

Online Exams During COVID-19: Teacher's Perspective

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Abstract

Background and Purpose- COVID 19 a highly infectious disease was declared as a pandemic on 11th March 2020 by WHO. The COVID19 pandemic resulted in a nationwide lockdown wherein the colleges had to be shut. The teachers and students had to switch to Online mode of learning. The purpose of this study is to check the teachers' perspective regarding conduction of E exams amidst the pandemic.

Objectives were to understand the efficacy of e-exams, benefits of the exams and also the problems faced by the teachers while conducting the same.

Methods- Self-made questionnaire was circulated as google forms to all teachers of Physiotherapy and management faculties. A total of 41 responses were obtained and the data was then analysed to check for the pros and cons of e-exams from teachers' perspective

Results- The teachers had to take high efforts when it came to conducting exams online, they also faced a lot of network connectivity issues and had a lack of the necessary technical skills required to conduct exams. There was plagiarism in the answers written by students too with poor presentations skills and lack of sincerity in appearing for the exams.

Conclusion-The teachers will prefer Offline mode of exams in the near future and they did not find it too easy or too difficult to conduct the exams, rather the level of difficulty was- medium.

Key words- COVID19, e-exams, online, teachers, perspective, offline

INTRODUCTION

COVID 19 is a highly infectious disease or illness caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) which originated in Wuhan city of China⁽¹⁾. (**World Health Organisation, January 12, 2020; Huang et al., 2020**) and the disease was declared pandemic on March 11, 2020 (**World Health Organisation, March 11, 2020**).

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected not only the world economy but also caused the largest disruption of education in history, affecting almost all learners and teachers of the world (**United Nations, 2020**). With the students studying from home and teachers working remotely, there has been a shift from traditional learning to modern teaching and learning methods and computer-based examination system, a shift from seminar to webinar and classroom to zoom. The most promising observations of the online exam system that were made were immediate feedback, randomization of questions, and immediate scores after the exam³. Although online platform is an alternative and interactive option and is considered a developing examination system due to the less manpower, less travelling time of students and teachers and diminished need for paper, this system also has some negatives to it. Many students do not have an accessibility to good network, lack of smart phones, learning content is unavailable to them.² Also there is a lack of social interaction in online learning where students and teachers still prefer the traditional way of teaching, learning and assessment² Getting adapted to this technological system in a short frame of time also imposed a big challenge on the teachers as well as the students. Online exams have been a challenge to the teachers and assessing the student performance while the e-exams were used as a measure to know the students' calibre, different assessment techniques were used like assignment assessment portfolios, multiple choice questions, open book, oral exams⁴. Though distance online teaching was implemented immediately after the lockdown was announced, the students experience revealed that they had a higher preference for traditional classroom learning as against the online methods⁵. The teachers faced various challenges in conducting e-exams as institutional closure was announced. The probable challenges according to research are- 1) Possible student dishonesty and plagiarism since there is a reduction in the capacity to control students' action. The easy access of students to unauthorized resources and materials. 2) Assessing

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and certifying practical knowledge and skills, as the teacher cannot rely on written tests to check the acquired knowledge and skills and observation of the student to check the practical task is important. 3) Ensuring fairness, as there are no similar conditions while giving online exams with each individual which isn't the case when the students are appearing for exams together in a classroom under one roof.⁽⁶⁾ Feedback plays an important role when it comes to conducting online exams.⁽⁷⁾ Online exams enable the students to assess themselves and participate in the learning and teaching process with both standardized and personal feedback opportunities (Chickering et.al., 1990; Hewson, 2012). Various ways in which online exams can be conducted are online discussions, multiple choice questions and self-assessment. Adapting the students' examination to Online administration will require the institution and the teachers to consider a lot of parameters, the nature of the course and the intended learning outcome needs to be decided. Also organising e-exams will require planning, taking into consideration the teacher's previous experience of e-exams. They should be given enough time to schedule the lectures and for paper setting. Prior to COVID 19, majority of the teachers were conducting exams offline in a classroom set-up. The present situation is an altogether different experience for teachers across the globe and this is an on-going learning process.

This research will help us to get a clear picture of the actual problems encountered by the teachers during such e-exams and all the advantages of the e-examination system will be highlighted. It shall give us an opportunity to work on the lacunae and the aspects of the system which need to be worked upon and revised for a wider acceptance and to ensure an easier learning process.

Aim- To understand the teachers' perspective in conducting the online exams(e-exams) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objective- To know the teachers' viewpoint and experiences of conducting the e-exam.

Methodology-

Study Design- Questionnaire based Survey

Sampling method- Convenient Sampling

Sample Size- 40

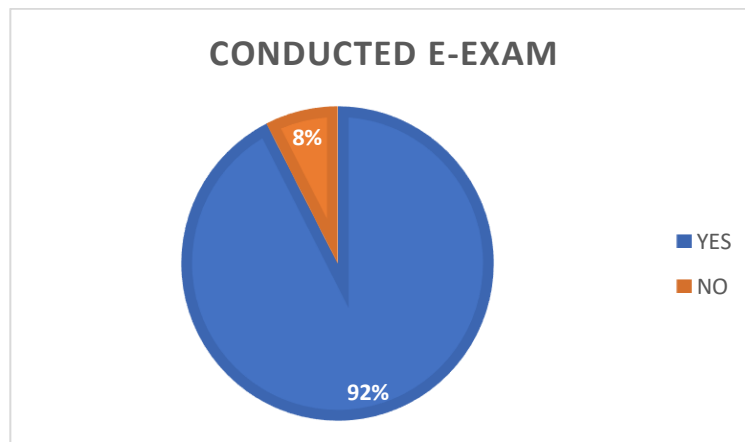
Procedure-

The data for the study was collected using an online survey form because of the prevailing COVID 19 situations. The form was made available online for a period of two weeks. The link of the prepared google form was shared with the teachers through various social media platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook groups, LinkedIn account) The responses were then taken and further analysis was done. The demographic data of the teachers was taken. Out of the total 12 questions, one was an open-ended question wherein the participants were asked if there is any need of further improvisation in conducting e-exams, with all others being close-ended. Apart from the demographic data, few other questions had pre-determined responses whereas the other few were to be marked on a Likert-scale. A total of 40 teachers participated in the study. A question on the participants consent was included in the survey form. A copy of the response receipts was not shared with the participants and each participant was limited to only one response. No incentives were offered for responding to the survey. This study was a part of project which analysed different aspects of online exam.

Data Analysis

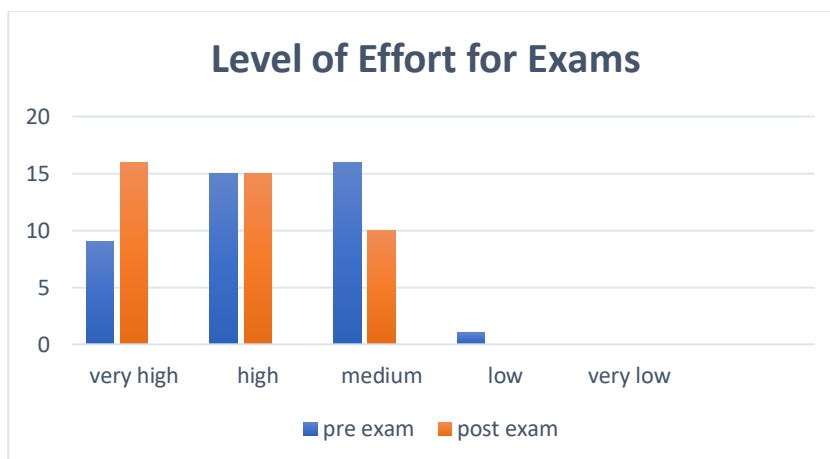
The data was analysed with the help of graphical representations

Graph 1



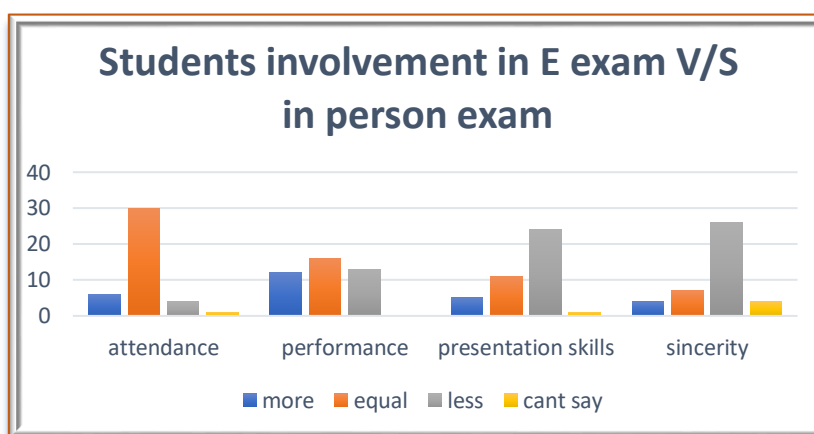
Inference- Majority of the population who participated in the study had conducted an e-exam.

Graph 2



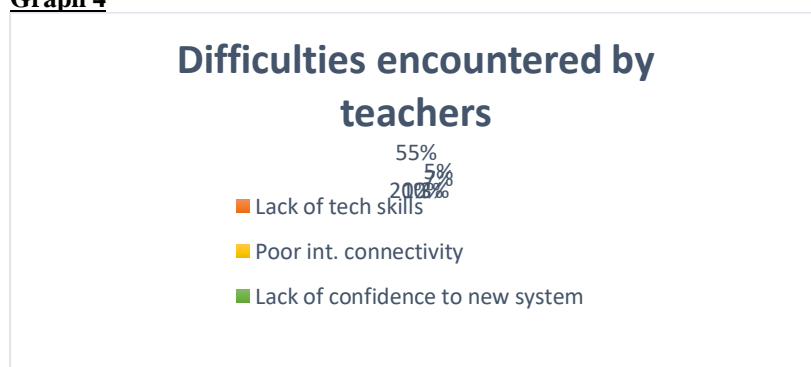
Inference- According to most of the teachers, high efforts were required to be taken post exams and moderate efforts were taken pre-exams. This was in comparison to the offline exams.

Graph 3



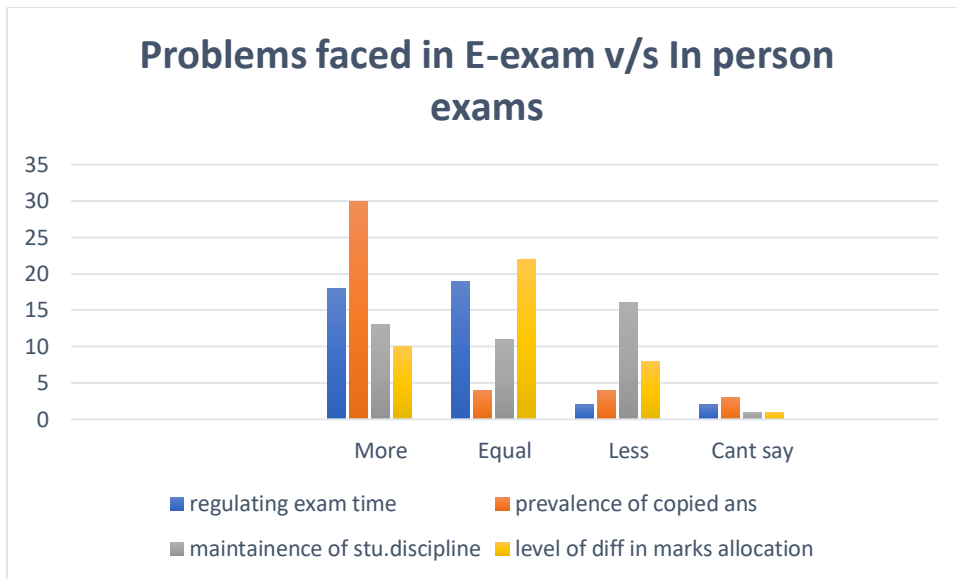
Inference-Presentation skills and student sincerity were least when it came to attempting the e-exam as compared to offline exams.

Graph 4



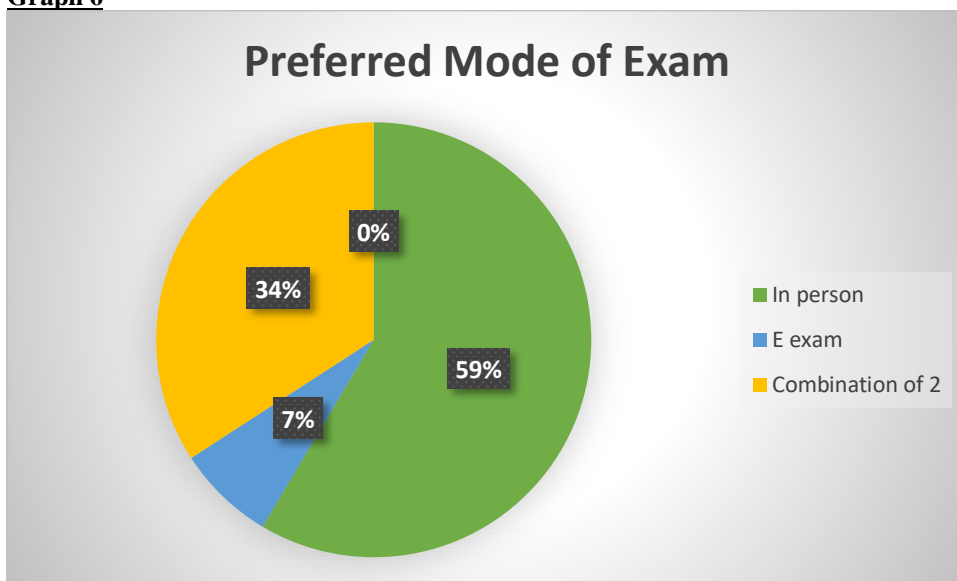
Inference- The most common problem encountered by teachers while conducting online exams was poor connectivity issues from their respective homes, followed by lack of technical skills.

Graph 5



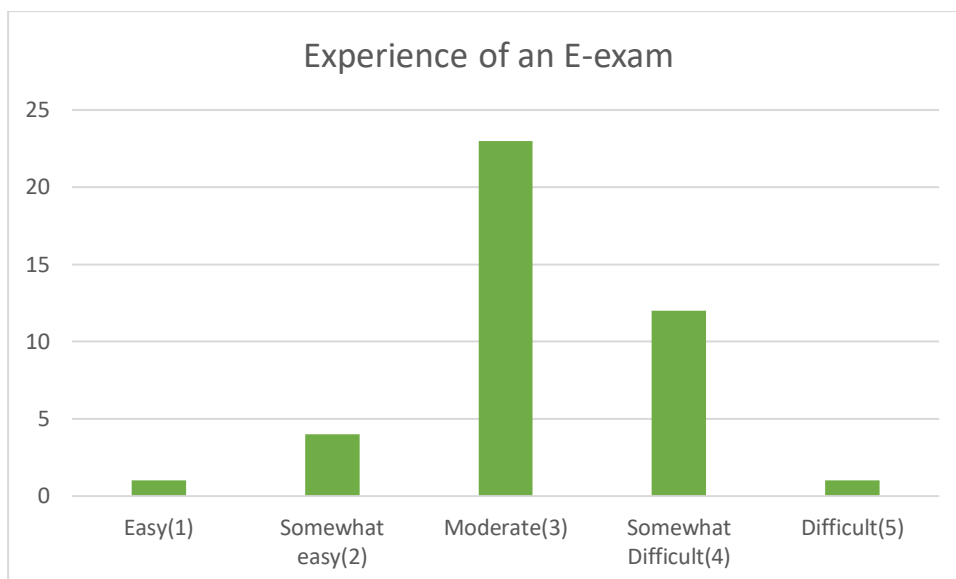
Inference- There was very high prevalence of copied answers when it came to online exams which was not the case with offline ones.

Graph 6



Inference- On asking the teachers their preferred mode of exam in near future, majority opted for Offline exams followed by combination of Online and Offline exams. Least preferred mode of exams was an e-exam.

Graph 7



Inference- The teachers' experience of conducting the e-exam was Moderate. They found it neither too easy nor too difficult.

Discussion

This research paper aims at checking the teachers' perspective when it came to conducting online exams during the COVID 19 pandemic. As this pandemic affected all aspects of society and everyday life, people had to adapt to new ways of communication and interaction⁽⁸⁾. There was a complete paradigm shift from offline learning to online learning.

Though e-exams were conducted in the pre COVID times as well, they were mainly conducted on campus⁽⁹⁾. Today, when the e-exams are conducted remotely, concerns have been raised by the educational institutions, faculties and the students⁽¹⁰⁾. It was an arduous task for the teachers as well as the students to get accustomed to this new instructional medium. It was observed that in the beginning, aggressive use of WhatsApp, email and telephonic conversations was done to impart knowledge and assess the students. As we moved further in the lockdown, teachers and students got more well-versed with app based softwares like Zoom, Google Meet and Webex, to name a few. Graph 1 shows that out of the total population who participated in the study, majority of the teachers had conducted online examination. Due to the periodic extensions in the lockdown, the teachers were left with no choice but to conduct the exams too online along with online lectures. Graph 2 suggests that the teachers had to take high efforts post exam, the reason attributed to this could be poor internet connectivity of remotely situated students which created hurdles for timely upload of the answer sheets and teachers as well⁽¹¹⁾. A minimum of 4G network is essential for uploading the papers online, and unavailability of broadband and interrupted power supply increased the time needed by the students for uploading their papers and hence it took longer for the teachers to check the same. Also, at home, the teachers had to single-handedly manage everything, right from uploading the paper to collecting them to checking to marks tabulation which contributed to an increase in the overall efforts. Also, the teachers had to take moderate efforts before the exams since there was a difficulty in setting paper online and the problems in inter-faculty co-ordination for paper setting added to the difficulties. When it comes to offline paper setting, it is easier since the faculties are under one roof which makes the co-ordination smoother. Also, the practical components were difficult to be assessed and validated by remote e-exams for which the teachers had to take extra efforts pre-exam⁽¹²⁾⁽¹³⁾. Graph 3 states that the students were not sincere when it came to online exams. Previous studies had indicated that when a poll was taken, students reported that the objectives of the curriculum were not met in case of Online learning because of which the student sincerity scored low points⁽¹²⁾. The presentation skills of the students too were very poor as students took the e-exams lightly while inappropriate use of writing materials, limited availability of resources and poor camera clarity while taking the pictures to upload the answer sheets could be a few reasons for poor presentation skills. Also, connectivity issue was a major problem as teachers had to be heavily dependent on available infrastructure at their homes. Graph 4 shows that the major problem of teachers was uploading and downloading papers, which was very difficult and took a longer than normal time⁽¹¹⁾. Teachers were not used to conducting exams online and faced a lot of problems as their technical skills were not up to the mark⁽¹¹⁾. The sudden transition from offline to online did not give adequate time for teachers to conduct any mock exams which would have led to a better level of preparedness. Hence, these two reasons were selected by most of the teachers as problems they faced while conducting e-exams. Graph 5 showed that majority of students wrote answers which were copied with the probable reason for this being un-supervised exams. The students took unfair advantage of the situation

and plagiarism was seen when it came to e-exams. Dishonesty and misconduct have been a major challenge in online modes of exam.⁽¹⁴⁾⁽¹⁵⁾⁽¹⁶⁾ Students during in-campus exams face some invigilation which was not the case here. Recent studies have revealed exam dishonesty as an important impeding factor in remote e-exams.⁽¹⁵⁾⁽¹⁷⁾ On asking the teachers their preferred mode of conducting exams in near future, they revealed that they would opt for offline exams or a combination of online plus offline exams. Very few of the teachers opted for purely online exams. As seen in Graph 6, teachers feel that a blended examination method will reduce the load of the teachers and also make it slightly easier and more interactive. Also, the students will be assessed in a better manner in case of online as well as offline exams just like blended learning⁽¹⁸⁾.

The study was conducted at the early phase of the pandemic where most faculty members and students had their first-time experience of distance education and e-exams. Further studies will give us a better picture about the same. Also, a smaller sample size is the limitation of the study. There is a dire need to bridge the gap now between the haves and the have-nots, remote rural and urban affluents as students come from different socio-economic backgrounds. Prior to application of the same pedagogical approach for all, since this method is in its infancy, it is important to know the pros and cons well and what modifications are to be done to make learning a better experience for the students as well as the teachers.

Conclusion

The teachers will prefer Offline mode of exams in the foreseeable future. They did not find it too easy or too difficult to conduct the exams, rather, the level of difficulty was moderate.

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