Navigating Online Teaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Challenges and Coping Strategies Among College Teachers in Mizoram

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic caused an unprecedented disruption in education systems worldwide, necessitating a rapid transition to online instruction. This study investigates the challenges encountered and coping strategies employed by college faculty in Mizoram, a geographically remote state in Northeast India. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 50 college teachers via a structured online questionnaire. The results identified poor internet connections, inadequate technology, low levels of student interaction, mental strain, and financial difficulties as some of the major problems. Nevertheless, educators were able to adapt through video conferencing, project-based evaluation, and self-care. This study emphasizes the need to focus on digital infrastructure, faculty development programs, and mental health services to build sustainability against future challenges. The study underscores the importance of investing in digital infrastructure, faculty training, and mental health support to enhance institutional resilience in the face of future disruptions.

Key words: Online education, COVID-19, Mizoram, college teachers, digital divide, teaching challenges

I.   Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly disrupted global education systems, leading to unprecedented challenges and exacerbating existing inequalities. At the height of the crisis, over 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries were affected by school closures, representing approximately 91% of the global student population (UNESCO, 2020). These closures compelled educational institutions to rapidly transition to remote learning modalities. However, the shift exposed significant disparities, particularly in low- and lower-middle-income countries, where limited access to digital infrastructure hindered effective learning. A joint report by UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank revealed that children in these regions lost nearly four months of schooling, compared to six weeks in high-income countries (UNESCO, UNICEF, & World Bank, 2020). The pandemic not only disrupted academic progress but also highlighted the urgent need for resilient and inclusive education systems capable of withstanding such global crises. Measures such as lockdowns and social distancing, while necessary to curb the virus's spread, led to increased social isolation and loneliness. Studies have shown a significant increase in loneliness during the pandemic, with reduced social interactions predicting greater feelings of isolation (Killgore et al., 2020). This social isolation

has been linked to adverse mental health outcomes, including heightened levels of depression and anxiety (Horigian et al., 2021). In terms of the economy, the pandemic caused many companies to close and many jobs to be lost. Small businesses suffered the most; estimates indicate that if the crisis continued for several months, closures could result in the loss of over 30 million jobs (Fairlie, 2020).

In India, over 320 million students were affected by school closures, with many struggling to access remote learning due to limited internet connectivity and a shortage of digital devices (World Economic Forum, 2020). This digital divide disproportionately impacts underprivileged groups, including girls, children with disabilities, and those from low-income families, exacerbating existing educational inequalities (Al Jazeera, 2021).

In the northeastern state of Mizoram, educational institutions were closed on March 17, 2020, as a precautionary measure against the spread of COVID-19 (NDTV, 2020). To ensure continuity in education, the Mizoram government initiated virtual classes via television broadcasts starting April 13, 2020, allowing students to access lessons from their homes (India Today, 2020).

Teachers across India faced numerous challenges adapting to remote teaching methodologies. Many grappled with limited access to technology, inadequate online resources, and a lack of professional development opportunities to effectively deliver virtual lessons (Wason & Sahni, 2023). This abrupt shift not only strained educators but also affected the quality of teacher-student interactions, highlighting the need for comprehensive support systems to enhance digital literacy and pedagogical skills among teachers (Dayal, 2023).

The crisis highlighted the importance of responsive and transparent governance, as effective communication and policy coordination were crucial in managing the pandemic's challenges (Gostin & Wiley, 2020). There is an urgent need for investment in digital infrastructure and inclusive educational policies to bridge the digital divide and ensure equitable access to quality education for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

Objective of the study

The objective of this study was to identify educational challenges experienced and coping strategies used by college teachers in Mizoram during the pandemic.

II.   Methodology

The study aimed to include the entire population of college teachers in Mizoram, but due to feasibility reasons, a convenient sample of 50 college teachers was selected. The use of convenience sampling was deemed appropriate due to time constraints and the accessibility of participants during lockdown conditions. While this limits generalizability, the sample provides meaningful insight into the experiences of educators across both public and private colleges. To collect data, an online survey was employed and distributed to the participants via WhatsApp. The survey was created using Google Forms. The study utilized a descriptive survey approach to collect information from college teachers residing in various regions of Mizoram.

Participants

Out of the 50 participants, 20 were from government colleges, while 30 were from private colleges in Mizoram. The participants were from various colleges, including Pachhunga University College, Government Hrangbana College, Government Aizawl College, Government Aizawl North College, Government Lunglei College, Government J. Buana College, Government Saitual College, Government Zawlnuam College, ICFAI, St. Xavier's College, Aizawl City College, Mizoram Christian College, HATIM, and Kawnpui College, in both the Arts and Commerce streams. Among the participants, 29 were female and 21 were male.

Data gathering instrument

The survey was designed as a questionnaire developed by the investigator, comprising seven dimensions: Pedagogical Challenges, Students' Challenges, Technological Challenges, Assessment and Grading, Personal and Emotional Challenges, and Financial Challenges. The questionnaire included multiple-choice options as well as opportunities for open-ended answers. The questionnaire was reviewed by subject experts to ensure content validity. An online survey was conducted utilizing Google Forms. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and no personal information was gathered. The collected data was analyzed through percentage calculations.

III.   Challenges

Table 1

Pandemic-Related Educational Challenges faced by College Teachers in Mizoram (N = 50)

Domain	Major Challenge	(n)	(%)
Technological	Internet reliability issues	50	100%
	Frequent technical problems	34	68%
Financial	Educator pay reductions	20	40%
	Partial technology access	26	52%
Pedagogical	Low student engagement	30	61.4%
	Remote classroom management	27	53.6%
Teacher Well-being	Increased stress/anxiety	33	66%
	Work-life imbalance	19	38%

Domain	Major Challenge	(n)	(%)
Assessment	Remote monitoring difficulties	28	63.6%
	Academic integrity concerns	22	50%

Discussion

The study reveals significant challenges of college teachers in Mizoram faced during the COVID-19 pandemic across five critical domains:

Technological Challenges

All surveyed teachers (100%) reported unreliable internet connectivity, and 68% faced frequent technical problems. These findings highlight significant infrastructure limitations that hindered effective online teaching. Such challenges are consistent with broader research indicating that inadequate technological infrastructure was a primary barrier to effective online education in developing regions (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Additionally, 52% of teachers reported partial access to necessary technology, reflecting the digital divide that exacerbated educational inequalities during the pandemic (Alam & Mohanty, 2022). Geographical factors contributed to the challenges faced by teachers during the pandemic. As noted by Mishra, Gupta, and Shree (2020), persistent connectivity issues continue to serve as a significant barrier in several north-eastern states, particularly during efforts to transition schools to digital platforms without adequate preparation.

Financial Challenges

The data reveals substantial financial strain among teachers, with 40% reporting pay reductions and 52% lacking full access to necessary technology. Teachers who worked in private institutions faced more financial challenges due to unpaid fees from the students during the pandemic. According to India Today (2021), a significant proportion of teachers in states like Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh lacked the devices necessary to conduct online classes. These barriers were compounded by recurring power outages, unreliable internet connectivity, and insufficient IT training—issues mirrored in Mizoram's hilly and rural regions. This supports findings that educators in resource-constrained settings often bear the financial burden of transitioning to online instruction (World Bank, 2021). Mahdy (2020) observed that financial constraints and unreliable internet connectivity remained persistent barriers to the effective implementation of digital education throughout the country. The limited access to technology particularly underscores the inequitable resource distribution noted in studies of pandemic-era education (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021).

Pedagogical Challenges

More than half of teachers in the study reported difficulties with student engagement (61.4%) and classroom management (53.6%) during the shift to online learning. Student engagement issues can be due to limited peer interaction and irregular feedback contributed significantly to student disengagement across the north-eastern region (Baruah & Sarmah,2022). Problems with classroom management can also be due to the sudden transition to online education (Hodges et al., 2020). Such issues were particularly acute in contexts

lacking prior online teaching experience (Rapanta et al., 2020). Priyadarshani and Jesuiya (2021) also revealed that teachers encountered difficulties in conducting online classes due to insufficient preparation and development for this new teaching mode. British Council (2020) and Izhar et al., (2021) also found that extended preparation time for lessons, feelings of being overwhelmed, and difficulty balancing administrative burdens with pedagogical responsibilities increased the challenges faced by teachers during the pandemic.

Teacher Well-being

High levels of stress and anxiety were reported by 66% of teachers in the study, with 38% experiencing work-life imbalance. Teachers had to rapidly adapt to online teaching, often without adequate training or resources (UNESCO, 2021). Many struggled with extended working hours, as preparing digital lessons, troubleshooting tech issues, and responding to students/parents outside school hours blurred work-life boundaries (Kim & Asbury, 2020). Brooks et al. (2020) also reported that educators took on additional caregiving roles at home while managing remote teaching, compounding stress, and also noted the psychological impact of quarantine and potential mitigation strategies, and revealed a variety of negative psychological effects, such as symptoms of post-traumatic stress, confusion, and anger.

Assessment Challenges

Challenges in remote monitoring (63.6%) and concerns about academic integrity (50%) were prevalent among teachers. Many online learning platforms lack robust proctoring tools, making it difficult for teachers to supervise exams in real-time, and uncontrolled testing environments (e.g., home settings) allow for unauthorized resources (notes, internet searches) during exams. These issues reflect well-documented difficulties in maintaining academic standards in unproctored online environments (Iglesias-Pradas et al., 2021). Studies have shown increased opportunities for academic dishonesty in remote assessment formats (Watson & Sottile, 2010).

IV.   Coping strategies

Table 2

Coping Strategies Implemented by College Teachers in Mizoram during the Pandemic (N = 50)

Strategy Type	Specific Approach	(n)	(%)
Technology Adaptation	Video conferencing tools	48	96%
Engagement	Interactive online activities	25	50%
	Increased communication	28	56%
Educator Support	Institutional mental health resources	18	36%

Strategy Type	Specific Approach	(n)	(%)
	Professional development	21	42%
Assessment	Project-based assessments	23	46%
Well-being	Self-care promotion	35	70%

The data on Coping Strategies Implemented by College Teachers in Mizoram during the Pandemic (N = 50) reveals a multifaceted response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 disruption, reflecting adaptability, creativity, and institutional support

Technology Adaptation

A significant 96% of teachers in the study reported using video conferencing tools, indicating a rapid shift to digital platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, or Microsoft Teams to ensure continuity of instruction. This mirrors global trends where synchronous online teaching became the primary method for delivering classes during school closures (Trust & Whalen, 2020). The high percentage demonstrates not only technological adoption but also teachers' resilience in unfamiliar environments.

Student Engagement Strategies

To address reduced motivation and attention spans in remote settings, 50% of teachers utilized interactive online activities, while 56% increased communication with students. These findings align with research emphasizing that interactive pedagogy and consistent communication are key to sustaining student engagement in online learning environments (Martin & Bolliger, 2018). These methods help in reducing student isolation and fostering a sense of community, both of which are crucial in remote education settings.

Teacher Support Mechanisms

36% of teachers reported that they made used of institutional mental health resources, and 42% of teachers reported having professional development opportunities such as training on the use of technology and application of software during the pandemic. These indicate that some institutions took active steps to support teacher well-being and professional readiness. As per UNESCO (2021), teacher training in digital pedagogy and mental health support were recommended globally to help educators cope with increased stress and the demands of remote teaching.

Assessment Adjustments

About 46% of teachers employed project-based assessments as alternatives to traditional exams during the pandemic. This approach is consistent with recommendations to shift towards formative and authentic assessments during emergencies, which promote deeper learning and reduce academic dishonesty (Iglesias-Pradas et al., 2021).

Well-being Measures

Notably, 70% of teachers reported promoting self-care during the pandemic, indicating a strong awareness of mental health and burnout risks. This finding aligns with studies demonstrating that self-care

practices, including mindfulness, time management, and peer support, were effective coping strategies for educators globally during the pandemic (Kim & Asbury, 2020).

Conclusion:

This study contributes to the growing global literature on pandemic-era education by providing localized evidence from India's northeastern region - an area often underrepresented in educational research. While documenting significant hardships, the findings ultimately suggest an optimistic vision: that the crisis-induced innovations in Mizoram, if properly supported and institutionalized, could seed longer-term transformations toward more flexible, equitable, and resilient education systems. The pandemic has highlighted that quality education depends not just on curriculum and pedagogy, but equally on technological infrastructure, institutional supports, and educator well-being that make teaching and learning possible. As education systems move forward, the lessons from Mizoram's teachers - both their struggles and their adaptive innovations - offer valuable guidance for building education systems capable of weathering future disruptions while providing quality learning for all. The experiences documented in this research highlight the need for comprehensive approaches that address both structural challenges and human factors in education.

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