

Soft Skills in Teacher Education During Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (1995) in their model 'Triple Helix Model' suggest that there should be a harmonious interaction between University, Industry, and Government to foster economic and social growth. It requires certain skills to be learned by the individuals to fulfill the demands of society. NEP 2020 (point no. 11.1) also suggests that some skills needed to be inculcated in individuals in professional development like communication, discussion, and debate. It is also related to teacher education courses as they prepare teachers for school and it is considered as a miniature of the society. In the contemporary scenario, soft skills are also required for teachers to teach in online mode during Covid-19. Teacher education programs are also conducted in online mode to prepare the teachers for the schools. Therefore, this research study aims to understand the views of pre-service teachers regarding the soft skills developed in teacher education courses. The purposive sampling was opted. The structured interview was conducted with the pre-service teachers who are currently enrolled in a teacher education program in a central university. It was found that the pre-service teachers are learning in an online mode during pandemic. There was a lack of proper exposure as peer interaction, micro-teaching, and interaction with teachers in face-to-face mode, and library facilities were not provided in an adequate manner due to lockdown. It was concluded that there is a need to inculcate some pedagogical strategies to prepare them in a better way to further develop the teaching-learning process in school.

Keywords: Soft skills, Student-teacher, Online class, Teacher education, NEP-2020

Education is not only about the transfer of knowledge from one person to another. The role of education is dedicated to the holistic development of a learner as they will grow as responsible citizens. They will make their contribution to society's economic activities and become thinking human beings. This holistic development includes skills directed towards enhancement of personality, speaking skills, presentation skills, etc. All these skills come under an umbrella term which is called "Soft skill". Soft skill is a blend of skills commonly needed at every workplace such as interpersonal skills, personality, common sense, emotional intelligence, incitation, self-regulation (Hirsch and Alliance, 2017). To get a job, soft skills are today's necessity (Pellegrino and Hilton, 2012).

It is one of the main responsibilities of academia is to give certain skills to students to meet their

survival chances in the job market and help in their career building. As 'triple helix model', given by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (1995), describe that there should be an interactive relationship between the university and corporate (job market), which Means universities should have knowledge about what are the needs of corporate today and what qualities and skills they are expecting in their employees. NEP-2020 mentioned that soft skills such as discussion, debate and communication were there in Indian education in Ancient times also. Soft skills help individuals to work efficiently at their workplace. When it comes to teaching profession

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soft skills set is must as it is a very interactive job. Teacher is not only a medium of information transaction; teacher is a leader for students, team member for fellow teachers and a thinking being for society. A teacher should possess these skills to be an active and efficient member of the teaching faculty. These skills generally require face to face interaction between teacher and learner but the world is going through a pandemic and the education sector has to go online. Teacher education institutes are also teaching online. According to NCFTE 2009 teacher education program, with 2 year duration (B.Ed), student teachers should have a school internship program for a continuous period of 4 days in a week and a minimum duration of 10 weeks along with one week of observation in the initial phase of internship. This internship program is meant to run in campus mode in which student-teachers not only teach their prospective subjects but experience school work dynamics as a whole like interaction with school authorities and fellow teachers, and be part of a team which conducts several activities.

They learn more about work ethics and how to conduct themselves at the workplace. The duration of 2 year in a teacher education program provides time and opportunity to learn better about school working, to engage with in-service teachers and to self-reflect. But due to pandemic universities and schools are working in online mode so student-teachers are not on school campuses for their school experiences program. They are not experiencing school campus and school working as teachers. Student-teachers are also teaching online in schools and taking their course lectures online. In both the cases there is a compromise with the pre service teaching experience. In this research, researcher tried to find out whether online mode teacher education is inculcating soft skills in upcoming teachers or not.

OBJECTIVE

- ❑ The aim of this study is to understand the views of pre-service teachers regarding the soft skills developed in teacher education during pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

The research study is qualitative and descriptive in nature. The purpose of the study is to understand

the perspective of pre-service teachers regarding the development of soft skills during pandemic. The purposive sampling was opted for the research study. The structured interviews were done with pre-service teachers who are currently enrolled in a two year teacher education program in a central university. There were 40 participants who responded to the interview for the data. The data is thematically analysed under the themes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section includes the responses of Pre service teachers. It was noted that some pre-service teachers were prepared in face to face mode and due to Covid-19 led to a shift in complete mode of online transaction. The qualitative analysis of the data including the responses is categorized in the following aspects:

Interaction with professors

In the academic world, a teacher is not the one who only transact prescribed syllabus. When it comes to teacher education programs, teacher educators play different roles like mentor, guide, and counselor.

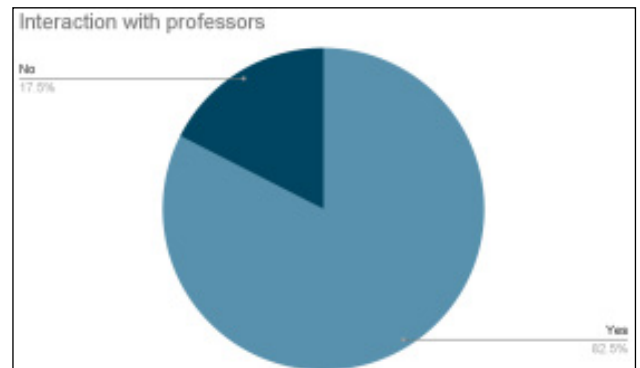


Fig. 1

Face to face interaction helps learners to learn things better. Student teachers gain teaching techniques by observing their teachers in real time. Apart from the classroom interaction learners meet their teachers on campus and discuss different issues which develop certain intellect and critical thinking among them. But during this research, it was found that 82.5% of the participants said that there is no constant interaction between them and their professors. According to them, interaction is confined to the class time only and due to this screen teaching there are not getting opportunities to indulge in

meaningful conversation with their professors by which they can learn more about teaching and issues related with teaching.

Engagement in group activities

Peer learning has the key aspect of group activities which led to enhancement of team skills. Group activities have a significant role in teacher education programs to develop communication and team skills. These skills are required on the field to implement different activities of lesson plans and other co curricular activities in classrooms. It was found that 75% of those participants mentioned that they are not involved in any group activity during online classes.

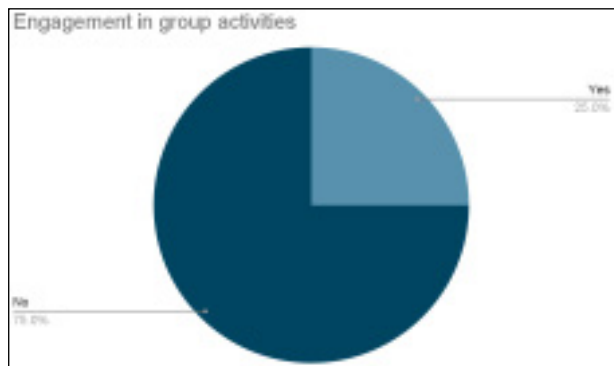


Fig. 2

Interaction with fellow student-teachers

During this research, it was found that there was a minimal interaction with fellow student teachers. It was observed that 70% of the participants accepted that there was a lack of interaction with peers and only 30% agreed that they were able to interact with their fellow classmates during online mode of education.

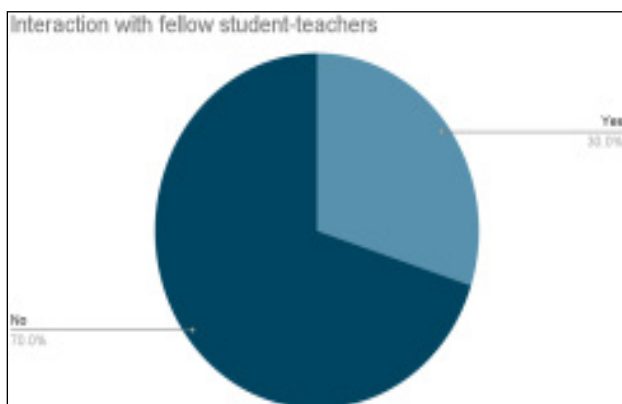


Fig. 3

As mentioned by Slavin (1990), interaction with peers leads to attainment of certain skills which are considered as lifelong learning skills. Boud *et al.* (1999) also recognized that these attributes are related with collaboration, teamwork, critical inquiry and communication skills. Therefore, it is one of the significant aspects of teacher education to integrate the skills in student teachers. Peer learning approaches have been promoted to foster certain types or aspects of lifelong learning skills which are not as readily pursued by other means.

Coordination with school authorities and In-service teachers

It was noted that few participants mentioned that they were able to coordinate with school authorities and in-service teachers during internship, however 65% of the participants mentioned that there was minimal interaction with in-service teachers.

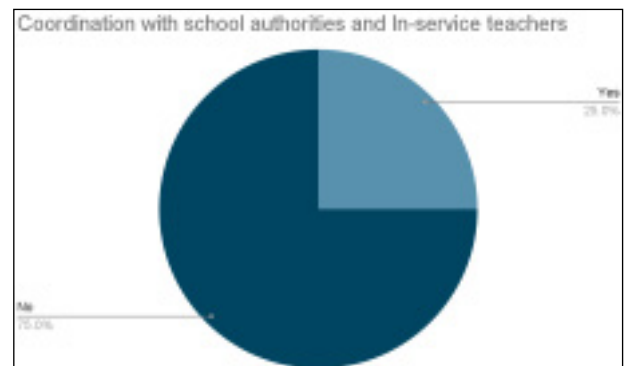


Fig. 4

Sessions related to Micro teaching

Majority (65%) of the participants mentioned that they were not provided the sessions related to micro teaching which led them to face challenges during their teaching in internship programme.

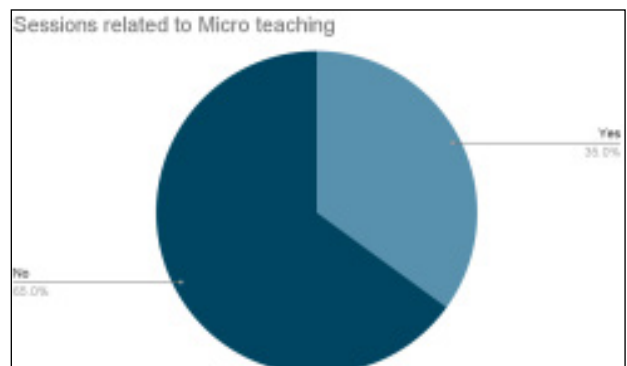


Fig. 5

As it is one of the important skills to be developed during a teacher education programme, there exists a gap between the objectives of the course and implementation during the online teaching learning process.

Class management and board skills

These skills are important for any teacher who is teaching the concepts in the classroom as the board is provided and can be used as a resource and tool to implement their pedagogy and teach any concept. It was found that 85% of the participants mentioned regarding the classroom management skills were not developed during online teaching learning and only few (15%) participants agreed that they were provided with the sessions of classroom management and board skills.

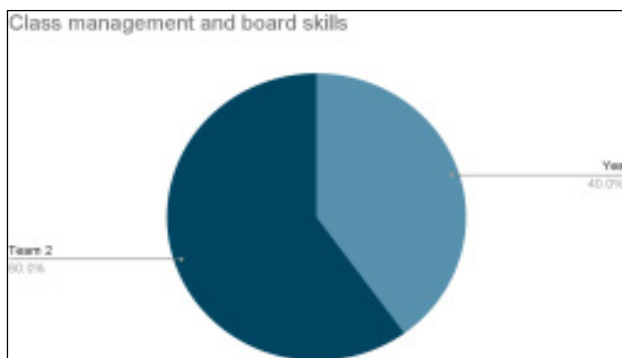


Fig. 6

They faced issues and challenges during their online teaching as they were not able to manage the classroom in a proper way. Few of the participants mentioned that it was a major challenge in online mode because they were prepared in offline mode and they needed to teach in online mode during lockdown.

Satisfaction towards online teaching

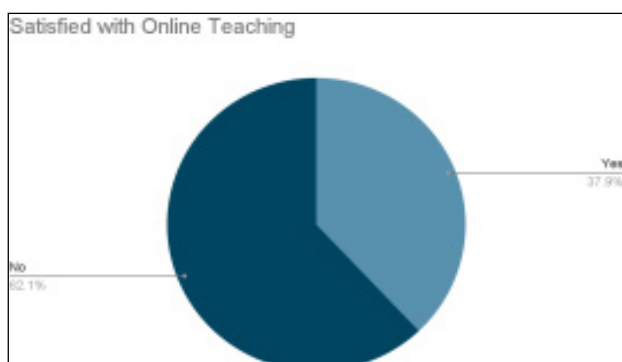


Fig. 7

Majority of the participants (70%) were not satisfied with online mode of teaching as they are not able to comprehend the conceptual knowledge of teaching learning process in classrooms. It was noted that this screen exposure in online teaching has led to less focus and ability to sit for long hours as per the responses of participants.

CONCLUSION

It was concluded that the student-teachers were pursuing the teacher education programs online as there is a complete shift from offline to online mode in education during the pandemic. The soft skills in teacher education programs are important to develop them in a holistic manner in professional space. It was observed that there exists a gap between the theory and practice as the certain objectives of teacher education programs were not fulfilled during online teaching and development of soft skills is one of the aspects which needs to be addressed. As the teacher educators are transacting the learning concepts and developing the soft skills in student teachers which led to the major impact on professional development. The pedagogical strategies also needed to offer to equip the student-teachers with micro-teaching skills so that they can teach in a better way in online mode. It was noted that there is also a gap between what is learnt by student teachers and what is taught by them as they were not able to transact the concept in online mode due to various issues and challenges faced by them. Online mode has also led to lack of interaction between the peers and it has also led to lack of developing skills associated with it like team work, collaboration and others. These development of soft skills would lead to encouraging the student teachers to improve their skills and prepare them to actively practice them in classrooms in internship. The adequate resources and facilities need to be provided in an effective and efficient way to facilitate them for a better teaching learning process.

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