RETHINKING TEACHING AND TEACHERS' WELL BEING POST COVID – ERA

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Abstract

The sudden outbreak of the Covid-19 Coronavirus has been an eye opener of sorts. It has brought many problems – social, political, economic and educational; to the forefront which had otherwise been turned a blind eye to. It has laid bare the flaws in the Education Sector that lay unanswered for long; affecting all the stakeholders in the system; mostly unsympathetically. Of all stakeholders, Teachers, the actual facilitators of the entire educational process, are and will remain worst affected. With a livelihood to maintain, families to support, innumerable technical challenges to face, imminent fear and probability of job termination looming large, health concerns amidst an unforgiving pandemic situation, carrying heavy psychological baggage and the persistent necessity of maintaining contextual competence in the face of a Generation Alpha student, Teachers have been rendered an insecure lot with an equally ambiguous future. As Educational Institutions face closures for an indefinite period of time, millions of young people and children have been affected across all nations. With millions of learners away from school, it becomes very difficult to ascertain any significance to the dwindling role of the teacher or the school as a structural institution. As the two most important stakeholders of the educational process, the presence of the student validates the role of the teacher, and vice versa. While governments try to contain the contagion with lockdowns, it leads to heightening teachers' insecurities and acts as the initiator of throwing the economy off-balance – where EIs are unable to pay salaries and are terminating services of teachers, amplifying the sorry state of unemployment in a Post-Covid World. This paper attempts to assess some problems that education in general and teachers in particular will wake to, once the trauma and the confusion is over. It attempts to provide a Qualitative SWOT analysis for Teaching Professionals post the pandemic. The Methodology involves using a Balanced Scorecard approach to identify stakeholders concerned, activities to achieve sustainability

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goals and related performance measures. It has been observed that while the situation shows far-reaching implications in the short-term, it does open up Pandora's Box of opportunities this profession requires and needs equally. Various strategies were evaluated on the basis of their feasibility and enlisted accordingly. Collective Well-being and Assimilation of Technology in Education have evolved as probable solutions in dealing with it and looking the "New Normal" in the eye.

Keywords: Digital Learning, Entrepreneurial Educators, Physical Distancing, Adaptability

INTRODUCTION

The world effectively came to a steady standstill with an unidentified air-borne virus impregnating a quantum of population unimagined before. A timeline of misadventures by regulatory authorities and a ludicrous attempt to make it look innocuous ended up making COVID-19, another rip-off of the age-old common flu, only deadlier, affecting the entire humankind in a matter of days. In 200 days, it has affected a staggering percentage of the entire world population, and is yet to show signs of containment and regression in most countries making superpowers look powerless, frail and imbecile.

In addition to prolonged periods of economic stagnancy and irreparable damage, it has also stalled the progress of mankind, in ways more than one. Education leads the race, with educators being the frontline runners in the list of affected stakeholders of the Education Sector.

Institutions were quick to resort to the opportunities at their disposal – Smart Classrooms, Advanced Education Models – chiefly automated, Online Classes and Video Classes. A number of applications initially paved the way for bringing back classrooms – this time in shape of Virtual Classrooms. Survival hence became the watchword.

The COVID-19 pandemic has left no stone unturned in undoing reliable economic, social, environmental and political systems. The Education System acts as the cornerstone for most of these structures that constitute civilized and progressive society. The Incubation Period of investment in the Education System has always been very high. Consequently, the Incubation Period of the current impacts that the pandemic is increasingly inflicting upon the Education System is immeasurably difficult to perceive as of now.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Kognito survey done among 8,054 K-12 educators showed that while teachers believe that professional development and implementing trauma-informed practices is important, only half felt prepared to recognize signs of trauma in their students. The survey found that almost everybody (98 percent) agreed that educators should be trained in trauma-informed classroom practices. And more than 82 percent agreed that one of the jobs of teachers and other school staff is to hook up students who are experiencing psychological trauma or distress with mental health support services. However, not much has been researched about the need for mental and physical well-being of teachers. Students, their parents, and educators around the world are feeling the extraordinary ripple

effect of Covid-19 as schools are shutting down and quarantine methods are being ordered to cope with the global pandemic.

While governments and health officials are doing their best slowing down the outbreak, education systems are trying to provide quality education for all during these difficult times (Spotlight: Quality education for all during Covid-19 crisis, April 2020). Social distancing has been identified as a crucial step to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Recently, however, psychologists have highlighted that physical distancing might be a more appropriate word (Miller, 2020): we should be ensuring physical distance from others, but not social distance. At these times, and in fact all times, social support is essential for our wellbeing (Waldinger, 2015).

In researches among teachers, it was found that those who experience more positive relationships with students and colleagues tend to report greater wellbeing at work and in broader life (Collie et al., 2016). On its own, transformative learning (Brock, 2009; Cranton, 1994) is seen as a valued process whereby the learner can come to new knowledge or analytical connections between concepts. Combining this process with mLearning can be especially beneficial to a learner. Help seeking from colleagues, peers, and mentors has been shown to be a helpful strategy for teachers to navigate work challenges (Castro et al., 2010). Any approach to learning that involves technology may have an impact on digital divides. These divides can be quite subtle. They relate not only to access to equipment and connectivity, but also to the skills to make use of that equipment, and other aspects of the learners' situation that may impact on

their ability to make meaning, to appropriate and to contribute (Parsons, 2011). Several authors have confirmed that blended learning has a positive impact on teaching and learning (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Gilbert & Flores-Zambada,2011; Morris, 2014; Sharpe, Benfield, Roberts, & Francis, 2006).

Adaptability refers to the extent to which individuals are able to adjust their thoughts, actions, and emotions in order to effectively navigate new, changing, or uncertain situations (Martin et al., 2012). Teachers must respond to the changing needs of students throughout a lesson, adapt to manage unexpected situations relating to student behaviour, and make adjustments to their teaching plans when timetable changes occur (Collie & Martin, 2016). Adaptable teachers demonstrate greater commitment to their job and lower disengagement at work (Collie & Martin, 2017; Collie et al, 2018).

Autonomy-supportive leadership refers to actions by leaders that promote empowerment and self-initiation among teachers (Slemp et al., 2018). Emotional exhaustion involves feelings of being emotionally drained and worn out, and is considered a key component of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Adequate methods for assessing the scholarly achievements of autonomous learners need to be developed to enable students to acquire techniques of formative peer and self-assessment (Brian Hudson, 2004). Researchers have recognised that resilient teachers demonstrated agency in the process of overcoming adversity (Castro, A. J., Kelly, J., & Shih, M. 2010).

Series of studies have been conducted to trial and evaluate the use of MOOCs intraditionally taught courses. Most of the studies covered

enriching a classroom coursewith a MOOC (Bruff, Fisher, McEwen, & Smith, 2013; Firmin, Schiorring, Whitmer,Willett, Collins, et al., 2014; Ghadiri, Qayoumi, Junn, Hsu, & Sujitparapitaya, 2013;Griffiths, Mulhern, Spies, & Chingos, 2015; Holotescu, Grosseck, Crețu, & Naaji, 2014)

CURRENT SCENARIO

In the wake of Covid-19 pandemic, 1.53billion learners across 184 countries have been driven out of their schools and university spaces, with teachers and professors being confined to their homes as Closures were imposed on educational institutes in a bid to contain the contagion. Higher Education is seeing its disaggregated worst while faculty and students are left grappling with the unanticipated new norm of completely tech-mediated teaching and learning.

Education is not merely confined to classes. It involves interactions, broadening of ideas, free-flowing open discussions, debates, and mentoring of each student, a lot of which gets lost in translation on the online platform.

Mentoring, debates, dialogue exchange, conversations in traditional classrooms make learning interesting. Students ask fewer questions online as doubts are lesser because of low attention levels. The greatest advantage of Face-To-Face Teaching is eye contact and physical accessibility allowing teachers to gauge if students are following the lesson in context. Home environment is often not conducive to effective learning and sadly lacks the excitement of real classrooms entirely.

CHALLENGES

The teachers who are the worst affected stakeholders, have a variety of challenges to face. They can be broadly categorized under the following heads:

Personal Challenges

Financial Problems

Teaching is a vocation but is also a livelihood that helps a teacher feed a family. With schools under closure, salaries are being slashed or withheld or are running the risks of job termination.

Emotional Problems

Teachers are hence suffering from insecurity due to financial issues and from a lack of role definition in the present circumstances. They also do not feel confident about certain practical problems that Online Teaching characterizes.

Professional Challenges

- Universally reliable internet connection and digital devices for both teachers and students, is a myth. The **Digital Disparity** is in no way conducive to usher in **Educational Access** or **Equity**.

- Lessons are often disrupted with low connectivity and more than once either fail to comprehend the teacher or are logged out of the Virtual Classrooms when connectivity is lost.

- Virtual presence leads to low attention without immediate eye contact making monitoring and establishing emotional connect difficult for the teacher.

- The educators are ill-equipped to do justice to the content in question, being forced to use an instructional system that

is ill prepared and for which they have not received any scientific or professional training. What was supposed to be **'Online Learning System'**, has found a new desperate avatar in **'Emergency Online Home-Schooling System'**.

- Subjects that are best taught in a Face to Face Mode and require Hands-On Learning, like Music, Theatre, Dance, and Physical Education, lose much of their Co-operative and Collaborative efficiency and relevance.

- The transformation of pedagogies from **F2F To M2OC** in order to create a suitable **"Dynamic Online Learning Environment".**

- The need to collaborate and create a **Metaversia, a MOOC Model** that would facilitate **Collaborative Network**.

- Slow Learners who lack motivation, struggle to work independently.

- Inability to decrease the students' exposure to increased screen-time

- Practical issues around physical workspaces persist prevent effective learning.

- There is a dearth of adequate material and Educational Research for students with Learning Disorders and Special Needs. Digital Learning still continues to dodge **Inclusive Education**.

- Understanding and implementation of effective solutions are missing.

- Connection between citizens need to be promoted to enable complete participation in the

Actual Networked Knowledge Economy.

Prevalent Challenges

- The emphasis on **Rote Learning** and the expectations of reproducing the same during evaluation.

- Evaluation assessing theory over critical thinking and skill procurement.

- The quality and quantity of education failing to keep sync with the demands of the Labour Market.

- The teacher acting as **"a sage on the stage"** and assuming authority and acting as the pivot of most classroom activities.

- The teacher failing to fit into the role of a mentor or a facilitator.

- The incompetence of Teaching Structures to incorporate the concepts of the Flipped Classrooms where the teacher acts as **"a guide by the side"**.

- Technology being used as an **Expendable Assistant** to teaching and not forming the core of an Instructional Process.

- The lack of customization of lessons and delivery.

- Failure to shift the perspective of classrooms from **Instructional Processes** to **Learning Processes**.

- Lack of Teacher Training programmes emphasising the practical implementation of technology.

- Tech-Non-Conversant educators facing a Tech-Savvy Generation Alpha student population.

- Non-transparency in improvement of knowledge, application and competency in learners.
- Practitioners simply 'transposing' classrooms to the digital medium without scientific Lesson Designs.

STRATEGIES TO HELP TEACHERS COPE WITH THE SITUATION

Building Support Structures

Teachers experiencing more positive relationships with students and colleagues tend to report greater wellbeing at work and in life generally. Strong social connections are therefore crucial, particularly in times that strain relationships through distancing.

Building social support with colleagues, peers, and mentors can be a helpful strategy for teachers to navigate work challenges.

Teachers often connect to individual students in and beyond their classrooms. Many well intending parents at times lack the capacity to support their children's learning needs where teachers might be the only possible solution to massive inequalities that this crisis brings.

Teachers, faced with more demanding students who will have learnt how best to learn and from what or whom, won't be able to deliver their teaching as in the past, hence facilitating much more diverse learner needs to surface and reduce the inequality existing in regular schooling.

Creating bigger communities of learning

Strong **Professional Learning Communities** within and across schools should help collaborate and engage in **Research, Design**, and **Evaluation** of their offering in the current crisis.

Institutions must find ways to balance **Professional Autonomy** & **Collaborative Culture** allowing teachers and Education Communities to co-create and co-facilitate learning for their students.

Evaluation

Ways to integrate Evaluative Methods with the possibilities of the Digital World need to be found. Higher Education needs to be identified as experiences that will prepare a student to become a functioning member of the work force, with the requisite knowledge, skills, and life experiences rather than merely as exams, classes or grades.

Adaptability

The changing needs of students throughout a lesson would require Lesson Designs adapted to manage unexpected situations pertaining to student behaviour, and redesigning their teaching plans accordingly. It may involve:

- Adjusting thinking patterns and adapting to attitudinal changes of students learning online and integrating technology into teaching like never before;
- Adjusting behaviours by including professional personnel to address technical needs to facilitate remote teaching; and,
- Adjusting emotions by reining in possible anxiety or frustration as new technologies in learning emerge.
- Teachers are required to be more adaptable to maintain wellbeing and demonstrate greater commitment to their

job and minimize disengagement at work which can occur when teachers tend to put in very little or no effort into their work, often due to experiences of prolonged work stress.

- Some actions that might help teachers boost their adaptability are:

- Identifying situations where personal adaptability has helped

- Reflecting situational actions and resorting to alternative courses of action on recurrence

- Experimenting with and implementing ideas when a similar situation arises

Adaptability is to be a highly significant factor for teachers to function effectively in the given situational crisis.

Educational leaders and teachers

Educational Leaders, like School Leaders and immediate supervisors play pivotal roles in supporting teachers.

Autonomy-Supportive Leadership can be practiced by them to help promote empowerment and self-initiation among teachers by offering social support and facilitating adaptability.

Professional Wellbeing reflects positive and healthy performance at work, but emotional exhaustion can be caused by being emotionally drained leading to undesirable burnout.

If School Leaders are autonomy-supportive, teachers will tend to experience greater **Workplace Buoyancy**, which is the capacity to effectively face common challenges at work.

Methods to implement Autonomy-Supportive Leadership

Autonomy-Supportive Leadership can be provided in the following ways:

- Listening to teachers' requirements for successful delivery of online learning

- Facilitating acknowledgement and attempting to recognize complications from teachers' perspectives

- Including teachers' suggestions in decision-making at the school-level

- Providing rationales for the tasks, teachers are required to fulfil.

Ensuring Job Security

With a global tendency that threatens to be on the rise with teachers losing their jobs and facing butchering of salaries, especially those attached with private educational institutions, in the wake of this pandemic, has but only added to the feeling of frustration and mounting insecurity leading to not only questionable wellbeing of the teachers but also adversely affecting their performance. Educators in classes can never be replaced by technology which will always lack accessibility and the "Human Touch" – a belief that both students and teachers share. Teachers need to understand their worth and leave no stones unturned in acquiring technological fluency.

Governmental Policies

Ministries and their ancillary bodies that nationally and internationally regulate Teacher Education and Training Programmes must immediately revise a change in **Teacher Training Policies** which instead of the emphasis on theory must directly emphasize

Practical Application of Methodologies which are chiefly **Tech- Oriented** and emphasize on **Analytic Skills** and **Creative Leadership.**

Only about 50% of teachers worldwide feel comfortable or have experience in digital teaching & learning, with many trying to directly replicate a traditional lesson on a computer, due to lack of familiarity or comfort with **Digital Pedagogies.**

Teachers hence need to be encouraged to be **Leaders, Designers** of innovative learning environments, **Co-Creators, Facilitators,** and **Coaches** for students. **Educational Entrepreneurship** needs to be encouraged by Global Educational Systems.

Incorporation of Teaching Technology

Teachers previously intimidated by technology are now compelled to take the bull by its horns. A staggering population of teachers are solely proficient at planning and teaching in the traditional classroom setup. It would be more than merely challenging to exhibit competency in their area of expertise, without proper planning, relevant training and re-learning or instructional methodologies in an online setting, to the Generation Alpha student, who is way more technologically equipped.

There are a variety of Digital Pedagogies that have often been left unexploited, predominantly due to the lack of proper infrastructure, accessibility, teacher incompetence, university policies or sometimes even sheer oblivion of the fact that they even exist.

The creation of a suitable "**Dynamic Online Learning Environment**" will greatly help teachers to cope with this isolating and restraining situation. This would necessitate a very fluid transformation from **F2F** to **MOOC** modes of teaching.

Potential platforms for MOOC creation

Some of the potential platforms that can assist teachers in MOOC creation are:

1. **EdX**

2. **Moodle**

3. **Course Sites**

4. **Udemy**

5. **Versal**

6. **ResearchEd Conference**, which is a platform to help teachers and educational professionals discuss evidence-based education.

7. **Wriggle Webinars** which specialize in Digital Learning for Education, had been offering support services to schools in the form of On-Site Demonstrations. Due to school closures they now provide this support in a webinar format focusing on Remote Teaching and Learning.

8. **Coursera**

9. **Khan Academy**

10. **Udacity**

11. **Course Builder** by **Google**

E Portfolios and **Enhanced Digital Tools** also need to be increasingly used just as **Webinars** facilitating **Learning for All** (both students and teachers) must be used.

OPPURTUNITIES

The chaos of the pandemic has brought in its

wake many opportunities too that teachers can use to their advantage.

Major positive opportunities:

- Excellent chance for teachers to form much stronger connections with parents, especially important for students with disabilities in this emergency

- Chance to develop creative initiatives to overcome the limitations of being physically separated

- Peer-collaborations

- Opportunities for cooperation, creative solutions, and willingness to learn from others and try new tools because educators, parents, and students are sharing similar experiences all at the same time.

- Many education related companies are offering their tools and solutions for free to help support teachers and students.

- Digital learning provides the opportunity to learn in new ways that may help us rethink how we collectively think about the school system.

- Greater autonomy and agency for students to take charge of their learning to explore new ideas and experiences like never before. New interests and passions will emerge for many students and teachers.

CONCLUSION

This new shift in education is unassuming and rapidly evolving. The pandemic has posed many detrimental practical hindrances leading to a dearth of immediately accessible research material that would help foretell the future of these learning environments and routines.

New challenges will always require new solutions that are significantly innovative. These opportunities need to be taken advantage of to serve the need of the hour.

The forthcoming months will necessitate a deeper understanding of the challenges to arrive at solutions with the help of global networks. In a situation that is as traumatic as trying, realization of **Individual Responsibility** and **Accountability** towards **Collective Well Being**, needs to be prioritized. A positive attitude towards Mental Health Awareness needs to be encouraged with the same importance that is attached to Physical Health Awareness.

Our new acquisition of innovative instructional methodologies and teaching experiences should be used to positively change the way we look at education in the future. The present situational crises require that we support and learn from one another in order to get through this pandemic together.

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