

Challenges of E-Teaching During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Uganda Universities

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Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced a quick transition to online learning, which has presented teachers with many difficulties when delivering instruction from a distance. In the context of e-teaching, this study investigated the difficulties faced by academic staff members during the COVID-19 pandemic. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted as part of a qualitative research strategy with faculty members with e-teaching experience during the pandemic. The research identified several challenges related to technology, pedagogical adaptation, student engagement, assessment and feedback, workload management, and the effect on faculty members' emotions and psychological health. These difficulties highlighted the requirement for technological competence, pedagogical training, support structures, and resources to improve the experience of e-teaching. Comprehensive faculty development programs, inclusive instructional design, a variety of evaluation techniques, assistance with workload management, and attempts to enhance faculty well-being are among the recommendations. By addressing these issues, educational institutions can manage the difficulties of e-teaching in emergencies and ensure that students receive high-quality instruction in virtual classrooms.

Keywords: E-teaching, faculty members, COVID-19 pandemic, challenges, online education, technological difficulties

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented disruptions in several industries around the world in which the education industry was not left out. The advent of this led to a considerable trend toward e-teaching, or online instruction, because of the demand for social seclusion and the closing of educational facilities. For the faculty members who were tasked with delivering instruction remotely during these difficult times, this change has brought several difficulties and challenges.

E-teaching refers to the utilisation of a variety of digital tools and platforms that let faculty members interact online with students, give lectures, lead debates, and evaluate student learning (Huang et al., 2022). While e-teaching has been gaining popularity recently, the pandemic hastened its global spread, compelling institutions to immediately change their teaching strategies to maintain educational continuity.

This study investigated the difficulties faculty members had when using e-teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Educational institutions can

create effective strategies and support systems to lessen their effects and improve the quality of online education delivery by identifying and comprehending these problems.

Overall, this study advances our understanding of the difficulties faced by e-teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic and offers helpful advice for faculty members and educational institutions as they pursue efficient online education delivery. We can work together to develop resilient and adaptive educational systems that cater to the changing demands of students and faculty in the digital era by tackling these difficulties head-on.

2. Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced a rapid shift to e-teaching (Ali et al., 2024; Maatuk et al., 2022; Uzorka & Makeri, 2020), which has created several difficulties for faculty members in providing quality instruction remotely (Trust et al., 2020). The issues faced by faculty members during the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of e-teaching are covered in this literature review, which gives a summary of the literature on the subject.

The technology side of e-teaching is one of the main issues mentioned in the literature. Many academic staff members were unprepared for the abrupt move to online instruction and were unfamiliar with the required tools and technologies (Szymkowiak et al., 2021; Uzorka et al., 2023; VanLeeuwen et al., 2020). According to Szymkowiak et al. (2021) research, it is vital for faculty members to be technologically literate and that they receive training and assistance while using online resources and digital tools to meet these issues.

Faculty members must modify their pedagogical strategies to engage students successfully in an online setting because of the change to e-teaching. The need for faculty members to investigate active learning strategies, asynchronous and synchronous communication methods, and evaluation procedures appropriate for online teaching is

highlighted by Tartavulea (2020). Faculty members must make sure that their teaching strategies support meaningful learning experiences and are appropriate for the online environment.

According to the literature, e-teaching presents a substantial problem in terms of retaining student involvement and interest. It could be difficult for teachers to get the same degree of participation and interaction as in traditional classes. To encourage student engagement and peer connection, research by Martin & Bolliger (2018) highlights the significance of developing dynamic learning environments, encouraging online discussions, and utilizing collaborative tools.

Online environments bring unique obstacles for assessment. Faculty members encounter challenges while creating and putting into practice fair assessments that precisely gauge student development. It's critical to match assessment plans with learning objectives and use a variety of assessment tools, including talks, projects, and online quizzes, to ensure thorough evaluation (García-Alberti et al., 2021; SEGUIÉ & Galiana, n.d.; Wei et al., 2021).

The switch to e-teaching can make it more difficult for faculty members to manage their time and add to their burden. According to research by Sahito et al. (2022), institutions must acknowledge and take steps to reduce the additional time demands placed on faculty members as they make the switch to online instruction. Giving faculty members the necessary resources and assistance can help reduce their workload and improve their capacity to provide high-quality instruction.

The pandemic and e-teaching have an emotional and psychological toll on faculty personnel, according to the literature. Stress, burnout, and feelings of loneliness may result from abrupt adjustment, isolation, and increased workload. The importance of supporting faculty members' well-being through programs like peer support networks, mental health resources, and professional development opportunities is emphasized by research by (Schwartz et al., 2020).

The literature already in existence makes it clear those faculty members switching to e-teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic experience a variety of difficulties. Concerns with technology, instructional adaptability, student involvement, equity and accessibility, assessment, task management, and emotional well-being are all part of this list of difficulties.

3. Methodology

A total of two hundred and eighty-three (283) participants from fourteen (14) universities in Uganda participated in the study. Participants are faculty members with experience using e-teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic from a variety of academic fields and institutions. Purposive sampling was used to choose the sample, assuring a variety of backgrounds, teaching styles, and degrees of experience to capture an in-depth understanding of the difficulties encountered. Focus groups and semi-structured interviews were used to gather data. The information gathered was transcribed verbatim and thematically analyzed using NVivo 12 (Stager et al., 2024; Uzorka, 2021; Yang et al., 2024).

4. Results

4.1. Demographic characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1. There were 157 (55 %) females and 126 (45 %) males. 121 (43 %) are in the age range 40 – 49. 197 (70 %) have doctoral degrees. 130 (45 %) participants had teaching experience above 20.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

Variables	Categories	Frequency (%)
Age (years)	20 – 29	29 (10 %)
	30 – 39	75 (27 %)
	40 – 49	121 (43 %)
	50 – above	58 (20 %)
Gender	Male	126 (45 %)

	Female	157 (55 %)
Education	Master	86 (30 %)
	PhD	197 (70 %)
Academic discipline	Sciences	94 (33 %)
	Social Sciences	114 (40 %)
	Arts	75 (27 %)
Teaching experience	Under 5 years	19 (7 %)
	05–10 years	30 (11 %)
	11–20 years	104 (37 %)
	Above 20 years	130 (45 %)
Designation	Assistant lecturer/lecturer	99 (35 %)
	Senior lecturer	128 (45 %)
	Associate professor/professor	56 (20 %)
Type of university	Public	102 (36 %)
	Private	181 (64 %)
Place of residence	Urban	185 (65 %)
	Village	98 (35 %)

Source: Primary data

4.2. Main e-teaching challenges faced by faculty members in higher education during COVID-19 pandemic

According to the responses given by respondents, there were eleven main e-teaching challenges that faculty members in higher education faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely: technological issues, limited interaction and engagement, difficulty in monitoring students, insufficient feedback, adaptation to online teaching, student assessment and academic integrity, workload and time management, poor internet connectivity, lack of proper guideline,

emotional and psychological impact, difficulty in practical work, and lack of ICT infrastructure

Technological Issues

The biggest problem most faculty members in higher education experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic was technological issues. 78 % of the participants pointed out technological issues. According to their responses, most faculty members identified the following difficulties:

- Limited familiarity with online platforms
- Difficulties in using digital tools effectively
- Technical issues during online sessions

Many faculty members interviewed stated that they were unprepared for the abrupt switch to online instruction and may not have been familiar with the required tools and technologies. Some faculty members stated that they cannot use digital tools, traverse online platforms, and create compelling online learning experiences. One of the participants stated "Using online tools and platforms for the first time can be intimidating. Learning and adjusting to new technologies take time and effort, which affects our capacity to provide seamless online instruction."

Limited Interaction and Engagement

Many participants 63 % indicated a lack of interaction and student engagement as the e-teaching challenges they faced during the pandemic. Faculty members stated as follows:

"In an online environment, it might be difficult to develop meaningful interactions. It can be challenging to recreate the lively debates and cooperative activities we engaged in in-person classrooms." "The amount of interaction and involvement between lecturers and students during online instruction is reduced." "It could be difficult to determine whether pupils have understood something, respond to their inquiries, or give quick comments." "It could be challenging for teachers to foster a sense of community while maintaining student engagement and enthusiasm." "Lack of student engagement."

"Online learning environments can make it harder to keep students interested than traditional classrooms." "Online instruction has less interaction and involvement between instructors and students than traditional instruction."

Adaptation to Online Teaching

The majority of the participants (53 %) indicated adaptation to online teaching as the e-teaching challenges faced during the pandemic. Participants stated as follows:

"There must be a substantial adjustment made when moving from conventional teaching techniques to online instruction. To adapt them to the online platform, lesson plans, instructional materials, and assessment techniques must be evaluated." *"I have to swiftly modify my teaching strategies to fit the online learning environment."* *"The process of delivering content in an online format could be difficult."* *"It can be difficult to properly engage students through virtual means, lead dialogues, or communicate complex ideas."*

Difficulty in Monitoring Students

Difficulty in monitoring students was also a challenge faced by faculty members during the pandemic. 46 % of the participants indicated difficulty in monitoring students. One participant stated "It is difficult to keep track of pupils' development and comprehension in an online setting. We place a great deal of reliance on student self-reporting and assessments, which may not necessarily paint a complete picture of their development."

Insufficient Feedback

32 % of the participants pointed out insufficient feedback. One participant stated, "Although giving students timely and thorough feedback is crucial for their development, doing so in online contexts can be time-consuming and difficult."

Student Assessment and Academic Integrity

Comments from some of the participants (30 %) suggest problems with students' assessment and

academic integrity. Some of the participants' comments are: "It might be challenging to ensure fair evaluation and uphold academic integrity during online tests and assignments. To stop cheating and assure fair assessments, we need to investigate new techniques and technology." "It can be difficult to administer tests securely and fairly online." "Less useful for evaluation." "When it comes to effectively assessing students' understanding and development, online instruction presents difficulties." "Traditional assessment techniques, including in-person exams or practical assessments, are difficult to recreate in an online setting."

Workload and Time Management

30 % of the participants pointed out workload and time management. One of the participants stated "It was difficult to manage the increasing workload and juggle numerous obligations. Online instruction necessitates more time for course planning, content delivery, and meeting the needs of each student."

Poor Internet Connectivity

The issue of poor internet connectivity was pointed out by 27 % of the participants. One of the participants stated, "The teaching and learning process was hampered by poor internet access, which makes it challenging to hold live sessions, distribute resources, or interact with students in real-time."

Lack of Proper Guideline

Some participants (18 %) pointed out the issue of lack of proper guidelines. One participant stated "The difficulties are exacerbated by the lack of explicit policies and procedures for online instruction. For faculty members to successfully negotiate the shift, detailed instructions and assistance are required."

Emotional and Psychological Impact

The emotional and psychological impact was pointed out by 17 % of the participants. One participant stated "One must not undervalue the pandemic's emotional and psychological toll or the

switch to online instruction. Prioritizing faculty welfare and offering them support for their mental health is crucial."

Difficulty in Practical Work

Practical work was mentioned as challenging by some of the participants (17 %). One of the participants stated "Online practical subject instruction presents particular difficulties. It takes ingenuity and initiative to come up with alternate ways to teach and practice practical skills."

Lack of ICT Infrastructure

Few participants (8 %) pointed out the challenge of ICT infrastructure. One participant stated, "The provision of seamless online education is hampered by certain regions' or institutions' inadequate ICT infrastructure, which restricts access to dependable technology."

5. Discussion

The qualitative data showed that the move to e-teaching presented several technological obstacles for the faculty. These limitations included a lack of experience with online platforms, problems efficiently using digital tools, and technical difficulties while participating in online sessions. These results are consistent with earlier studies on the value of technological competence and the demand for extensive support and training to meet these difficulties (Mumbing et al., 2021; Uzorka et al., 2023; VanLeeuwen et al., 2020). To provide a smooth e-teaching experience, institutions should invest in faculty development programs to improve their technological skills and offer ongoing technical support.

The qualitative data showed how important it is for faculty members to modify their educational strategies for the online learning environment. Participants talked about how to create engaging learning exercises, prompt students with feedback, and maintain student interaction in virtual classrooms. To increase student engagement and foster meaningful learning experiences, faculty

members must investigate active learning practices, make use of collaborative resources, and take advantage of asynchronous and synchronous communication techniques (Martin & Bolliger, 2018). Initiatives for faculty development should concentrate on offering pedagogical materials and training to help faculty members effectively modify their teaching styles.

The qualitative data brought to light the difficulties in evaluating student learning in an online setting. Faculty members acknowledged challenges in developing accurate assessments and timely feedback. Faculty members should think about using a variety of assessment techniques, such as online quizzes, projects, and debates, to evaluate various aspects of student learning to overcome these difficulties (García-Alberti et al., 2021; SEGUIÉ & Galiana, n.d.; Wei et al., 2021). To maintain openness and encourage uniformity in grading, students should be given clear evaluation criteria and rubrics. The evaluation process can also be improved by using digital technologies for automated grading and rapid feedback.

The qualitative research results showed that faculty members encountered higher workloads and difficulties with time management during the switch to e-teaching. Institutions should acknowledge the increased expectations on faculty personnel and offer support systems such as workload modifications, administrative help, and professional development opportunities to lessen these difficulties. To maintain a balance between their teaching responsibilities and other professional obligations, faculty members can benefit from time management tools and prioritization techniques.

The qualitative findings emphasized how e-teaching has an emotional and psychological effect on faculty members. Stress and burnout may result from the abrupt adjustment, an increased workload, and feelings of isolation. By facilitating access to mental health resources, forming support networks, and building a friendly work environment, institutions should place a high priority on the well-being of their teachers. Peer

partnerships, frequent check-ins, and chances for self-care can all help faculty members develop their emotional and psychological resilience (Schwartz et al., 2020).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic has compelled a swift and widespread move to e-teaching, posing a variety of difficulties for academic staff who wish to provide instruction online. The difficulties faced by faculty members during the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of e-teaching have been explored and examined in this research. These difficulties include technological issues, limited interaction and engagement, difficulty in monitoring students, insufficient feedback, adaptation to online teaching, student assessment and academic integrity, workload and time management, poor internet connectivity, a lack of proper guidelines, emotional and psychological impact,

The results of this qualitative study generally highlight the numerous difficulties that faculty members had when teaching online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Institutions should invest in faculty development programs, offer technical and pedagogical support, and consider the requirements of students with restricted access to meet these issues. To improve the e-teaching experience, strategies including inclusive instructional design, diversified assessment methodologies, workload management support, and faculty well-being efforts should be put into practice.

Educational institutions can manage the intricacies of e-teaching during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and assure the delivery of high-quality education to students by confronting these challenges head-on and putting effective methods into place.

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