canvas and Moodle have provided platforms for distributing and managing course content, while video conferencing tools such as Zoom and Google Meet have enabled teachers to conduct virtual classrooms and interact with students in real time.

Perceived ease of use focuses on teachers' perception of how easy it is to use the technology for remote instruction. Educators who find the technology user-friendly and straightforward are more likely to adopt and successfully use it for distance learning. Conversely, those who find technology challenging or complex are less inclined to embrace it. For many teachers, receiving assistance and training has been crucial in enabling their use of technology for remote instruction.

External influences, another aspect of the TAM, emphasize the significance of outside factors on teachers' acceptance and usage of technology. These factors include social norms and enabling environments. Social expectations and conventions surrounding remote learning have motivated teachers to adopt and utilize technology effectively for instruction during the pandemic. Additionally, teachers' ability to use technology for remote teaching has relied on facilitating factors such as the availability of technology resources and technical support.

The TAM has been widely employed to understand user acceptance of technology in various contexts, including education, healthcare, and business (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). Within the education sector, the TAM has proven to be a valuable framework for understanding how teachers have embraced and employed technology for remote teaching during the pandemic (Joo, Lim & Kim, 2021). By considering factors such as perceived usefulness and ease of use, as well as external influences like social norms and facilitating conditions, educators can identify strategies to promote the effective adoption and utilization of technology in education.

Another theory worth exploring in the context of education during the pandemic is Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in the

1980s. SDT suggests that individuals are motivated by three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1980). In the context of remote teaching, the use of technology may allow teachers to exercise greater autonomy in designing and delivering their lessons, enhance their sense of competence in utilizing technology, and foster a sense of relatedness with their students despite the physical distance (Deci & Ryan, 2022).

By integrating the TAM and SDT, educators can gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing teachers' adoption and usage of technology during the pandemic. This knowledge can guide the development of strategies and interventions to support teachers in effectively integrating technology into their teaching practices, promoting engagement and motivation among both educators and students.

Hence, the TAM offers valuable insights into teachers' acceptance and utilization of technology for remote teaching during the pandemic. Perceived usefulness and ease of use are key factors influencing teachers' intentions to adopt and effectively employ technology in education. Additionally, external influences such as social norms and facilitating conditions play a significant role in shaping teachers' acceptance and usage of technology. Integrating the TAM with theories like SDT further enriches our understanding of the motivational factors underlying teachers' adoption of technology. By leveraging this knowledge, educators can better support teachers in integrating technology into their instructional practices and creating engaging and effective learning experiences during and beyond the pandemic.

1.2 Objectives:

- To highlight the impact of Covid-19 on Higher Education in Kerala, India especially in the field of English Literature.
- To detail a teacher's perspective of how teaching changed during this period.
- To enlighten various emerging pedagogical approaches in the field of English Literature.
- To enlist post-pandemic trends in higher education in India and make comparisons with the previous modes of teaching
- To explore the reasons why teachers have a tendency to revert back to traditional forms of teaching in the post-pandemic era.

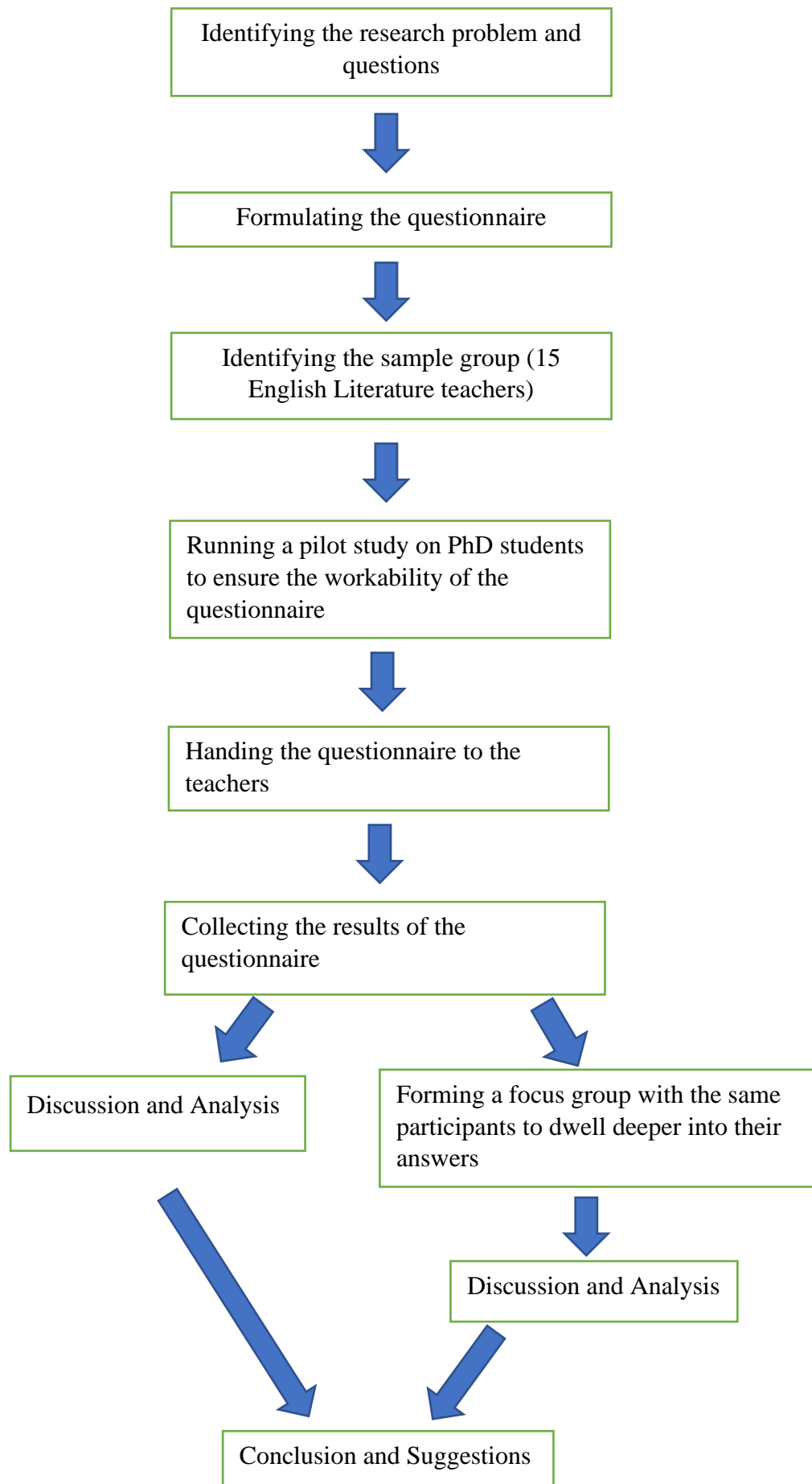
1.3 Research Questions:

The research questions pertain to the Indian educational system and are being answered from the same context.

- What were the detrimental effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the educational system?
- How has the pandemic influenced the operations of educational institutions?
- What significant changes have occurred in the operations of educational institutions and the overall educational system?
- How did teachers obtain training to conduct lessons remotely, and what challenges did they face?
- Without access to an LMS, how were lessons held, materials shared, student relationships upheld, and assessments carried out during remote instruction?
- Why is there a tendency among teachers to return to the traditional form of teaching?

1.4 Research Methodology:

The study employed a mixed-methods approach of quantitative and qualitative analysis to examine the experiences, opportunities, challenges, and lessons learned regarding online learning during the COVID-19 crisis. National and regional articles and journals discussing educational reforms implemented during the pandemic will be reviewed to gather relevant information. 15 teachers from the Department of English, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Kochi, India will be involved in the study through questionnaires and interviews, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the research questions. To ensure the validity of the survey questions, a pilot study was conducted to address any potential issues. The collected data from the questionnaires and interviews will be subjected to quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques. Descriptive statistics will be utilized to analyse the survey data, while thematic analysis will be employed for the interview data. Through the data analysis process, conclusions will be drawn regarding the impact of the pandemic on teachers' experiences, attitudes, and perceptions. These findings will have practical implications for educational policy and practice. Furthermore, the study's results will serve as a foundation for future research in the field. The research will be conducted in the following pattern.



2. Comparative Examination of Pedagogical Approaches in English Literature Before and During Covid in India

2.1 Teaching English Literature Before the Pandemic - The Teacher's Perspective

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, English Literature instruction in colleges encompassed various methods that were influenced by factors such as the specific college, course level, and instructor's preferences. However, several general features characterized the teaching of English Literature in colleges. Lectures served as a primary mode of instruction in many English Literature courses. Professors would deliver lectures covering topics such as literary theory, literary history, or specific literary works. To enhance the learning experience, multimedia aids like slideshows, video clips, and audio recordings were often employed by instructors.

In addition to lectures, some English Literature courses were conducted in smaller seminar-style classes. These classes facilitated group discussions and collaborative analysis of texts. Compared to lectures, seminar-style classes required greater active participation from students, as they were expected to contribute their own ideas and insights to the discussions. Reading assignments formed an integral part of English Literature courses. Students were assigned a diverse range of texts including novels, poetry, plays, and critical essays. It was expected that students read these texts thoroughly and critically, preparing themselves to discuss them in class or in writing assignments. This emphasis on reading aimed to develop students' engagement with the literature and their ability to analyse texts. Writing assignments played a significant role in English Literature courses. These assignments varied in format, ranging from short response papers to more extensive research papers. Students were tasked with analysing literary texts, constructing arguments, and supporting their arguments with evidence from the texts and scholarly sources. Writing assignments fostered critical thinking and allowed students to develop their skills in literary analysis and argumentation.

Exams were commonly used to assess students' understanding of literary texts and concepts, as well as their ability to analyse and interpret them. Exams might include short-answer questions, essay questions, or a combination of both, providing an opportunity for students to demonstrate their comprehension and analytical skills.

Before the pandemic, the primary mode of educating students in English literature was through face-to-face classroom instruction. Teachers employed various educational

strategies, such as close reading, literary analysis, and discussion-based learning, to encourage students to analyse and evaluate literary texts. These pedagogical approaches aimed to foster critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of the literature.

To enhance student engagement and promote teamwork, teachers often incorporated group projects, presentations, and theatrical readings into their instruction (Smith et al, 2018). These activities allowed students to collaborate in groups, collectively examine readings, and share their findings with the rest of the class. Such interactive activities not only enhanced comprehension but also encouraged students to express their interpretations and ideas. Through these pedagogical approaches, teachers aimed to create a dynamic and interactive learning environment where students actively engaged with English literature and developed their analytical and communication skills (Zoch & Myers, 2017)

However, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the educational landscape underwent significant changes, necessitating the adoption of alternative approaches and the integration of technology for remote and online learning. The shift to remote instruction presented challenges and prompted educators to explore innovative strategies to effectively engage students in the study of English Literature.

2.2 Teaching English Literature During the Pandemic - The Teacher's Perspective

During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, global organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and UNESCO swiftly issued regulations regarding the transition to online learning. The UNESCO document "COVID-19 Educational Disruption and Response" (2020) emphasized two crucial reasons for the importance of online learning during this time. First, it aimed to ensure the continuity of education without disruptions, enabling students to continue their studies despite the challenging circumstances. Second, online learning was seen as a means to prevent the spread of the virus within educational institutions, prioritizing the health and safety of students, teachers, and staff. As the pandemic unfolded, online learning became increasingly vital for educational institutions worldwide, providing a way to stay connected and follow courses even when students and teachers were physically separated. It served as an opportunity to evaluate the challenges and problems associated with emergency remote teaching, ultimately informing the development of robust online education plans for future crises or natural disasters.

During the pandemic, English Literature instruction in colleges primarily shifted to online formats, as many institutions adopted remote learning to mitigate the risk of COVID-

19 transmission. The traditional classroom experience transformed into online lectures, with professors recording their presentations and uploading them to learning management systems or video-sharing platforms like Zoom or YouTube. In lieu of in-person seminars or group discussions, courses increasingly utilized discussion forums or video conferencing platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams to facilitate online interactions and collaborative discussions among students. Assignments involved reading literary texts and responding to prompts or questions from the instructor or fellow peers. To conduct assessments, exams were often administered online through learning management systems or proctoring software that monitored students' computer screens and webcams to prevent cheating.

While the pandemic undoubtedly presented numerous challenges for the education system in India, there were also several positive impacts on the sector:

- **Increased access to digital learning:** The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital learning technologies in India. Many schools and colleges embraced online platforms and digital tools to deliver instruction, significantly expanding access to education, especially for students in remote or underprivileged areas who may not have had access to traditional classroom-based learning. The increased availability of digital resources and online connectivity has bridged the gap and facilitated learning opportunities for a wider student population.
- **Flexibility and personalized learning:** Remote learning has introduced greater flexibility in terms of scheduling and pacing of instruction. Students have been able to learn at their own pace and on their own schedule, accommodating individual preferences and circumstances. This flexibility has led to more personalized learning experiences, with teachers tailoring instruction to meet the specific needs of each student. By allowing students to engage with course material at their own pace, online learning has the potential to enhance understanding and retention of English Literature concepts.
- **Development of new teaching methods:** The pandemic has compelled teachers to explore and develop new teaching methods better suited to online or remote learning environments. Educators have embraced innovative pedagogical approaches, leveraging digital tools, multimedia resources, and interactive platforms to engage students effectively. This period of adaptation has fostered the development of new teaching techniques, including the creative use of technology and digital media, which may continue to enhance education even beyond the pandemic.

- Increased parental involvement: With many children learning from home during the pandemic, parents have become more involved in their children's education. This increased parental involvement has created stronger partnerships between parents and teachers, as families have actively supported and monitored their children's learning progress. Collaborative efforts between parents and teachers can positively impact student learning outcomes by creating a more supportive and nurturing learning environment.
- Greater appreciation for education: The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the critical importance of education in India and worldwide. It has brought heightened awareness to the challenges faced by students, teachers, and educational institutions. This newfound appreciation for education has fostered a renewed commitment to ensuring access to high-quality education for all students, irrespective of crises or disruptions. The recognition of education as an essential pillar of society has spurred efforts to strengthen educational systems, improve infrastructure, and address issues related to access, equity, and quality.

Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the rapid shift to online learning in colleges, including English Literature instruction. Educational institutions worldwide embraced online platforms and digital tools to deliver lectures, facilitate discussions, and administer assessments remotely. While the pandemic presented significant challenges, it also brought about positive changes, such as increased access to digital learning, flexibility in scheduling and personalized learning experiences, the development of new teaching methods, enhanced parental involvement, and a greater appreciation for education. The lessons learned from this period of adaptation will inform the future of education, ensuring that institutions are better prepared to navigate potential crises and prioritize the continuity of learning.

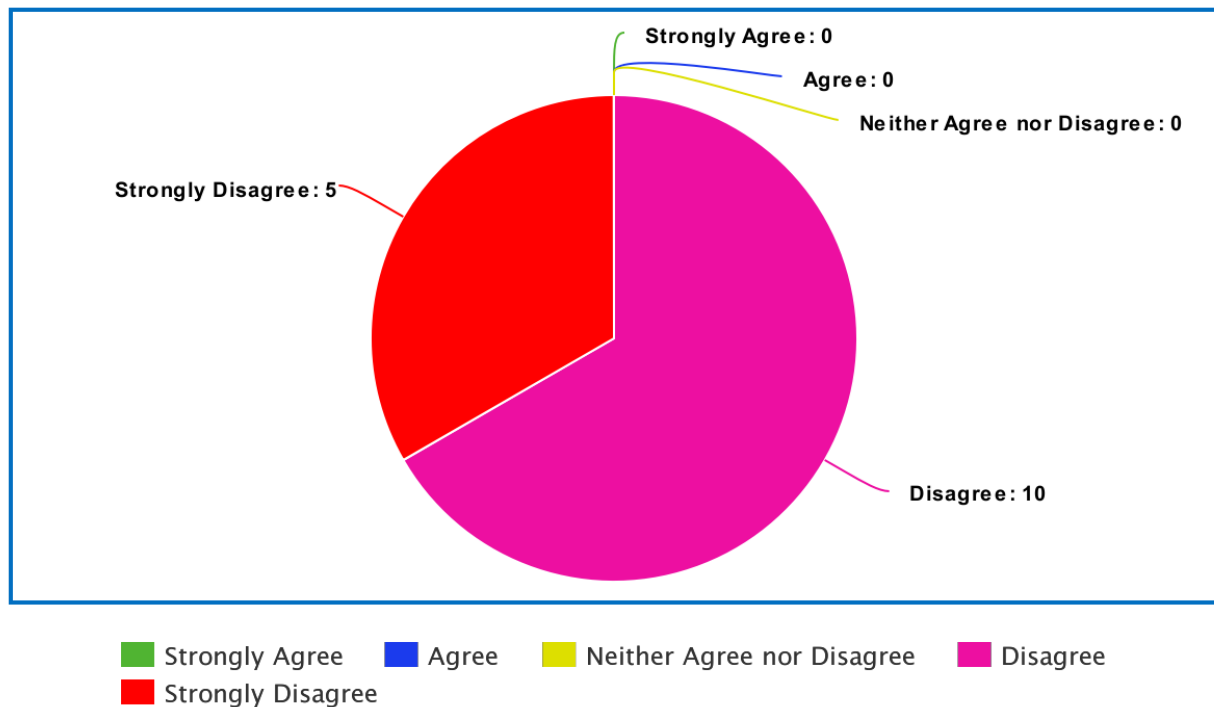
The questionnaire would give an insight into how well these positive impacts are actually reflected in reality. Teachers and students had to adapt to a situation which was quite alien to them and had to evolve from their existing notion of education. A Likert scale is used to assess the gravity of their responses.

3. Results and Analysis

The questionnaire aimed to capture the perceptions of teachers regarding their teaching experiences before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants in

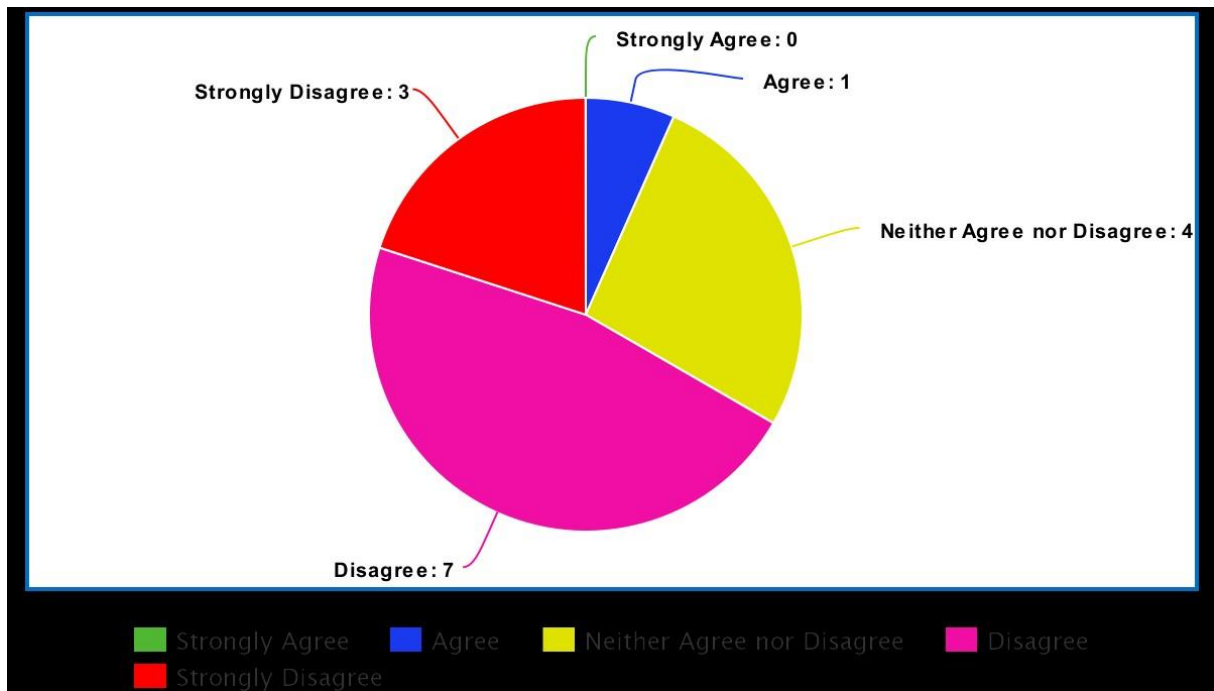
the study included PhD scholars actively engaged in teaching, as well as existing teachers in the department, covering an age range of 25-60 years. This age diversity allowed for an examination of how different age groups of teachers transitioned from offline to online or blended modes of teaching. The results of each question provide valuable insights, as described below:

Question 1. I was given adequate preparation time before the classes shifted online.



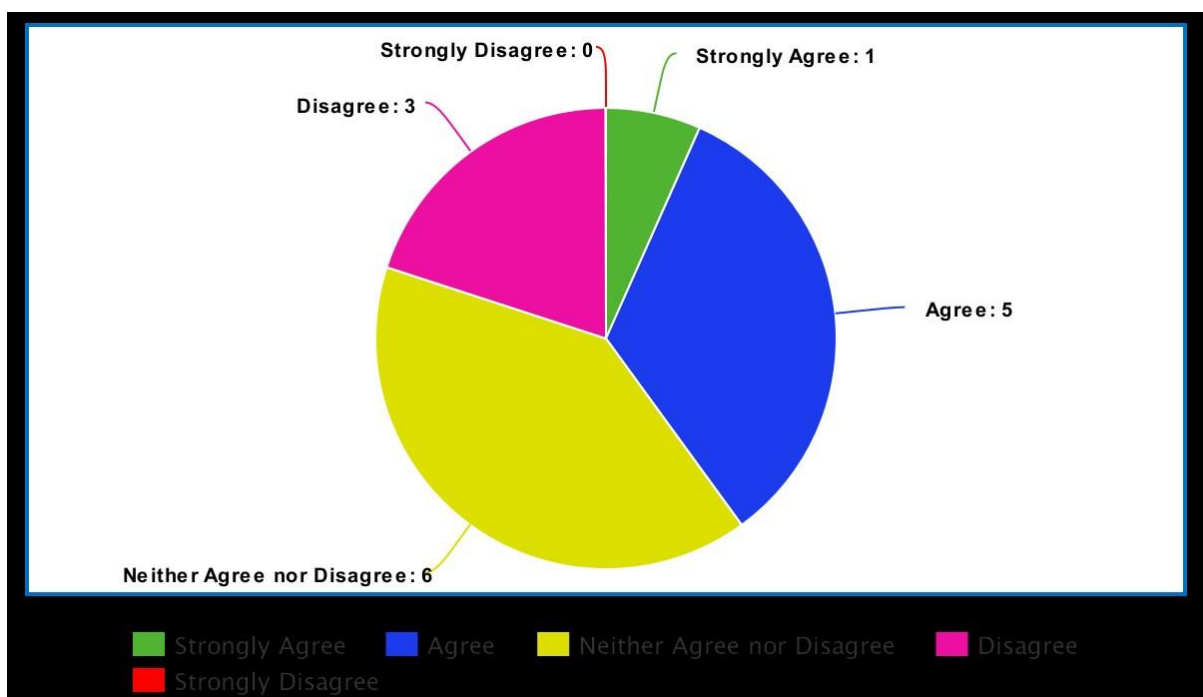
All 15 participants in the survey expressed their disagreement or strong disagreement with the notion that they were given sufficient time for the preparation of class materials before transitioning to online teaching. This response was expected as the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions and lockdowns presented unprecedented challenges for teachers worldwide. The abrupt shift to online teaching required quick adaptation, leaving little time for adequate preparation.

Question 2. I was given the essential resources to switch to an online teaching mode.



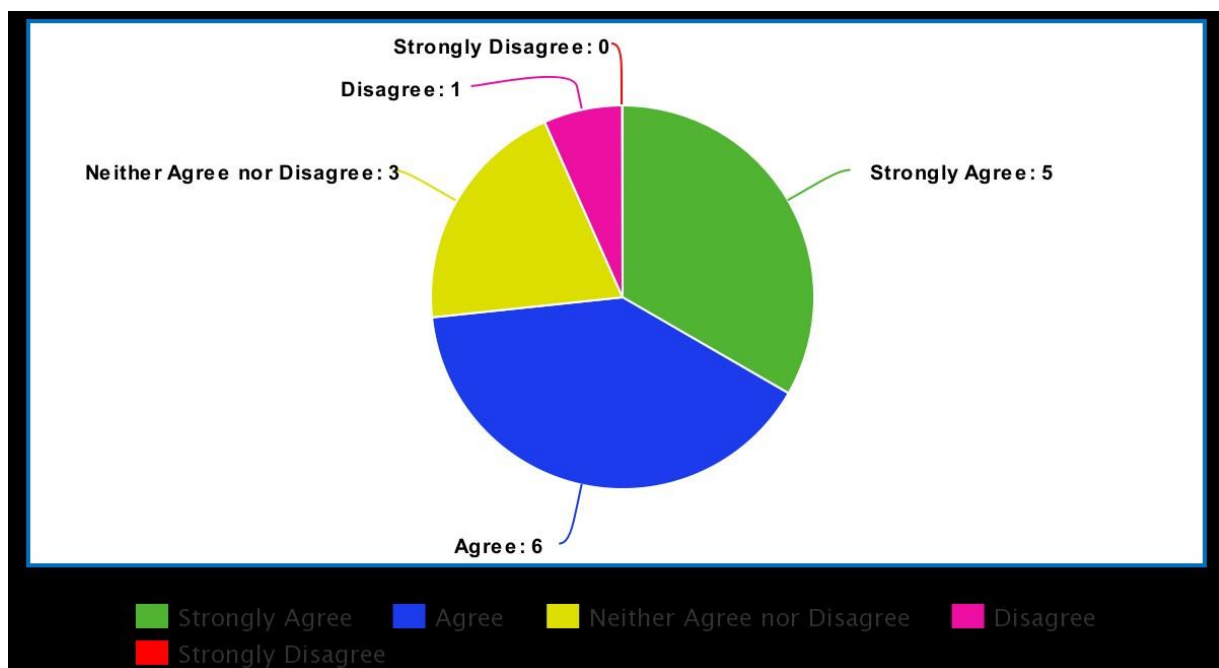
Participants reported that the institution did not provide them with the necessary resources such as laptops/computers and active network connectivity. However, there was a positive development as the institution started reimbursing teachers for data packs in the second week of classes. This step was taken to support teachers in acquiring the essential resources needed for online teaching.

Question 3. The online form of assessment was effective.



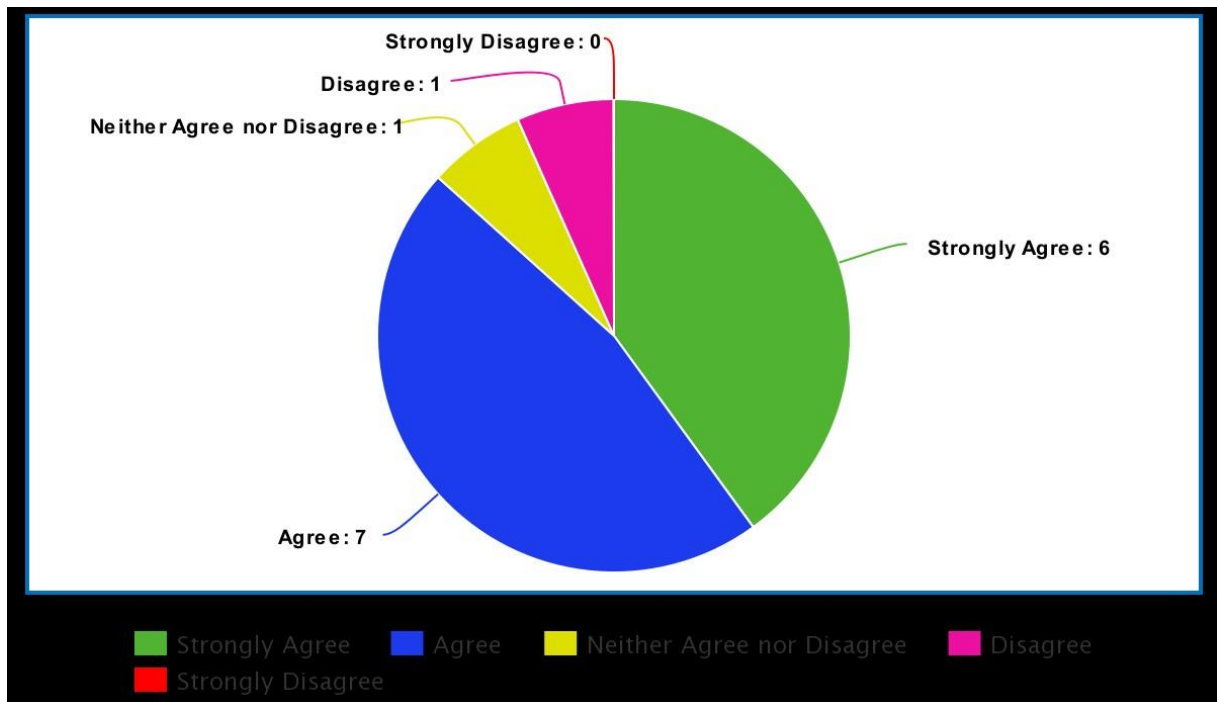
Teachers found that the transition to online assessment did not significantly impact the effectiveness of student evaluation. Although physical answer sheets were replaced by uploaded pictures of written work, teachers were able to assess and evaluate the responses effectively through computer screens. This finding suggests that online assessment methods were successfully implemented and maintained the integrity of the evaluation process.

Question 4. I stayed connected with my colleagues and maintained to be part of an academic community.



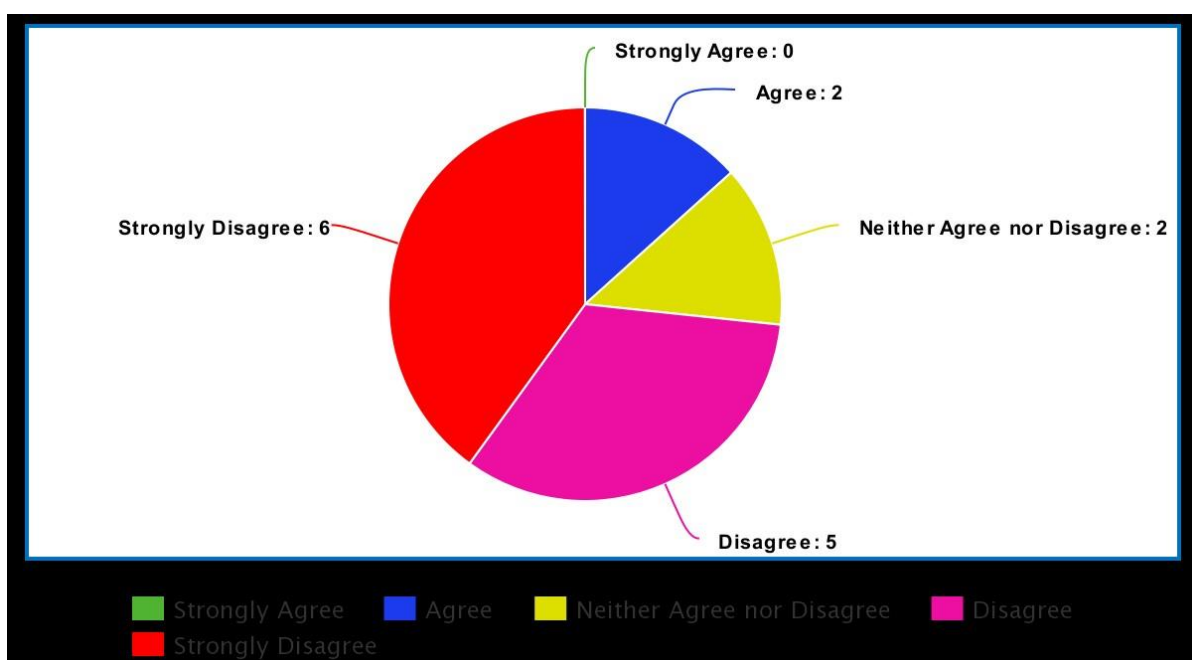
Maintaining connections with colleagues and being part of an academic community was considered crucial during the online teaching period. Teachers relied on communication platforms such as WhatsApp and Microsoft Teams to collaborate, coordinate, and address any technological or study material-related challenges. Effective communication among colleagues helped overcome barriers and facilitated a supportive environment.

Question 5. I had prior experience teaching online before the pandemic.



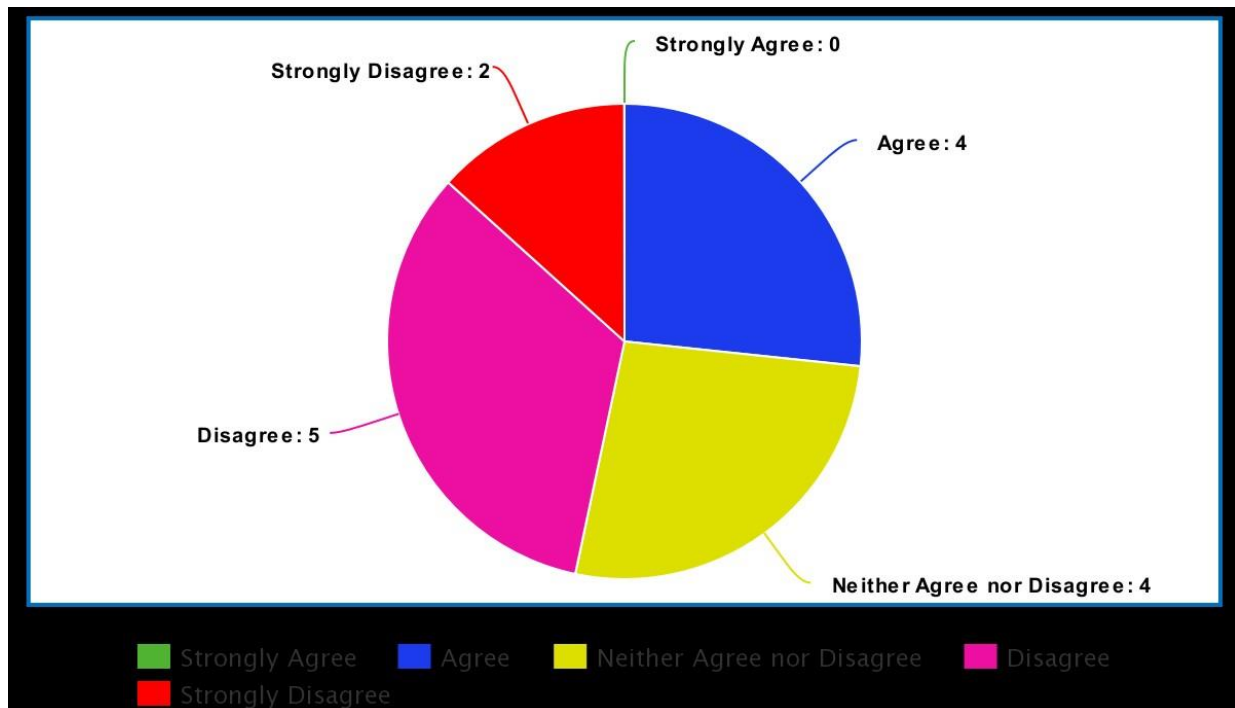
Most participants reported having prior experience with online teaching, although these experiences were limited to short durations caused by natural disasters like floods. The respondents' previous exposure to online teaching was insufficient to prepare them adequately for the challenges posed by the prolonged pandemic period. Lack of extensive experience likely contributed to difficulties encountered by teachers, such as instances of student pranks.

Question 6. I felt that I was able to maintain the same level of interaction and rapport with my students while teaching online.



Given their limited prior experience with online teaching, participants expressed difficulties in maintaining the same level of interaction and rapport with students during online classes. Challenges included the inability to read non-verbal cues effectively, disruptions caused by technological issues, and instances of student pranks. These findings highlight the need for further support and training to equip teachers with effective strategies for engaging students in an online environment.

Question 7. I continue to use online teaching methods even after the pandemic is over.



The final question in the questionnaire examined whether teachers continued to utilize online teaching methods after the pandemic. The results revealed that most teachers reverted to traditional forms of teaching once in-person classes resumed. This finding indicates a need for deeper investigation into the reasons behind this shift, potentially requiring a focus group discussion with participants to explore their perspectives further.

When asked about their overall teaching experience during the pandemic, the teachers provided responses using a rating scale ranging from 1 (very negative) to 5 (very positive). The average score received was around 3, indicating a neutral response to their teaching experience. This suggests that teachers had mixed feelings about the transition to online teaching during the pandemic.

Upon enquiring about the biggest challenges they faced in transitioning to online teaching, the teachers highlighted several key issues. Firstly, they unanimously agreed that

there was a significant lack of student engagement compared to the offline mode of learning. They felt that students were not as actively involved and engaged in the online classes, which impacted the overall teaching and learning experience.

Technical difficulties emerged as another major challenge, particularly for older teachers who faced connectivity issues and struggled with technological gadgets. This age group also encountered difficulties in accessing the necessary resources and materials for online teaching. They had to seek assistance in obtaining online versions of texts, articles, and journals, which added to the complexity of their teaching tasks.

Due to their limited experience in online teaching, many teachers found it challenging to adapt their teaching methods to the online format. They expressed difficulty in effectively communicating with students and faced challenges in assessing and evaluating student learning in the online environment.

Furthermore, the transition to online teaching had a significant impact on the teachers' ability to provide personalized attention and support to students. Given the high number of students in each class, the online format made it more challenging to offer individualized attention. Teachers acknowledged that their ability to provide personalized attention had been reduced, which affected the overall quality of instruction and student support.

The teachers also emphasized that students' attention and motivation appeared to be diminishing in the online setting. This raised the need for further exploration into the factors contributing to this decline and possible solutions to address it effectively.

Moreover, teachers' limited technological proficiency restricted the strategies they could implement to enhance their subjects. They primarily relied on maintaining regular communication through online platforms and occasionally delivering content using interactive multimedia. However, they encountered disparities in students' access to technology and reliable internet connectivity, which significantly impacted their teaching effectiveness. Issues such as poor network connectivity, device failures, expiring data packages, and similar challenges multiplied the difficulties faced by both teachers and students. These were complex issues that could not be easily solved by individual teachers, highlighting the need for broader systemic solutions to ensure equitable access to online education.

When asked about their methods of assessing and evaluating student learning in the online setting, the teachers highlighted various approaches. Online quizzes and tests emerged as the most popular form of assessment, with all teachers following specific guidelines provided by the university. Additionally, some teachers saw this as an opportunity to

encourage virtual presentations or demonstrations, allowing students to showcase their knowledge and skills in a digital format. Assignments and projects submitted digitally were also utilized as a means of continuous evaluation. Younger teachers further implemented online discussion boards or forums to foster active participation and engagement among students.

During the focus group discussions, the positive impacts of online teaching and learning were explored. Teachers acknowledged that while they were not fully prepared for the sudden shift to online instruction, it provided them with opportunities to explore and tap into the potential of enhanced technology and digital resources. They discovered that teaching became more flexible in terms of time and location, allowing for innovative approaches to instruction. The experience also highlighted the importance of student independence and self-directed learning skills, as students had to take greater responsibility for their own learning in the online environment.

The positive experiences with online teaching prompted some teachers to conduct further research on incorporating these newly acquired skills into their future classes. They recognized the value of online teaching in fostering student engagement and independent learning and sought to integrate these aspects into their teaching practices moving forward.

When asked about the tools they became familiar with over the last two years, most teachers mentioned learning management systems such as Moodle and Canvas. These platforms provided a centralized space for organizing course materials, sharing resources, and facilitating online interactions. Video conferencing tools like Zoom and Google Meet became essential for conducting online classes and virtual meetings with students. Additionally, digital platforms like Microsoft Teams were utilized for sharing instructional materials with students. However, it was noted that some teachers no longer heavily relied on these tools except for using Teams to distribute course materials.

Overall, the teachers acknowledged the positive aspects of online teaching and learning. The flexibility it offered in terms of time and location, the exploration of innovative teaching approaches, and the development of student independence and self-regulated learning skills were recognized as valuable outcomes. The experience also introduced teachers to various digital tools and platforms, enabling them to adapt and incorporate technology into their instructional practices.

However, it is important to note that the teachers also faced challenges during the transition to online teaching, as discussed earlier. The limitations of online engagement,

technical difficulties, and disparities in access to resources and technology were significant obstacles that impacted the overall teaching and learning experience.

4. Discussion

The questionnaire provided valuable insights into teachers' perceptions and experiences during the transition to online teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It shed light on the challenges faced in terms of preparation time, resource availability, online assessment, maintaining connections, prior experience, interaction with students, and the sustainability of online teaching methods. These findings underscore the need for ongoing professional development and support to assist teachers in effectively navigating online teaching. The results and analysis clearly demonstrate that online learning has greatly benefited from emergency remote instruction, opening up new perspectives and opportunities for the education system. The focus group discussion revealed the pressing need to address the issues arising from the COVID-19 crisis in order to establish robust pedagogical frameworks, infrastructure, and platforms specifically designed for online instruction. These innovative approaches must be developed from an interdisciplinary standpoint, considering potential implications and social expectations, while adhering to responsible research and innovation strategies.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound and detrimental impact on the Indian educational system. The disruption of classroom instruction was caused by the closing of schools and other educational facilities to stop the virus's spread. Due to their inability to attend traditional classes, students missed out on crucial learning opportunities and in-person contact with peers and teachers.

The epidemic brought about many new problems, one of which was unequal access to education. The shift to online education brought India's digital gap to light. Many students lacked access to essential tools like smartphones, laptops, and steady internet connectivity, especially those from rural and marginalised regions. Due to the discrepancy in access to education caused by this, many students were unable to take part in online courses or use digital learning materials. The divide between students from rich homes and those from economically challenged backgrounds grew even wider as a result.

The extended shutdown of classrooms and the shift to online instruction negatively affected students' ability to learn. A considerable amount of learning was lost as a result of the absence of direct supervision, decreased teacher engagement, and difficulties adjusting to online learning methods. In the absence of a structured learning environment, students found

it difficult to remain motivated and engaged. For educators and policymakers, the intellectual gap that was formed during this time presented a huge issue.

Additionally, the pandemic caused tests and evaluations to be postponed. Students experienced uncertainty and anxiety as a result of board examinations, entrance exams, and other significant assessments being postponed or cancelled. The disruption of the exam timetable had long-term effects on career pathways and entrance to higher education. Students had additional difficulties as they had to adjust to new assessment techniques, such as online exams and other modalities of evaluation.

An alarming issue that was not addressed in India during the pandemic era was the big effect on students' mental health and general well-being. Mental health issues were exacerbated by the abrupt interruption of habits, social isolation, and heightened stress and worry due to health difficulties. These problems were made worse by the lack of social connections and support mechanisms in schools. Students' emotional health became a serious concern, necessitating the need to give mental health issues a top priority.

Hence the challenges identified can be categorised into three technological, pedagogical, and social. These played a significant role in teachers' experiences (Ferri, F et al, 2020). It is crucial to address these challenges comprehensively, taking into account the integration of technology, effective teaching methods, and the social dynamics that influence online learning environments. The main technological issues are around a shortage of electronic gadgets and Internet connectivity (Sivasankari et al, 2023). According to TAM, due to unequal access to the technology that both students and teachers need, this issue may worsen existing inequities due to a lack of technological relatedness. In fact, not all students have access to the tools needed to benefit from online learning, such as a quick Internet connection and a potent computer. Moving forward, all parties concerned must develop their technical skills in order to construct an appropriate pedagogical course for remote instruction. Challenges connected to gaps in digital literacy among instructors, students, and parents were reportedly on the rise in a number of instances. Considering the social elements, supporting pupils with exceptional needs while minimising any danger of inequality and vulnerability is a significant problem. This issue necessitates a new teaching strategy that takes into account the potential benefits of technology. For parents and teachers, emergency remote teaching also poses certain difficulties. They might even be conducting remote work during such an event. This causes difficulty with the accessibility of ICT gadgets for each family member. The issue of physical space where each person may learn or complete their work arises if everyone works from home. Online learning logistics must be properly considered. It is clear

that these teachers faced difficulties as a result of their inexperience and the lack of an LMS. As previously said, some evidence points to the possibility that prior familiarity with an LMS or some basic knowledge of e-learning may have made the emergency shift easier (Alquabbani et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 epidemic has had a significant impact on how educational institutions around the world operate. Unprecedented difficulties have pushed schools, colleges, and universities to change their procedures in order to maintain educational continuity while placing a high priority on the health and safety of students, teachers, and staff. Here are some significant ways that the pandemic has affected how educational institutions operate:

- Transition to Remote Learning
- Models for Hybrid Learning
- Changes to the Academic Calendar and Exams
- Improved Health and Safety Measures
- Digitised Collaboration and Communication

To effectively create and carry out an innovative pedagogical program, teachers should receive training to improve their digital and other specialized skills for online education. The shift to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for educators to adapt their teaching methods and leverage digital tools effectively. However, it is essential to acknowledge that while many students are comfortable using digital gadgets, they may not be fully prepared for remote instruction, and it can be challenging to keep their attention and engagement. Additionally, parents may lack the linguistic proficiency and educational background required for digital literacy, further emphasizing the importance of providing adequate support to both teachers and students in the online learning environment.

Building upon the lessons learned from this unprecedented shift to online teaching, it is crucial to continue refining and improving online instructional practices. This can be achieved through comprehensive training programs that equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate online teaching platforms, create engaging learning materials, and facilitate interactive and collaborative activities. By providing the necessary support, resources, and training, educators can better adapt to online teaching and create meaningful and effective learning experiences for their students.

In order to support teachers in their transition to online teaching, the following components should be included in their training curriculum:

- **Technical Assistance:** Teachers who use online teaching tools and platforms must have access to technical assistance to resolve any problems or difficulties they may encounter. This assistance can take the form of specialized IT personnel or a dedicated help desk that can promptly respond to instructors' technical questions and provide instructions on troubleshooting common issues. Teachers should also be provided with information about emerging tools and technologies in education, such as online collaboration tools (e.g., Google Docs, Microsoft OneDrive), educational apps or software (e.g., Kahoot!, Nearpod), and virtual whiteboard or interactive presentation tools (e.g., Jamboard, Prezi, Miro).
- **Training Programs:** Comprehensive training programs should be developed to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills they need to effectively utilize online teaching resources. These programs should cover topics such as the use of learning management systems, online assessment methods, facilitating virtual discussions, and integrating multimedia materials into online lessons. To cater to diverse learning styles, training sessions can be delivered through workshops, webinars, or online modules.
- **Pedagogical Strategies for Online Teaching:** In addition to technical training, teachers require coaching on effective pedagogical strategies for online instruction. This includes techniques for promoting student engagement, encouraging active learning, and providing personalized support in a virtual setting. Training programs should emphasize the value of clear communication, well-structured online resources, and interactive activities to enhance student learning outcomes.
- **Continuous Professional Development:** As online education methodologies and technologies continue to evolve, it is essential to provide educators with access to ongoing professional development opportunities. Regular workshops, seminars, or online communities of practice can be established to facilitate knowledge sharing, collaboration, and the exploration of new trends and best practices in online education. Continuous professional development ensures that teachers stay updated with the latest advancements in online teaching and can continually enhance their skills.

- Feedback and Evaluation: Gathering feedback from teachers about their training experiences and the effectiveness of the provided technical support is vital. Regular evaluations and surveys can help identify areas for improvement and tailor future training programs to better meet the needs of teachers. Feedback loops also foster a culture of continuous improvement and provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the training initiatives.

By prioritizing technical support and comprehensive training for teachers, educational institutions can empower educators to confidently navigate online teaching and create engaging and effective learning experiences for their students. According to Vladescu (2016), this form of method has the ability to develop and provide instruction for all types of pupils, from lower levels to higher education. The integration of collaborative activities, group projects, gamification, and educational technology tools should also be promoted to enhance student engagement and motivation in the online learning environment. Ultimately, investing in the professional development of teachers in the context of online education contributes to the overall success and sustainability of online teaching initiatives.

Researchers, academic institutions, corporations, and governments must work together to provide sufficient solutions to the problems brought on by this global experience. For policymakers in India, online learning and emergency remote teaching should be given top attention. This research identified difficulties and would like to give overall recommendations for how to handle these challenges to policymakers from India and other developing countries so they can address some of the open challenges thanks to the results of the conducted research.

- Development of dependable network infrastructure is required. The ability to take classes remotely while others in the same home are engaging in other online activities is a requirement for teachers, students, and parents. In reality, the outcomes of the focus group highlighted how connection issues were brought on by the pandemic crisis' extensive use of networks.
- Another proposal is to improve connectivity and offer reasonably priced gadgets. The cost of connected devices like tablets and PCs should be reduced, and governments should offer incentives to households to purchase them. To learn remotely in the most enjoyable way, all the participants must have the proper equipment. The teachers emphasised this problem, especially for households with many children.

- To improve instructors' and students' technological proficiency in connection to new emerging models and approaches enabling the efficient use of online learning, systematic training programmes should be offered. The findings of this study showed that issues connected to a lack of digital literacy among instructors and students exist in India.
- It is necessary to develop communication and assessment strategies for digital education. The survey also emphasises the dearth of student feedback. Participants in the conversation agreed that teachers should speak with students frequently and regularly to prevent them from feeling alone and bewildered. They should stay in touch with pupils at all times.

Even though there were a plethora of positives to take away from teaching online and using blended learning, there has been a tendency for teachers to double back to their traditional ways of teaching after the pandemic got over. This might be because most of them could not adapt to online learning requirements. For many years, face-to-face instruction in classrooms and other traditional forms of teaching has been the standard. Since they have had training and experience in giving lessons in a physical classroom context, teachers are typically more familiar with and at ease using these methods. Many teachers found the abrupt switch to online learning during the epidemic to be a difficult transition, and many might prefer to go back to their more comfortable routines. Many teachers cherish their students' personal connections and face-to-face interactions with them in a typical classroom setting. They value the ability to read students' body language, facial expressions, and degrees of participation in order to assess understanding and modify their instruction as necessary.

In an online or remote learning setting, keeping order and managing the classroom might be more difficult. In a physical classroom where they have direct control over the learning environment, teachers could find it simpler to establish routines, set expectations, and maintain order. Some teachers could find it difficult to supervise students' behaviour, attention, and engagement in online environments, which makes them prefer the structure and management provided by conventional teaching techniques.

The quick shift to online learning during the pandemic revealed the disparities in teachers' technical expertise. It's possible that some teachers have trouble adjusting to and successfully utilising digital tools and platforms for instruction. The inability to use technology proficiently can frustrate students and prevent the seamless incorporation of

technology into educational methods. It is frequently necessary to have access to dependable internet connectivity, digital devices, and the proper software or applications when teaching online. Access to technology and internet infrastructure varies widely across the globe, especially in some places in India. It may be difficult for teachers to maintain their online teaching practises if they are dealing with resource limitations, either personally or among their pupils. This might encourage them to resume using more conventional, non-digital teaching techniques.

With regard to established curriculum frameworks and assessment procedures, traditional teaching approaches are very compatible. Some instructors may believe that their course's objectives and content are better suited for face-to-face education, where they may deliver the material as intended and grade students using conventional techniques like tests and quizzes.

It's crucial to remember that not all teachers have a strong desire to use more conventional teaching techniques. In response to the pandemic, many educators have begun to investigate and embrace technology's possibilities in education, realising its advantages in terms of adaptability, accessibility, and creative teaching methods. Additionally, some teachers may have adopted a mixed approach, integrating components of both traditional and online teaching methods to produce a more engaging and productive learning environment, as a result of their experiences and lessons from the pandemic.

5. Conclusion:

After COVID-19 and the prolonged campus closures, education around the world faced difficulties. Initial circumstances and the adaptability in meeting the demands of this historic event altered teaching and learning experiences. Conducting classes online is difficult, especially for practical subjects. Since there is no face-to-face interaction with the pupils, evaluating the students is challenging. It hasn't been able to sense the emotional bond between the teacher and the learner.

Even though our sample is tiny and only includes English literature professors in India, the results apply to many institutions in underdeveloped nations all over the world. When compared to their lack of prior online teaching experience and the limited institutional support for the emergency changeover, the participating professors in this study have shown

admirable resilience. This research anticipates that additional instances like this will be added to the body of research documenting COVID-19's effects on education.

The quality of education has increased as a result of the growing use of technology in the classroom. Online learning is therefore a valuable approach to the current educational system and can be applied in a positive way going forward. The teachers' responses reflected a mixed experience with online teaching during the pandemic. They encountered challenges related to student engagement, technical difficulties, limited resources, the adaptation of teaching methods, communication with students, assessment practices, and reduced ability to provide personalized attention. Additionally, disparities in students' access to technology and reliable internet connectivity further complicated the teaching and learning process. These findings underscore the importance of addressing these challenges and providing comprehensive support to teachers and students in order to enhance the quality of online education.

While online teaching presented challenges, the teachers did find ways to assess and evaluate student learning through online quizzes, tests, presentations, and digital assignments. They also recognized the positive impacts of online teaching, such as increased flexibility, the discovery of innovative teaching approaches, and the development of student independence. Additionally, they became familiar with various digital tools and platforms that supported their online instruction. Moving forward, these experiences can inform future teaching practices and the integration of technology into classroom settings. This thesis has argued that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented both challenges and opportunities for teaching English literature from the perspective of English literature teachers. While the shift towards remote learning has disrupted traditional methods of teaching, it has also opened up new possibilities for engagement and learning. The article *Higher Education in India in the Time of Pandemic, Sans a Learning Management System* (2022) exclaims, "Going forward, COVID-19 must be viewed as a catalyst to redesign post-pandemic teaching. Much human capital has been developed, and expertise gained, in the use of some educational technology; continued use can enhance the learning experience for all students" (p. 12) The article also emphasises the importance of LMS. The widespread usage of blended learning and LMSs will revolutionise higher education in India when face-to-face instruction resumes.

The thesis concludes that the future of teaching English literature lies in a hybrid model that combines the best of traditional and digital methods, prioritizes student-centred

pedagogy, and provides resources and support for teachers to adapt to the changing needs of education. This study, which does not claim to be thorough, was intended to gain a better understanding of the educational issue in India during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research has opened opportunities for further research in the future, offering a significant theoretical and empirical validation for the list of acts here hypothesized. In order to provide a more thorough understanding of the issue and to produce more granular results, more research will assess teachers' as well as students' perspectives, experiences, attitudes, and sentiments and compare them across other countries so that developing countries like India can take a leaf out of the educational systems in developed countries.

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Thank you,
Sincerely,

Mathew John Moolakkattu

Author Declaration

I hereby declare that I have written this thesis independently and that all contributions of other authors and supporters have been referenced. The thesis has been written in accordance with the requirements for graduation theses of the Institute of Education of the University of Tartu and is in compliance with good academic practices.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mathew', with a long, sweeping underline.

Mathew John Moolakkattu

02/06/2023

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Appendix

A questionnaire using Linkert Scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

1. I was given adequate preparation time before the classes shifted online.
2. I was given the essential resources to switch to an online teaching mode.
3. The online form of assessment was effective.
4. I stayed connected with my colleagues and maintained to be part of an academic community.
5. I had prior experience teaching online before the pandemic.
6. I found it harder to manage my workload while teaching online.
7. I felt that I was able to maintain the same level of interaction and rapport with my students while teaching online.
8. I continue to use online teaching methods even after the pandemic is over.
9. How would you rate your overall teaching experience during the pandemic?

Focus Group Discussion Questions with Options

1. Which of the following were the biggest challenges you faced in transitioning to online teaching during the pandemic?
 - a) Lack of student engagement
 - b) Technical difficulties
 - c) Limited access to necessary resources (e.g., technology, internet)
 - d) Adapting teaching methods for an online format
 - e) Communicating effectively with students
 - f) Assessing and evaluating student learning
2. What strategies or techniques did you find most effective in maintaining student engagement and motivation in the online learning environment?
 - a) Regular communication through online platforms
 - b) Interactive and multimedia content delivery
 - c) Collaborative activities and group projects
 - d) Gamification or use of educational technology tools
3. How did the transition to online teaching affect your ability to provide personalized attention and support to your students?
 - a) Greatly reduced my ability to provide personalized attention
 - b) Somewhat reduced my ability to provide personalized attention
 - c) Did not significantly affect my ability to provide personalized attention
 - d) Improved my ability to provide personalized attention (e.g., through one-on-one virtual meetings)
4. What types of support or resources were most beneficial to you in navigating the challenges of online teaching during the pandemic? (Select all that apply)
 - a) Technical support and training
 - b) Pedagogical guidance and professional development opportunities
 - c) Access to relevant online teaching tools and platforms

- d) Collaboration and sharing of best practices with colleagues
5. How did you assess and evaluate student learning in the online setting? (Select all that apply)
- a) Online quizzes and tests
 - b) Assignments and projects submitted digitally
 - c) Virtual presentations or demonstrations
 - d) Online discussion boards or forums
6. Were there any disparities in students' access to technology or reliable internet connectivity that affected your teaching? If yes, how did you address these disparities?
- a) Yes, and I provided alternative options for those with limited access
 - b) Yes, but there were no feasible solutions
 - c) No, all students had adequate access
 - d) Not applicable
7. In your opinion, what were the main benefits or advantages of online teaching during the pandemic? (Select all that apply)
- a) Flexibility in terms of time and location
 - b) Enhanced use of technology and digital resources
 - c) Increased student independence and self-directed learning skills
 - d) Opportunities for innovative teaching approaches
8. How has the use of online teaching tools impacted your teaching experience or student engagement outside of the pandemic?
- a) Improved teaching experience and student engagement
 - b) No significant impact
 - c) Had some positive impact but also challenges
 - d) Discontinued use of online teaching tools
9. Please indicate which online teaching tools or platforms you continue to use even after the pandemic. (Select all that apply)
- a) Learning Management System (e.g., Moodle, Canvas)
 - b) Video conferencing tools (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams)
 - c) Online collaboration tools (e.g., Google Docs, Microsoft OneDrive)
 - d) Educational apps or software (e.g., Kahoot!, Nearpod)
 - e) Virtual whiteboard or interactive presentation tools (e.g., Jamboard, Prezi)

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