

A STUDY OF CHALLENGES IN REMOTE WORKING FOR FACULTY IN COMMERCE COLLEGES IN PUNE CITY

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Abstract

Teaching has been a challenging job since its inception. The art of honing young minds in terms of knowledge and values requires dedication and commitment towards one's job. Combine this with the need for the teacher to match pace with the changing world and the challenges become manifold. Such a turnabout in the existing teaching pedagogies has been posing a problem to the effectiveness of teachers and the satisfaction of the students. This research paper aims to highlight the major areas that have been posing as a problem to the teachers. Also it is worth noting that some of these challenges are specific to developing countries. Therefore the researcher has attempted to understand how the transition from physical classroom to virtual learning has affect the content- deliverer especially with regards to his/ her effectiveness prima facie due to the challenges posed by his/ her operating environment.

Keywords: *Remote working, teachers, challenges, commerce colleges*

1.1 Introduction

Online education has already caught momentum within the last two decades in the developed economies, and most higher education institutions believed that this method of instruction would be critical for the future of higher education. (B. Mastel-Smith; J.Post; and P. Lake, 2015)In developing nations too education has seen the online path albeit with more focus on synchronous learning than asynchronous learning tools. With the onslaught of the pandemic COVID -19 the rigid outlook regarding the traditional approach of chalk and talk has certainly seen a 360-degree turnaround during the last one year, causing the teaching fraternity to experience a wide array of ups and downs in meeting the challenges posed in front of them by the pandemic. Not only have the teachers been compelled to enhance their technical knowhow by leaps and bounds; what is more is that their absolute feeling of job satisfaction is challenged.

The teaching fraternity had so far merely switched from the usage of a traditional black board to the more techno savvy audio visual tools of teaching while the method of content delivery remained more or less the same. Teachers were known to accommodate the seasonal variation from the classroom environment in the form of field visits and internships with aplomb and ease but a complete turnaround was something that they were unprepared for. (E. Allen and J. Seaman, 2013)

With classroom teaching coming to an absolute standstill; and there has been complete reliance on online content delivery using various digital platforms across age groups to which the higher education is not an exception. However, this sudden and prolonged change in the working conditions has been seen to rub off on teachers causing them to experience stress, uncertainty and an overall decline in their productivity culminating in job dissatisfaction.

1.2 Review of literature:

“Teaching, learning and evaluation are tasks requiring an academic bent of mind along with a conducive environment for mental, moral, social and cultural growth of those learning as well as those facilitating.”

However, the unseasonal and continuous change in the teaching learning process has made it imperative to work upon the factors that clearly are seen to have an effect on the effectiveness of teaching leaning process. The following mentioned are the various tangible and intangible changes with a view to create structural dimension to measure teachers' effectiveness.

1.2.1 Changes in methodology:

- **Work from Home (WFH):** Advocated by HRs across the globe this method of working that precisely requires a person to perform his/her job within the confines of his/ her home has been successful to a great extent with dual benefits to the employer in the form of curtailed costs and to the employee in the form of flexibility and greater work life balance. However teaching as a profession so far remained untouched with this development. The onslaught of the pandemic however confined the teaching fraternity to a work from home schedule. Most faculties have viewed work from home as disruptive and lack of harmony. Respondents have also noted that at times the interference of family commitments and their physical presence at that time has disturbed their synchrony in teaching.
- **Requirement of IT arrangements:** Most of the teachers in higher education are bestowed with necessary learning resources including IT arrangements by their respective institutions. Also, assistance is easily available in case a person lacks necessary skill set. However strict lockdown measures have laid excessive burden on the limited IT resources available with the teachers at home. In order to make online teaching –learning process enriching a strong and robust infrastructure is a must. This not only includes hardware and soft wares but along accessibility with good high speed bandwidth internet connections, routers, modems and uninterrupted power supply. In fact, this randomly created technical environment is often bound by snags such as power cuts and internet and device failures
- **Excessive usage of digital mediums:** Teaching aids and their effective usage is a reflection of the efficiency of the person utilizing them. Traditionally the blackboard has been a go to option for teachers. With the advent of technology more advances were seen in the form of audio-visual aids however the role of technology was supplementary to face to face teaching without completely replacing it. However online teaching is altogether different in the sense it makes the teachers presence virtual. Teachers find the excessive reliance on technology and digital mediums overwhelming. The researchers state that most of the teachers belonging to the older age groups lack comfort with the usage of digitised learning tools in turn reducing their effectiveness. This coupled with the several constrains placed by different digital platform in form of number of students, time limits, purchase of paid versions of software have added difficulties to the teaching process.

1.2.2 Changes in the environment:

- **Lack of environment for teachers:** (TB., et.al, 2015) in their research on undergraduate teachers have noted that most teachers lack the environment of a classroom that is necessary for maintaining their flow during the teaching process. Most teachers stated that they found minor disturbances from their family members distracting. Also, the fear of being evaluated by outsiders or relatives or their own spouse and children during the process of teaching is known to have made teachers conscious of their teaching methodologies.
Also, the positively reinforced discipline in a classroom is missing in a virtual environment limiting the concentration span of students.
- **Limited concentration span:** While it is true that every student has a limited attention span during the learning process and that the effect of external barriers is inevitable. (Chickering and Gamson;1991) in their research have identified that a key factor that has reduced the span drastically for the students is the usage of mobile phones and internet. Their continuous presence on social media and the urge to track others digital footprints had been instrumental in reducing attention span in students. However, with education switching over to the online mode these two elements have become a compulsion.
- **Distracting environment for students:** During classroom interactions rules norms and protocols of behaviour instil a sense of discipline amongst the students and tend to avoid distractions. (Rubin and Fernandes, 2013) Also, the physical presence of the students and their verbal and nonverbal communication signals are capable of communicating with the teachers whether they have been successful in getting their message across. However, in the online modus operandi

students are scattered far and wide without their classmates or the rules and norms that bind their behaviour. (Darabi, et.al; 2011) Thus, it is quite possible that various extraneous variables act up in creating distractions for the students causing the harmony of learning to break.

1.3 Hypotheses of the study:

1. H0: Changes in *methodology of teaching* has a negative effect on the performance of teachers in higher education.
2. H0: Changes in *teaching environment* has a negative effect on the performance of teachers in higher education.

1.4 Research methodology:

The jurisdiction of Savitribai Phule Pune University is further subdivided into 4 regions viz. Pune Urban, Pune Rural, Ahmednagar and Nashik. The researcher has collected the primary data from 50 teachers associated with commerce colleges affiliated to Savitribai Phule Pune University using survey method. The primary data has been collected using *snowball sampling*. This method ensured speedy and optimum data collection despite the vast geographical expanse to be covered. The researcher could obtain 15 responses from Pune Urban, 15 responses from Pune rural and 10 each from Ahmednagar and Nashik. This ensures that the sample represents the entire geographical expanse under study. The opinions and responses received from the respondents have been instrumental in drafting the findings of this paper. Secondary data has been drawn from university circulars, research papers, journals, published theses on related topics with a view to build premises and to understand and analyse the nature of the problem.

1.5 Major Findings:

Parameters	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	TOTAL
Changes in teaching methodology				
Work from home (WFH)	10	5	35	50
Requirement of IT infrastructure	23	0	27	50
Complete reliance on digital mediums	5	5	40	50
Content development and background reading	15	8	27	50
Evaluation changes	5	8	37	50
Covering practical workload	0	6	44	50
Total	58	32	210	
Changes in environment				
Lack of teaching environment	9	9	32	50
Reduced concentration span of students	13	3	34	50
Distracting environment for students	18	15	17	50
Total	40	27	83	300

1.5.1 Cross tabulation of data area wise:

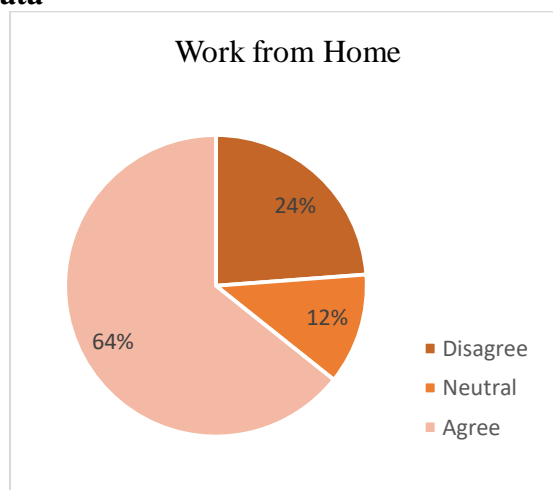
Requirement of IT infrastructure				
Area	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Total
Pune Urban	11	0	4	15
Pune rural	5	0	10	15
Ahmednagar	4	0	6	10
Nashik	3	0	7	10
Total	23	0	27	50

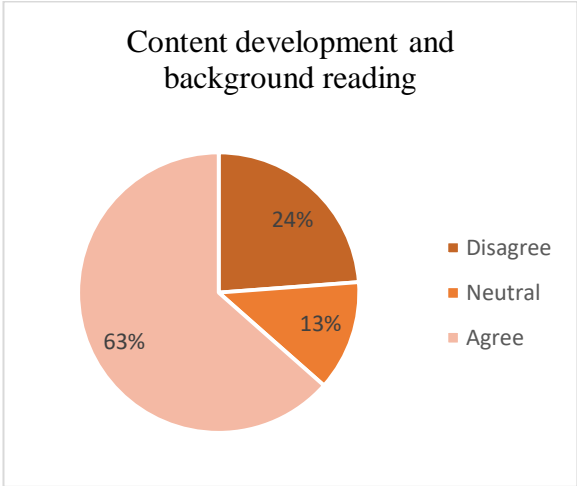
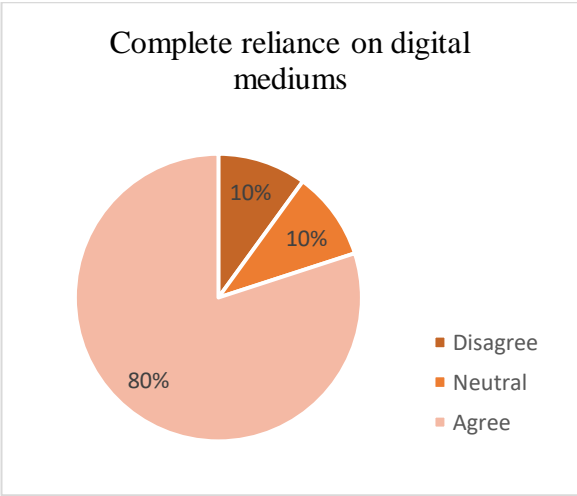
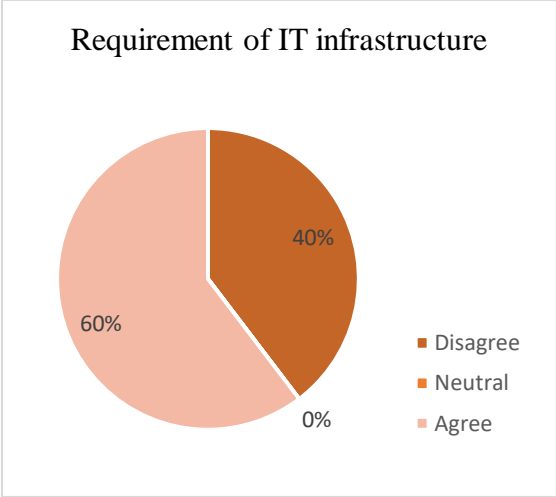
Complete reliance on digital mediums				
Area	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Total
Pune Urban	3	2	10	15
Pune rural	1	3	11	15
Ahmednagar	1	0	9	10
Nashik	0	0	10	10
Total	5	5	40	50

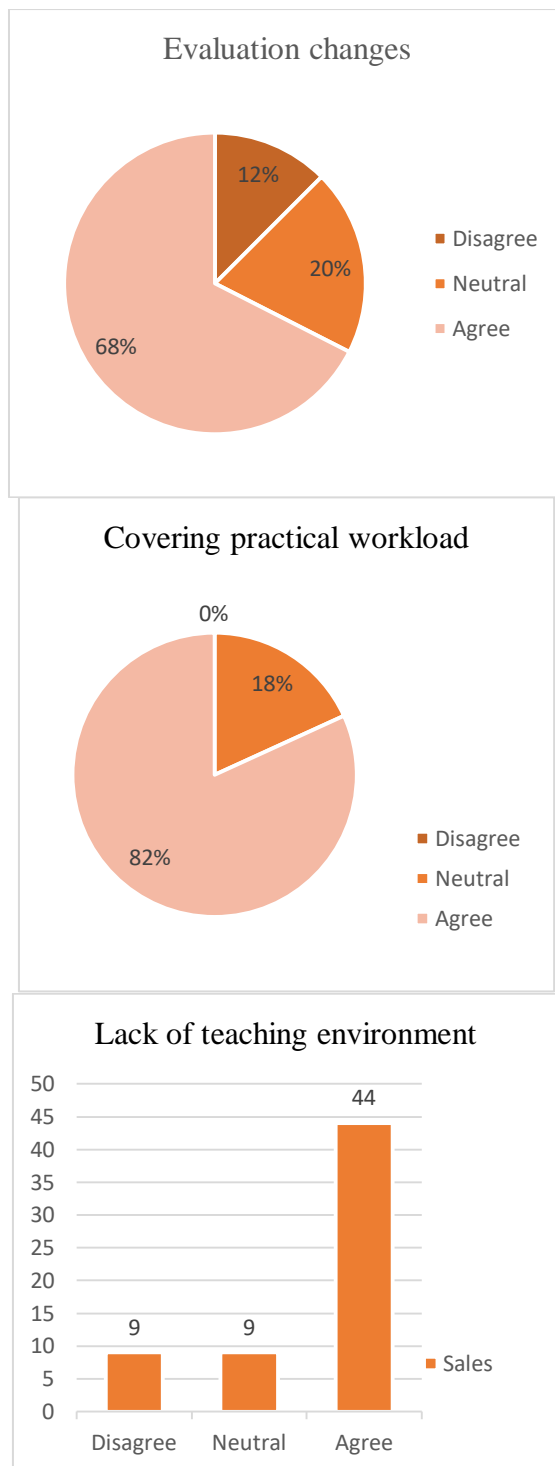
Content development and background reading				
Area	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Total
Pune Urban	8	1	6	15
Pune rural	4	2	9	15
Ahmednagar	1	3	6	10
Nashik	2	2	6	10
Total	15	8	27	50

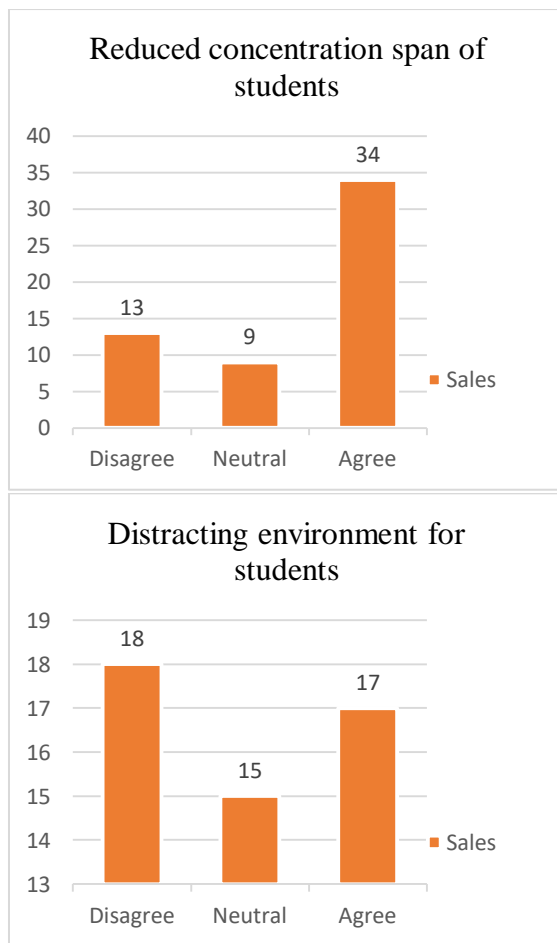
Evaluation changes				
Area	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Total
Pune Urban	3	8	4	15
Pune rural	0	0	15	15
Ahmednagar	1	0	9	10
Nashik	1	0	9	10
Total	5	8	37	50

1.6 Graphical analysis of data



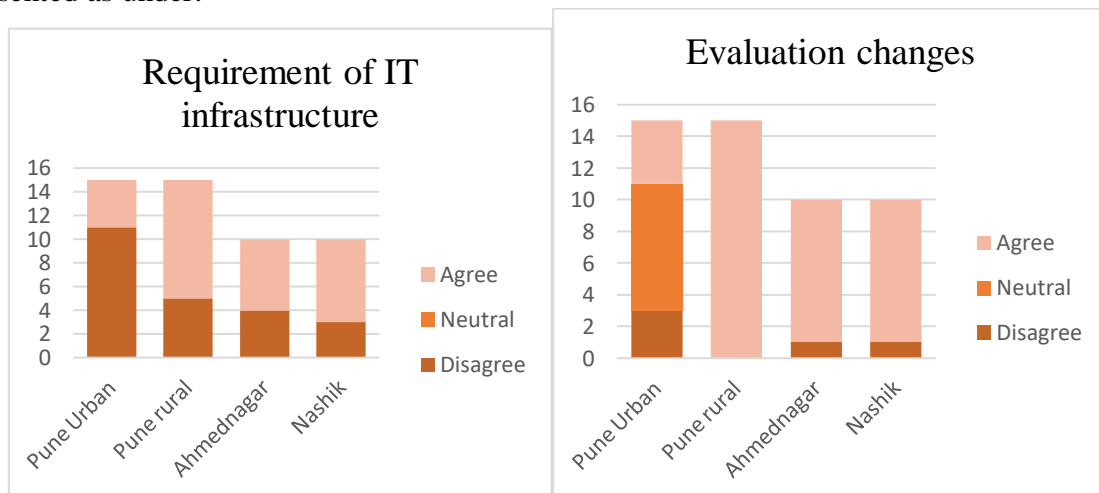


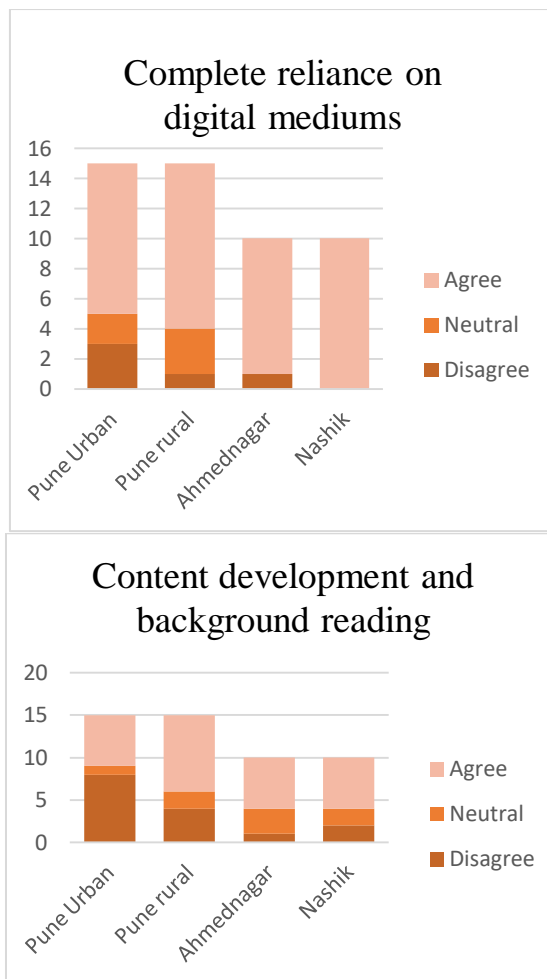




1.6.1 Cross tabulation of data:

For the changes in methodology the researcher has attempted to understand the influence of geographical location on the availability of technology for online teaching. The following findings are presented as under:





Statistical analysis and interpretations:

The researcher has used the Chi Square test to test the correlation between the variables. The level of significance alpha α is 0.05 and the chi square test for Likert scale analysis has been used by categorizing responses into three categories vis. Disagree, Neutral and Agree.

Interpretations:

Parameters	df value	Calculated Chi square Value	Tabulated Chi square value
Changes In Methodology	10	89.50	18.31
Changes In Environment	4	89.50	9.49

Table 1.2 Comparison between calculated and tabulated chi square values

Since in both the hypotheses’ calculated values are higher than the tabulated values for chi square it is safe to conclude that the null hypotheses can be accepted in both the cases.

1.7 Major conclusions:

- Most teachers have agreed that they were not comfortable in the work from home pattern. Interactions revealed that prima facie the teachers missed a conducive classroom environment that they have been accustomed to and secondly, they held a fear of being evaluated by their family members as well as students’ parents regarding their teaching skills.
- Most of the teachers agreed that the extensive requirement of IT infrastructure was a change in the modus operandi that affected their performance negatively. Interactions revealed that they had to share the available IT resources with their children/ spouse giving them limited time to

grasp the new technology and to complete their academic responsibilities. For this particular attribute the data collected has stated that those in the rural areas found it more challenging to arrange the IT related infrastructure. Interactions revealed that the sudden imposing of lockdown and unpreparedness in terms of information technology was a major drawback for the teachers located rurally.

- Many of the teachers agreed that content development and background reading was a problem posed to them owing to the pandemic since they had limited access to literary resources and also were unaware as to how to disseminate content to the students in the asynchronous mode of learning. This particularly being a necessity as per the norms of UGC (University Grants Commission) circular that 40 percent content has to be disseminated in asynchronous mode. The movement of the teachers to their distant roots in the absence of daily college did indeed make availability of teaching content a challenge. Most teachers were of the opinion that they had no access to material at their respective homes and were unprepared for a long gap in availability of reading and teaching materials.
- Most of the teachers stated that the sudden and radical changes in the evaluation system in the form of objective based evaluation hampered their performance since they had to modify their content delivery to absorb the changes in the evaluation as well. This problem was particularly expounded upon by faculties teaching numerical subjects relating to accounting and mathematics. Faculties from the rural jurisdiction of SPPU also stated that the colleges were ill equipped with mechanisms for internal evaluation of students in the online mode. Interactions revealed that faculties called for assignments on personal whatsapp in order to give internal assessment marks.
- Most of the faculties were of the opinion that while teaching theoretical subjects was realistically possible however practical subjects such as mathematics, accounting, taxation were tedious in the absence of a traditional classroom set-up. Also, the teachers stated that they found it difficult to judge the understanding level of the students when it comes to practical subjects.
- Most teachers felt that work from home lacked the positive discipline instilled by the classroom environment and they themselves found minor distractions while working from home to be quite disturbing. Interactions revealed that the fact to be judged by their family members and increasing reliance of the family members on them while working from home became the major hurdles while performing the role of a teacher.
- Maximum respondents stated that the concentration span among the students has reduced drastically. Some have attributed it to the distracting surroundings that students might have experienced in terms of lack of a quiet place for attending lectures while most opined that the mere presence of a smart phone in the teaching learning process was responsible for a decline in the concentration span of the students. This combined with the posed freedom in the absence of classroom restrictions has played a major role in distracting the students during the learning process.

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