INNOVATIVE APPROACHES OF REACHING OUT TO THE STUDENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC: A PARADIGM SHIFT IN TEACHING PROCESS

Binod Basnett[1]

Abstract

The entire world is under the mayhem due to the pandemic of COVID-19 which has hindered the educational process significantly across the globe. The nationwide lockdown and closure of educational institutions have created a havoc in teaching learning process. The present paper is an attempt to foresee the present scenario from the teachers' perspective. The objectives of the study were to explore the innovative approaches adopted by the teachers during the time of pandemic crisis, challenges being faced by them in imparting continuity to their teaching vocation and their preparedness for the post pandemic challenges. The study has been conducted by selecting 25 teachers from a number of populations from different government secondary and senior secondary schools of Sikkim purposively. Descriptive method has been adopted to understand the present situation. Different possibilities are being explored for reaching out to the learners to provide uninterrupted education. Technology has become the best companion of the teachers thereby assisting them for giving momentum to their vocation. However, there are issues and challenge pertaining to usage of technology. In majority, lack of basic infrastructure and technological devices among the learners were the impediments and training on hands on experience would prepare them for the challenges in post covid condition. Transformation in the field of education post pandemic is inevitable. This demands major paradigm shift in teaching pedagogy, methodology and assessment.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a progressive enterprise that demand constant experimentations and innovations. A skillful teacher does not hesitate or fear to undertake these explorations. Over the few decades, educational experiments and innovative practices have opened new

1. Graduate Teacher (Science), Govt. Senior Secondary School, Dikling Pakyong, East Sikkim,
 Email: binodbasnett4u@gmail.com

gateways for attaining the milestone. Innovative teaching has enabled both the teachers and learners to be more productive. Effective use of innovation in teaching is becoming a regular feature. Visionary approaches and efforts have worldwide and farsighted impact in education sector. Innovative teaching approaches has a significant and large effect on achievement (Savelsbergh, Prins, Rietbergen, Fechner, Vaessen, Draijer & Bakker, 2016, p.167). Innovation in teaching learning process has many facets. The national awardee teachers have introduced various innovative practices such as concept based teaching learning classes, connecting education with real life by skill based activities and project, making a very friendly environment in which students love to come to the school, while developing curriculum, teaching learning process should be made more easy which could be grasped by the students, promoting collaborative teaching, Organizing Special Assembly so as to provide same platform to students and parents, so the students can show their talents in front of their parents and parents may also give feedback about the school so that further improvement may be brought (Sengupta & Tyagi, 2016, p.51).

Apart from the innovative teaching, recent development in the present education system has witnessed widespread usage of sophisticated technological devices and internet which has not only made it accessible for all but also created an environment for teaching learning process with ease. "Information technology can be intensively used for facilitating students' participation in progressive inquiry, collaborative learning, the learners' active engagement in knowledge formation process, and learnability of

intelligence" (Hakkarainen, Mukkonen, Lipponen, Ilomäki, Rahikainen&Lehtinen, 2001, p.194). Modern advance technology has multiple components in the development of mankind in every sector. The magnitude of its application is boundless. With the introduction of ICT, internet and gadgets; the teaching community have been empowered for enhancing their vocation. "ICT, especially the internet, can enable the widespread sharing of valuable resources in both traditional and interactive forms, affording the means of collaborative learning distributed over time and place as needed" (Livingstone, 2012, p.11). Technological advancements have presented the learners with endless opportunities and possibilities. Ilomäki and Lakkala (2018) reported that pedagogically 'advanced' practices, such as using a virtual learning environment and collaborating via the web help to improve pupils' basic digital competence. According to Mynbayeva, Sadvakassova and Akshalova (2017) the modern digital technologies change our way of life, ways of communication, way of thinking, feelings, channels of influence on other people, social skills, and social behavior.

The prevailing predicament situation has left all in an alarming state. Nevertheless, this condition has also conferred the best opportunity to think beyond the conventional mode of education. In this dire situation, the educators have resolved to various innovative measures and alternatives for giving continuity to their teaching.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present pandemic like situation was not anticipated to have such a major setback in the

field of education. The impact of the pandemic and lockdown of the educational institutions has left everyone perplexed. The biggest concern that has been posed is to reach out to the learners and give continuity to teaching process. For this, the teachers have been the bestowed upon with the pivotal responsibility. Innovative approaches and practices have empowered them to tackle the situation in a better way. It is very crucial at this juncture for the teacher to adopt every possible means to reach out to his learners. According to Mynbayeva, Sadvakassova and Akshalova (2017), the application or nonuse of innovative methods depends on the personality of the teacher, his methodological competence, pedagogical skills. The innovative measures will enable mitigate the adverse effect posed by the temporary shutdown of the institutions. Sengupta and Tyagi (2016) state that the manner in which these innovative practices are implemented makes it effective to groom and nurture the talent and potential of the learners. Apart from this, the teachers have been defying all odds for sustainability of education. They are confronted with various hardships like limited resources, technological expertise and inadequate access for reaching out to their learners. In the era of science, there are certain limitations that have impeded from providing uninterrupted transaction, evaluation and assessment. Nevertheless, physical classroom has been replaced by virtual classroom aided by the technology and eventually a perpetual relationship between man and the machine has been established. Moreover, in the verge of the crisis, the teachers have to ensure that the quality of education does not suffer. The process of stimulating the learners towards their normal learning should be constantly and vigilantly monitored and evaluated. The challenges of today will definitely pave way forward to prepare and equip the teaching community for future transitions.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

For the present study, the following objectives have been formulated:

- To explore the innovative practices and approaches being adopted by the teachers for continuing the teaching process during the closure of institutions.

- To understand the measures adopted for reaching out to the learners by the teachers at the present pandemic situation.

- To examine the hardships encountered by the teaching community during the pandemic in teaching process.

- To know the preparedness of the teachers for the inevitable transformations in education in post pandemic context.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher has used descriptive survey method to have an insight of the impact of current pandemic in teaching process.

Tools

The researcher developed a questionnaire containing open ended questions pertaining to different aspects like innovative approaches and practices adopted by the teachers, measures for reaching out to the learners, challenges in teaching process during the closure of the institutions and their preparedness for post pandemic transitions in education.

Sample for the Study

The purpose of the present study was to investigate ways and means being implemented to provide uninterrupted education during the closure of the institutions due to lockdown, issues and challenges as well as readiness for post pandemic education from the teachers' perspective. Therefore, 25 school teachers (15 Science teachers and 10 Arts teachers) teaching at different senior secondary and secondary schools of Sikkim was taken as sample for the study.

Techniques for Data Analysis

Since the self-developed questionnaire was used by the researcher, the responses of the teachers were analyzed qualitatively.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Based on the data collected by means of open-ended questionnaire and interview schedule, the major findings were reported accordingly.

What are the innovative approaches/ practices adopted by you to give continuity to teaching process during this lockdown?

- Calling the students over the phone directly and explaining the contents whenever necessary.

- Teaching the lesson by means of audio/ video/textual content or amalgamation of all.

- Uploading video recordings of teaching based on lessons, discussion and solutions of difficult questions.

- Using the digital tools for continuity of teaching through online mode.

- Voice messages for giving extra clarity to the content and highlighting the areas of difficulty.

- Providing support and motivating the students for attending online classes and tests.

How are you able to reach out to your students during this pandemic?

- Connecting with the students by creating WhatsApp group, Facebook Page, etc.

- Reaching out to the students for teaching through different online platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Zoom, etc.

- Making direct telephonic calls to the students in order to address their problems.

What are the limitations/challenges faced by you at present in teaching process?

- Majority of the students do not have their personal devices such as smart phone, laptop, etc.

- Poor network connectivity and inadequate data pack for conducting online classes.

- Lack of students' interest and involvement.

- Students being usually inactive and not responding regularly during online classes.

- Lack of support from the students.

- Only few questions being raised by the students.

- Students ignore virtual learning as it is difficult for them to adjust to the transformations taking place during the pandemic.

- Delay in response from the students regarding submission of the assignments hindering the completion of the course/syllabus in time.

- Addressing slow learners through online mode of teaching is quite difficult.

- Going through the psychological distress and anxiety.

- Dissatisfaction of the parents over the online classes being conducted.

Could you highlight on some of the hardships being faced by you in reaching out to your students?

- Most of the students did not have access to devices like smart phones, laptops, etc. and internet.

- Convincing the parents and the students for virtual teaching learning process.

- The contact number provided to the school could not be reached out in some cases as they were non-functional.

- Having single mobile phone to be shared amongst the siblings studying in different classes caused interruption in maintaining smooth interaction.

- Recharging the mobile phone was not possible due to lockdown and closure of shops.

- Students travelling frequently to visit their relatives and not able to establish connection with them.

- The parents were least concerned and receptive regarding the online classes as the students have to wait until their parents gave the mobile phones for study purpose.

- Digital divide between the students from rural and urban areas.

Have you been evaluating/assessing the progress of your learners? If yes, highlight some measures for evaluation?

- Conducting open textbook tests, written tests, simple projects, etc.

- Organizing online debates, reading activities, etc.

- Telephonic conversation with the students to assess the level of understanding and difficulties faced by them.

- Assessing the assignments given to the students.

- Conducting weekly/monthly online tests.

What are the difficulties confronted by you regarding evaluation/assessment?

- Evaluation process becoming tiring and troublesome especially when evaluation at individual level for the entire class with huge number of students is concerned.

- Not sure whether real learning is taking place or not as the students are simply watching the videos and sending the assignments.

- Less number of students (50-60%) participate during the test.

- Underperformance of the students due to lack of seriousness towards the tests and assignments.

- Adverse effect on the health due to spending more time on screen.

- Multiple assignments given by the teachers at a single time has not only led to the delay in submission of the tasks by the students but also affected the quality of the assignments.

What are your preparations for the post pandemic situation for anticipating the transformations in the field of education?

- Learning to make YouTube videos and getting acquainted with the uses of various applications like Google Meet, Zoom, etc.

- Equip with more IT skills to making oneself more techno-friendly.

- Making more lucid evaluation process.

- Getting habituated with the technologies as it is going to be the new normal.

- Familiarize with online teaching and learning processes by using ICT.

- Preparing for many students who will be coming back from the state of hibernation.

SUGGESTIONS

On the basis of the findings, the present study would like to put forth some of the following suggestions:

- The teachers should be trained on Innovative Teaching Methods for making their teaching effective.

- Devices for E-learning should be made accessible and affordable for every learner.

- Basic ICT skills should be enhanced amongst the teachers and the learners.

- Proactive role has to be undertaken for attracting the learners towards E-learning through online education.

- Understanding of the psychological aspects of both the teachers and learners towards E-learning should be taken into account.

- Mechanisms should be devised for maximum reach out to the learners as some of the learners are still being deprived of education due to various constrains.

- Evaluation and assessment procedures need to be made lucid, however, with multidimensional approach.

CONCLUSION

Innovation in education and teaching learning process offers an answer and provides a gateway to many issues pertaining to imparting uninterrupted education to the learners at this time of pandemic and closure of the institutions due to lockdown. The teachers are bestowed with colossal task and they can definitely leave an impact on the present as well as future education system. With newer ways and means of reaching out to the students during this pandemic will not only boost the morale of the students but also minimize the threat of students being dropout. The challenges posed ahead have left everyone baffled but nevertheless it has also given the opportunity to rethink and reconsider for the future and holistic perspective. The pragmatic approach with amalgamation of technology has always been a path forward. It is a high time for overhaul of education system with the aid of experiences gained through the phase of COVID-19. Limitations and challenges should not be the shackle on the way to achieving the objective of providing education to the learners. Restructuring and redesigning of curriculum, paradigm shift in pedagogy,

technological amalgamation for blended learning, holistic assessment and evaluation procedures are some areas that needs a makeover as an optimistic measure for the post pandemic transformation in education.

REFERENCES

Hakkarainen, K., Mukkonen, H., Lipponen, L., Ilomäki, L., Rahikainen, M. & Lehtinen, E. (2001). Teachers' Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Skills and Practices of Using ICT and Their Pedagogical Thinking. Jl. of Technology and Teacher Education, 9(2), 181-197.

Ilomäki, L. & Lakkala, M. (2018). Digital technology and practices for school improvement: innovative digital school model. Research and Practice in Technology Enhanced Learning, 13 https://doi.org/10.1186/s41039-018-0094-8

Livingstone, S. (2012). Critical reflections on the benefits of ICT in education. Oxford Review of Education, 38 (1), 9-24.

Mynbayeva, A., Sadvakassova, Z. & Akshalova, B. (2017). Pedagogy of the Twenty-First Century: Innovative Teaching Methods, New Pedagogical Challenges in the 21st Century - Contributions of Research in Education https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.72341

Savelsbergh, E.R., Prins, G.T., Rietbergen, C., Fechner, S., Vaessen, B.E., Draijer, J.M. & Bakker, A. (2016). Effects of innovative science and mathematics teaching on student attitudes and achievement: A meta-analytic study. Educational Research Review, 19, 158-172. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2016.07.003

Sengupta, A. & Tyagi, H.K. (2016). Teaching Excellence and Innovative Practices: A Case Study of National Awardee Teachers of India. Journal of Education and Practice, 7(1), 48-53.