

# IMPORTANCE OF VIRTUAL INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION ON EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON WOMEN COLLEGE TEACHERS IN KOLKATA, WEST BENGAL

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## ABSTRACT

COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted on every aspect of mankind. Education sector is not left behind. Many education organizations around the world are closed now. The whole education system specially teaching-learning, knowledge sharing, evaluation methods etc. have been shifted from offline to online platform. Teachers are forced to work from home and they persistently trying to adopt new modes of virtual teaching. The new normal working process is challenging for them in keeping their motivation to work. Lack of physical face to face communication with students, colleagues, the Principals is affecting in teachers' motivation to work. This research study is an explorative case study and the sample was selected by using purposive sampling technique. For this study 9 female teachers of a Kolkata based college, West Bengal were chosen. They were interviewed on telephone to collect data. In-depth interview derived findings are divided into themes and discussed. This study will be beneficial for the higher education authority to concentrate on the role of virtual interpersonal communication in respect of teachers' motivation.

**Keywords:** Virtual communication, motivation, work from home, Covid-19 Pandemic

## **Introduction**

COVID-19 pandemic has impacted in every aspect of mankind. The govt of every country is appealing their each citizen not to step out of their houses. All the professional excluding the emergency personnel are working from their home remotely. Education sector is not left behind. All the educational institutions are closed now. The teaching-learning process has converted from offline mode to online mode. From small kindergarten students to the post graduate students are now compelled to use communication devices to attend their classes. It was not imagined a few years ago that a day would come to learn every lesson through technological devices. This pandemic period forced them to adapt these devices and learn to use them correctly. Using these devices constantly is challenging for them. In absence of face-to-face communication, they lose their motivation very often. Teachers are also facing same problems. This is also a new challenge for them.

Generally teaching job is very challenging but it is always not praised like other professions. A teacher not only imparts knowledge to his students and helps to build career of them, but also does many other administrative works in the concerned education institution. They are usually engaged in teaching-learning process, knowledge sharing and evaluation processes. He also simultaneously tries to develop his own career by doing many professional courses. But in recent time, COVID-19 pandemic

has changed everything. The entire classroom teaching is shifted from college building classroom to virtual classroom. Online classes are done on the virtual platforms like Google Meet, Zoom etc. Computer -mediated communication has replaced the face-to-face mode communication right now. So it left impact on the motivation of the teachers too.

Communication in which information, ideas, thoughts are feelings are exchanged between two people virtually, is called virtual interpersonal communication. During pandemic, most of the people are working from their home. They communicate with the outer world virtually. They mostly used Twitter, WhatsApp, FB messenger, emails etc. to communicate with their colleagues and bosses. Communication is fast here. Though it lacks face to face interaction, but it connects two digitally literate persons to exchange their message instantly. Pandemic make the people stay their home for being safe. Teachers also doing their online classes from home. But they miss the actual classroom and staffroom atmosphere. But something is always better than nothing. In the amidst of uncertainty about the future, fear of affecting by corona virus, multiple household chores could make a teacher demotivated towards his job. Communicating with the principals, colleagues and students at least over the phones, video calls, SMS, chat etc. can boost up their motivation for the works.

Communication is one of the important factors impacting motivation. It can

enhance one's motivation towards his job and also lack of communication brings demotivation. A motivated teacher can bring success to an organisation

### **Literature Review**

Bradley et al (2004) talked on using computer-mediated communication to create virtual communities of practice for intern teachers. They asked 35 intern teachers on teacher reflection, computer mediated communication and social cognition. Content analysis methods were applied. Their study suggested that web-based conferences are sensitive to relatively light instructional and social pressures.

Nina Langer et al (2020) investigated the critical role of teachers in providing social and emotional support for newly arrived migrant and refugee learners in Denmark during Covid-19. They took telephonic interviews with eight Danish preparatory school teachers. The schools were all closed. Their study highlighted how covid-19 induced school closures constrain the care work of teachers and refugee learners.

Agus Purwanto, et al (2020) explored the impact of work from home (WFH) on Indonesian teachers performance during covid-19 pandemic. They telephonic interviewed 6 people in an elementary school in Tangerang. They concluded with the advantages and disadvantages of WFH during Covid-19.

Tajularipin Sulaiman, et al (2021) examined the effect of e-evaluation

on work motivation among teachers during Movement Control Order (MCO) and determining the mediating role of stress. The findings suggest that teachers' stress cannot mediate the relationship between e-evaluation and work motivation.

Amal Akour, et al (2020) study the psychological status, challenges of distance teaching and coping activities and pandemic -related concerns among university teachers in Jordan in the midst of covid-19 related quarantine and control measures. They conducted a cross-sectional study using an anonymous online survey. The study concluded with the fact that the university teachers exhibit various levels of psychological distress and challenges during the implementation of precautionary national measures in the battle against COVID-19 in Jordan.

### **Research Question**

How virtual communication affect college teachers' motivation during COVID-19 pandemic?

### **Objective of the Study**

- To identify the benefits of virtual interpersonal communication on the teachers' motivation during COVID-19 pandemic.
- To explore the negative impacts of virtual interpersonal communication on the teachers' motivation during COVID-19 pandemic

**Data**

- *Primary data:* Data obtained via interview with 9 college teachers over the telephone
- *Secondary data:* Different reports, articles, research papers published in different journals, magazines, newspapers

**Method**

In this research study case study method was employed for exploration of information. The approach of the research was qualitative in nature. In this study respondents were 9

women college teachers. 3 Associated Professors, 3 Assistant Professors and 3 State-Aided Teachers in Kolkata were interviewed for in-depth study. For confidentiality each of the respondents were numbered R1,R2,R3,R4,R5,R6,R7,R8 and R9. A semi structured questionnaire was formed and asked over the telephone. The sample was selected by using purposive sampling method to achieve certain research objectives. All the telephonic conversation were recorded with the respondents' permission. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, face to face interview were not possible.

**Profile of Respondents**

Respondents	Age	Designation	Education	Experience (years)	Marital Status
R1	48	Associated Professor	M.Phil., PhD	20	Unmarried
R2	33	Assistant Professor	M.Sc.	10	Married
R3	28	State-Aided College Teacher	M.A.	6	Married
R4	58	Associated Professor	PhD	30	Married
R5	27	Assistant Professor	M.Com.	4	Unmarried
R6	35	State-Aided College Teacher	PhD	9	Married
R7	51	Associated Professor	M.Phil., PhD	25	Divorcee
R8	40	Assistant Professor	M.A., M.Phil.	15	Unmarried
R9	32	State-Aided College Teacher	M.Phil.	8	Unmarried

## **Research Findings**

For convenience of the study, two themes were formed. Theme 1 mainly focused on the advantages of virtual communication on the female college teachers' motivation.. Teachers of Kolkata based colleges were interviewed and seek for their opinion on their motivation to their jobs. Theme 2 focused on the disadvantages of virtual communication on their motivation as well.

### **Theme 1 : Advantages of Virtual Communication on Teachers' Motivation**

#### *Excerpts of the Respondents' opinion*

**R1:** “..... It was last week of June 2020. Our Principal told us to start online class on Google platform. I was clueless. I never did it before. But through our college WhatsApp group our IQAC coordinator assured us for a weeklong internal workshop on Google Meet and Google Classroom. In that workshop I learnt many things which help me in taking virtual class smoothly. It is easy to access and saves time. I can limit unnecessary interaction.”

**R2:** “... I am well versed with computer applications. I knew how to manage online environments. So, it was smooth sailing for me. I happily helped my other colleagues to operate their devices for online classes. Due to Covid-19, we were missing our staffrooms addas. But seeing and talking with them virtually my engagement with my job enhances.

Something is always better than nothing”

**R3:** “....my college is far from my home. It takes around 2 hours to reach my college. Due to recent pandemic, all the colleges in West Bengal is closed now. I am enjoying my onlineclasses. I save my time in terms of travelling. I can balance my work with my family well during pandemic. I have more time now to read for myself. There is an ocean of information in the virtual world. My thirst of gaining knowledge enhanced day by day”

**R4:** “..... Due to pandemic I am at home since March 2020. I am new in my job. I have more time now to prepare myself for upcoming NET exam. After the online classes, I generally watch YouTube lectures which me in my study. I downloaded many study materials from different websites. It is really helpful.”

**R5:** “.....you know Corona virus is very contagious in nature. Though we are using mask, hand sanitizers. We are trying to maintain social distancing whenever we step out our houses. I literally take bathe after returning from outside. I am really freaking out. I thank our Prime Minister for his decision of closing all the educational institutions nationwide. I am really comfortable with the virtual classroom teaching right now. The fear of getting affected by the virus is gone now. I no longer panic now. I can concentrate in my environment friendly teaching learning process. Virtual world is the safest place right now.”

**R6:** “.....My principal praised my work in our last virtual TC meeting. I organised a virtual Independence Day programme with my students. It was really nice. In the amidst of uncertain situation worldwide, these few words of appreciation really encouraged me. Very often our Principal personally calls to everyone and wants to know their needs and suggestions”

**R7:** “..... In these last few months I attended different courses. Corona period gave me an opportunity to broaden my knowledge. I came across other educators of my department from different country. I also presented my views there. Even I myself too organised two National level webinar in my department. You know it is very easy to organize such programmes. It is hassle-free. It makes me more productive.”

**R8:** “..... I am still struggling with my virtual classes and evaluation process. But I do not give up till now. It is not a rocket science. My students also try to help me to do better in terms of using technology. Learning on technology is fun with my students. “

**R9:** “.....I found shy and irregular students to be more vocal and regular in their virtual classrooms. Before the pandemic, I often tried to reduce communication gap between us in the normal classroom. But due to huge classroom size and work pressure I somehow not be able to sit with them personally. Due to covid-19 outbreak I was tensed for my students...about their health,their well beings, ... more over about their future. But when our

Principal informed us to begin our classes virtually, I became very happy because I would again be able to meet my students, hear their voices. Seeing active students in the classrooms I feel more motivated.”

### **Disadvantages of Virtual Communication on Teachers' Motivation**

#### *Excerpts of Respondents' opinion*

**R1:** “.....Virtual world is virtual world. Though I am taking my classes virtually, but the interface does not give me that level of satisfaction of teaching. I see the students' images and their names on the screen. Nonverbal communication is not possible here. So I am not fully satisfied with this “

**R2:** “..... I miss the “WE” feeling. Everyone is here, but still, no one is here. I sometime feel lonely.”

**R3:** “..... It is new to me. I found complication in searching work related information. There are so many virtual groups in our college and so many members in those groups. It is really hard to find an important message in the pile of messages. “

**R4:** “..... Our Principal expects exaggeratedly from us. We are not proficient in using virtual devices. It really sucks sometimes. Principals need to understand this.”

**R5:** “.....Difficulties in maintaining effective communication and cooperation with the Principal, the

colleagues and the students.”

**R6 and R7:** “..... Emoticons, GIFs, Avatars cannot replace the real facial expressions. Face to face interaction is far better than virtual communication”

**R8:** “.....Creates anxiety, confusion and miscommunication”

**R9:** “ ..... I cannot keep undivided attention in virtual platforms”

## **Discussion**

### **Theme 1: Benefits of virtual interpersonal communication on teachers' motivation**

College teachers in Kolkata are working from home nowadays due to covid-19 outbreak. The Education Minister Dr. Partha Chatterjee in his last meeting in February 2021, advised all the colleges and universities of West Bengal to continue online classes till his next announcement. Since March 2020, the offline classroom has been shifted to online classroom. The mode of communication is virtual. Most of the college teachers has learnt to use technology to conduct their teaching process. They not only interact with them in the classrooms, they make voice calls, video calls, chatting etc. to express their views on any given topic. It is time saving mode of communication. They can share data, information, study materials, question papers in a blink of eyes. Women college teachers can balance their work and life very well now. The Principals

and other administrative officials are keeping their eyes on the wellbeing of the employees. They contact with the teachers and trying to get their regular feedback virtually. On the other hands teachers also get motivation when they find that the authority is beside them during this pandemic uncertain time. A few words of praise in the virtual college meeting in the presence of other colleagues make a teacher more motivated. In the virtual world the scope of gaining knowledge is cheap and limitless. It is cost effective in terms of travelling. Teachers have more time for their research works. Unnecessary interaction can be curbed here.

### **Theme2:Negative Features of Virtual Interpersonal Communication on Teachers' Motivation**

Though Virtual communication is the safest way to communicate during COVID-19 pandemic, but there are many people who still are struggling to use it well. Besides there are many people who can not afford to buy technical devices for virtual communication. In any colleges and universities, multigenerational teachers work together. In West Bengal the retirement age of a college teacher is 65years. The teachers of older generation found difficulties in handling devices to communicate virtually. The anxiety and dissatisfaction can be seen in their performance. The exaggerated expectation of the college authorities seems unachievable often to all the faculties. Besides the virtual interface

of students and other colleagues, it does not give satisfaction to any teachers. It seems they are talking with the ghosts. There are many groups in WhatsApp to discuss study related information with students and work-related information with the Principal and the colleagues. With this overloaded information seems heavier for a teacher. Sometime important information become very difficult to search in a group. Due to its main dependence on the internet connection, it becomes useless if the connection gets lost. It creates anger and despair that moment and motivation curves down immediately. Most of the teachers miss their normal classroom teaching. Seeing the happy faces of students, interaction with them face to face give a psychological satisfaction. Virtual classroom may be able to bring all the students in one place, but soul is missing. This feeling brings demotivation of teachers. Emoticons, Avatars, GIFs cannot replace seeing one's original facial expression.

### **Conclusion**

Covid -19 has suddenly brought a huge change in our life nowadays. We cannot ignore it. Until and unless we get vaccine, we are not free from its attack. We have already lost many of our close people. But life cannot be stranded like this. It finds its own way to proceed. Computer mediated

communication takes the position of face-to-face communication now. It is safe and it replicates the real world. Yes, there are technical glitches, but it connects the entire world within a few seconds and brings in our small room. Voice call, video calls, sms, chats etc. help us to keep communicated with the outer world. Covid-19 pandemic left impacts in Education sector too. The entire teaching-learning process, evaluation process become online now to stop transmission of Corona Virus. Maintaining social distancing is not possible in a normal small classroom where students number is high. So to keep the lessons unhindered, all the colleges and universities started to take their activities on virtual platforms. Teachers are not only teaching their students in online mode but also they are enhancing their own knowledge banks. They are also developing their professional career by attending different webinars, conferences, workshops, faculty development programs organised by different universities in India. Students are also enjoying their classes.

Covid -19 cannot stop the learning process. If a teacher can ignore all the disadvantages of virtual communication in teaching process, he/she will get all the positive sides which brings similar motivation to work for betterment which leads to the success of an organization.

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