INTERNSHIP DURING COVID 19 PANDEMIC: EXPERIENCES OF STAKEHOLDERS OF TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTIONS

Dr. SWETA DVIVEDI[1*], Dr. NITU KAUR[1*], SWATI DWIVEDI[2] & Dr. ARATI MISHRA[3]

[1,1*]Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Mizoram University
[2]Research Scholar, Department of Education, Mizoram University
[3]Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Mizoram University

ABSTRACT

With the emergence of the COVID 19 pandemic, the delivery of proper classes to the students became a global issue. Educational institutions tried to deal with this problem by adopting certain methods to continue the teaching-learning process and switching to online platforms was the most prominent solution. Shifting classes on an online platform was convenient for higher education general degree courses but for courses that were professional; came across so many hitches. The teacher-training course is a professional course and for this programme, problems were more layered because, in spite of it being part of higher education level, it is dependent on schools for internship. In such a situation, the teacher-training institutions (TTIs) had to bear the brunt of the opening of institutions in several phases because the reopening period of schools and higher education institutions was different. This was one of the major reasons why TTIs were unable to match with schools to conduct internship programme with school students as in previous years. The present study is an attempt to study the perceptions and experiences of student teachers (STs) and teacher educators (TEs) regarding the efficacy and effectiveness of the internship program organized in the TTIs during the COVID-19 lockdown period. In this study, multiphase sampling was used for the collection of data. At the first phase, using a structured questionnaire, data was collected to find out the perception of STs and TEs of different TTIs in India regarding internship programme. Further, as per the responses, some auxiliary information was obtained through telephonic interviews. The results of the study indicate that in the majority of institutions online mode of the internship was practiced. However, for internship some institutions adopted a blended mode; online as well as offline mode. Since this was the first time that such arrangements were tried, both the teacher and the taught held a positive perception of the modality which was wisely chosen amidst the pandemic. However, many drawbacks were also cited owing to lack of preparedness and uncertainty prevailing over the whole education sector. It was concluded that the unique first-hand experiences of the STs and TEs will serve as a vital resource for proper planning and preparedness for organizing teacher training internships in future amidst any time of uncertainty.

Key Words: Internship, Teacher Training Institution. Student teachers, Teacher Educator, COVID 19

Introduction

The whole world has been affected by the outbreak of COVID-19 in the years 2020 and 2021. Across the whole world, due to COVID-19, all educational institutions were forced to shut down for an indefinite period (Abdollahi et al., 2020; Auger et al., 2020; Calhoun et al., 2020; Isumi et al., 2020; König et al., 2020; Patra et al., 2020; Vlachos et al., 2021).

The educational institutions and stakeholders of education are the most affected by COVID-19 in the long run. To prevent the spread of epidemical COVID-19, a total lockdown was announced by most the countries of the world. Along with this, all public places, and educational institutions, were also closed for a time period and face to face classes shifted to the online platform. In private institutions where online teaching was a part of the curriculum transaction; shifting classes to online mode was less problematic unlike institutions following the traditional face-to-face mode of curriculum transaction (Reference). During the COVID-19 pandemic, many institutions organized training programs for conducting online classes for their teachers and students, but it was lacking in most of the public education institutions (Reference). For most of the stakeholders of the public education system, this type of classroom was an alien concept and it was difficult for teachers (Fauzi et al., 2020; Rasmitadila et al., 2020), learners (Bibi et. al 2020; Almendingen et. al., 2021) & parents (Apriyanti, 2020; Garbe et.al 2020) to adapt to this new modality (Abhhammad, 2020; Mailizar et al., 2020; Özüdoğru, 2021).

Due to the sudden shift of classes to the online platform problems were reported by all the stakeholders related to different levels of education (Kim, 2020; Al-Amin et al., 2021; Ullah, et al., 2021). However, the teachers and students who were associated with professional courses where the internship was an integral part of the programme, encountered a significant number of problems (Dani, et al., 2020; Asgari et al., 2021; Zaman, 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). Teacher-training programme is also professional courses that contain deep-laid and participatory internships and are not possible without schools. The internship program is an integral part of teachers' training which is indivisible. Fletcher (1990) has recognized the importance of the internship programme for teacher education. The experiences gained during the internship increase the confidence, values , and right attitude of the students. It also increases students' independence, social maturity, and interpersonal skills (Jawabri, 2017; Gupta, 2019; Anjum, 2020). Parveen and Mirza (2012) have acknowledged the importance of an internship program in teacher education as it professionally prepares STs. Through the internship, the right understanding of the teaching profession is developed in the STs as well as it provides a practical opportunity to develop the future prospects of working conditions in that profession. It is a way to provide direct experiences to the STs regarding their various duties which are to be performed in the future. Various educational commissions and committees accepted the importance of internships in teacher education as; the Education Commission (1964-66), National Commission on Teachers (1983-85), National Policy on Education (1986), Acharya Ramamurthy Committee (1990), National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (2009/10), NCTE Regulation (2014).

Though the internship is an integral part of the teacher training programme, it was impossible for teacher-education to send the trainees to the schools for an internship due

to the closure of the schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. The schools were closed for a longer period as young children are found to be more vulnerable in case of infectious diseases. In such a situation, all the TTIs faced the challenge of conducting the school internship programme for the STs (Alam, 2021). This problem was not only with regard to the actual school experience but also with the pre-internship programme.

To deal with these problems and to provide essentially actual experience to the STs in the school itself, many TTIs also changed the fixed schedule of internship like postponement of the internship program to the next semester. But the prolonged closure of the schools hampered the internship programme and finally, most of the TTIs opted virtual mode for internship. One major reason of shifting to the virtual mode was opening of the schools for some selective classes only. The schools reopened themselves only for those students who had to appear in the board examination.

Lack of availability of schools made STs deprived of the actual training and eventually, these STs were dependent exclusively on simulated teaching for internship which is traditionally part of the pre-internship programme. This arrangement lent a hand to STs to complete the internship by teaching their peers, but on the other hand also kept them devoid of other experiences such as classroom management, dealing with real students, problems faced by students during the class performance, use of different teaching methods and strategies, laboratory activities, etc which are essential to be an effective teacher (Kosar, 2021; Tabassum 2021). One more problem that may not be commonly noticed is the level of students in the class. Intellectually, emotionally, logically and experientially more matured peer STs played the role of students which did not allow STs to develop the ability of questioning skill for a certain class, especially probing, the level of the content simplification and addressing the students of different mental levels at the same time in the classroom. Despite all the shortcomings, online internships enabled STs to get teaching experiences, develop critical thinking and problem-solving ability, use technology, and multi-media, develop communication skills, and attending all the activities without stepping out of the home (Mukhtar et al., 2020, Almahasees et al., 2021; Selvaraj et al., 2021).

Rationale of the Study

The present study basically aimed to extract information on the mode of internship of B.Ed. trainees especially during the session of pandemic i.e. 2020-2021. During the COVID 19 pandemic many institutions opted for a blended mode of internship or exclusive online mode (Dhawan, 2020) and hence it was felt that it would be good to know about the experiences of stakeholders from various Teacher Training Institutions (TTIs) belonging to various states across India. The study draws upon the perspective of both the teacher-educators and the student-teachers who had undergone pre-internship and internship experiences by either offline/online /blended mode during COVID 19 period.

The researchers thus are interested to find out first-hand experiences of STs and TEs; both regarding the modalities, step-in aids, innovations & best practices in conjunction with difficulties & problems they faced during training programme. The research questions of this study are as follows which are further translated into objectives of the study:

1. What are different modalities of teaching-learning processes applied by the teacher-training institution during COVID-19 pandemic?

2. What is the perception of student teachers and their educators about the effectiveness of the internship programme organized during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Objectives

1. To find out the different modalities of teaching-learning processes applied by the teacher-training institution during COVID-19 pandemic.

2. To study the perception of student teachers regarding the effectiveness of the internship programme organized during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. To study the perception of teacher-educators regarding the effectiveness of the internship programme organized during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Plan and Procedure

The researchers used a mixed methodology to study the perceptions of STs & TEs regarding the effectiveness of the internship programme organized during the COVID-19 lockdown period. The study covered 12 Indian states including 19 TTIs. In the present study the data was collected from 105 student teachers and 24 TEs from the different states of India using a descriptive survey. Hence all teachers and students of TTIs in India formed the two populations of the study. The institutions covered in the study are given in Table 1. In this study, multiphase sampling was used for the collection of data. During the first phase data was collected using the structured questionnaire from the student-teachers and teacher-educators. Further, some selected respondents were contacted for seeking more information using telephonic interviews. The researchers developed two questionnaires for studying the perceptions of STs and TEs separately regarding the effectiveness of the internship programme organized during the COVID-19 lockdown period. The teacher-education internship has three stages; pre-internship, internship and post-internship and it was tried by the researchers to include plenty of questions from each stage. The data was collected using an online survey using the application of Goggle forms. For seeking further information a semi-structured interview schedule was developed and data was collected through telephonic interviews. The obtained data was qualitatively compiled and experiences of the online modality of teacher education programme internship were recorded. The first-time experiences and perceptions of both the teacher and taught were analyzed for their pros and cons.

The data received from the first phase was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentages and the data procured during the second phase through telephonic interviews were analyzed for qualitative interpretations. All the data was collected after the conduct of internship in the lockdown period of COVID 19 in most of the TTIs in their dedicated semesters for school internship.

Table 1 List of Teacher Training Institutions (TTIs) with the State

Findings

Findings of the study have been categorized on the basis of the objectives of the study

S No.	Teacher Training Institution	State
1	Mizoram University, Aizawl	Mizoram
2	Central University of Tamil Nadu, Thiruvarur	Tamil Nadu
3	Rajendra (Auto.) College, Balangir	Odisha
4	Rajiv Gandhi University	Arunachal Pradesh
5	Delhi University	Delhi
6	Tezpur University	Assam
7	Arya Mahila PG College, Varanasi	Uttar Pradesh
8	Jamshedpur Womens' College	Jharkhand
9	Manipur University	Manipur
10	SCTE- Kohima	Nagaland
11	RK Sanatombi Devi College of Education	Manipur
12	Central University of South Bihar, Gaya.	Bihar
13	SCERT Kerala	Kerala
14	Vasanta College for Women, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh	Uttar Pradesh
15	Institute of Advance Study, Aizawl	Mizoram
16	Visva Bharati University, Shantiniketan	West Bengal
17	Dr.Parshuram Mishra Institute of Advanced Study in Education (PMIASE), Sambalpur	Odisha
18	Lady Shri Ram College for Women, New Delhi	Delhi
19	Mokokchung College of Teacher Education, Kokokchung	Nagaland

under the following heads:

Findings related to Objective 1

In order to obtain the findings for the first objective a survey methodology was adopted to find the different modalities of teaching-learning processes applied by the TTIs during COVID-19 pandemic. Present study covered twelve states of India namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. Altogether 19 TTIs were part of the present study each having a semester based curriculum. The questionnaire sought information separately on the pre-internship and internship and post-internship stages of the teacher training

programme which is conducted in a dedicated semester of the different teacher education programs as envisaged in the B.Ed. regulation (2014), NCTE (National Council for Teacher Education).

For the present study data is collected either for time period of the July-December 2020 semester or the January- June 2021 semester. Most of the pre-internship sessions were conducted either in the period between July-September, 2020 or February-April, 2021, the former period being the total lockdown period and later coincided with the lift over in total lockdown in the country after the first wave of COVID-19. One institution did not conduct micro-teaching at all in the pre-internship session and the rest 23 institutions conducted it amidst the pandemic conditions. In response to the mode of practice of micro-teaching skills in the pre-internship stage of the current year, out of the 22 institutions, 7 institutions conducted online micro-teaching; 8 had blended sessions, the initial sessions being offline and the later session online; and 8 institutions conducted offline sessions only. For the simulated teaching sessions, 15 institutions carried it exclusively in online mode, 6 institutions in exclusive offline mode and 3 institutions had the opportunity of having both online and offline sessions. As far as practice teaching of the internship was concerned 20 institutions conducted it online and 4 institutions did not conduct it at all during the specified period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings related to Objective 2

It was also tried to find out the perceptions and first-time experiences of the student teachers which could provide valuable insight into internship modalities they underwent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data was obtained from 105 student teachers studying in 13 different TTIs of Indian states. The respondents comprised of 71.4% (75 respondents) female and 28.6% (30 respondents) male student teachers. All student teachers experienced their teacher training internship during the pandemic year between the periods of July-2020 to June 2021 in the respected dedicated semester of internship. Table 2 provides information related to STs.

i) Findings obtained through the questionnaire
Majority of students (59.6%) remarked that blended (online cum offline) mode of pre-internship programme was organized by their institutions. 40.4% of students mentioned that face to face mode of pre-internship was conducted in their institutions. These experiences primarily included micro-teaching and simulated teaching as reported by 86.7% and 94.1% of students, respectively. There were some institutions where micro-teaching was not organized at all and still very few institutions where simulated teaching was also not organized. At the same time face-to-face modality of micro-teaching was adopted in many institutions (56.4%) during the small window period of lift in lockdown during March, 2021 followed by simulated teaching sessions (42.4%). During micro-teaching sessions skill of induction and explanation were the most readily practiced skill

followed by the skill of writing instructional objectives, questioning, blackboard writing, stimulus variation, reinforcement, classroom management, response management, illustration with examples, closure, and silence & non-verbal cues. However, the least practiced one was the skill of demonstration. These skills were integrated during simulated teaching sessions. The pre-internship session of practicing these skills was not free of problems as opined by the majority of students. Lack of proper classes in pandemic and inadequate cycles and practice of a plan, teach, re-teach due to time constrain was the biggest problem faced by a majority of students. Students admitted that they had trouble in integrating all the learned skills as well. A big majority of the students (72.6%) regretted the non-availability of face-to-face interaction that made the whole process very artificial. Almost between 25-35% of the students remarked the problem of incomplete communication cycle in online mode due to poor internet connectivity, lack of regular classes in pandemic and a very short duration of the micro and simulated sessions. Lack of preparedness for the online teaching-learning process, and very few offline classes were also cited as a reason that led to problems by 18.9% of students. Some specific challenges mentioned by some students were lack of self-confidence in carrying out the microteaching cycle, less time to practice skills to develop the expertise, lack of feedback from the teachers and miscommunication due to poor internet connectivity. In spite of many shortcomings, almost half of them (49.5%) rated the micro-teaching sessions as 'very good' and

Table 2 Data of Student Teachers (STs) from 13 Teacher Training Institutions (TTIs)

another 39.8% mentioned it to be 'fair'. A much better response was noticed for the simulated session with 18.9% remarking it be 'excellent', 58.9 % of them as 'good', and

Gender	Programme studied by Student Teacher	Number of Units in B.Ed.	Semester in which Internship was done	Pedagogy Specialization	Mode of the pre-internship programme	Mode of the internship programme	Whether internship conducted during lockdown
75 Female	2 Years B.Ed. (90.5%)	50 students (1 unit) 81%	1st Semester (0.95%)	Biological Science (5.71%)	Offline/Face to Face (40.4%)	Offline/Face to Face (18.4%)	Yes (93.1%)
30 Male	4 Years Integrated B.Ed. (8.57%)	100 students (2 units) (15.2%)	2nd Semester (3.8%)	Physical Science (23.80%)	Online (35.6%)	Online (68%)	No (6.9%)
	4 Years B.El.Ed (0.95%)	More than 100 students 3.8%	3rd Semester (20.95)	Language (40%)	Blended (both offline and online) (24%)	Blended (both offline and online) (13.6%)	
			4th Semester (58.09%)	Social Science (17.14%)			
			7th Semester(6.6%)	Mathematics (13.33%)			
			7th-8th Semester (5.71%)				
			Others (3.9%)				

17.8% of them rating it as 'fair'. Students responded positively in terms of their satisfaction level towards the pre-internship sessions provided by their institution amidst the pandemic period. A half majority of the students admitted that on an average 3-5 simulated classes were organized for each of the subject specializations in order to provide experience for integrating skills.

Practice teaching follows the pre-internship phase traditionally in all Indian TTIs. During lockdown, practice teaching was also organized by the institutions as reported by 93.6% of student teachers. The modality of internship was kept online in consideration of the prevailing circumstances by the majority of institutions as per 68% of student response. 18.4% of students reported that internships could happen in face-to-face mode and rest 13.6% reported blended mode. However, irrespective of different modalities, the problem of arranging for real students from school was the major constrain. Hence some alternatives were thought by every institution to substitute real school students. A huge majority (61.8%) of student teachers admitted that due to pandemic, all schools were closed and their peers acted as their students, although around 22.5% of them had a chance to teach real students in the real classroom when schools were opened and around 8.8% of them could teach real students through online classes. It seemed in majority of the institutions the whole session of the internship was dedicated to simulated teaching only.

A majority of respondents reported that practice teaching was done in groups (5-30 peer students) with 25 students as most frequently reported group and 1-2 teacher educators were assigned as the mentor in each group. 94% of students responded that their teachers were observing them through online mode to supervise them and were available for solving their problems related to internship, however some student-teachers remarked negatively for the same.

The teacher training curriculum approves for delivery of 15-20 lessons per specialization by the student-teacher. In majority of institutions students could plan the assigned number of lesson plans for each specialization but there was gap between the delivered and planned lessons. Owing to pandemic this requirement was compromised by reducing the total number of lessons to be delivered by the student teachers. 41% of students reported that they delivered between 10-20 lessons while 58% of them delivered between 1-5 lessons for each subject specialization.

STs took classes almost all weekdays; once or twice every week during the internship. The number of parallel classes organized during the internship varied from just one class to more than five, depending on the availability of time, mentor teachers, and the number of student teachers in the group. In institutions, where the student intake was 100 (2 units), 5 or more than 5 classes were organized in parallel, and where the intake was 50 students (1 unit), 1-4 parallel classes from different specializations were organized. Around 60% of STs reported having 1-2 parallel classes in general.

On average 75% of the STs reported that they used discussion and lecture methods while delivering lessons; around 35.3% of students mentioned the storytelling method, 15.7% of them used the cooperative learning method and 9.8% also applied the project method. During virtual classes the least used method by STs were laboratory method (4.9%) and direct method (1%) due to constrain of modality, time, and space. As far as teaching skills are concerned 39% of STs reported that skill of explanation was most frequently used skill during teaching followed by illustration with examples (27 %) and reinforcement skills (10%). Whereas skill of non-verbal cues (1%), skill of whiteboard writing (2%), and skill of probing questions (5%) were least used skills.

On the contrary, some advantages of learning and teaching through online platforms were also highlighted by the STs. More than half (57%) of STs expressed their relief by mentioning that online classes save both time and energy on their part, 54% of them were happy to share that it enabled them to use ICT in the teaching-learning process more than offline classes and 45% reported that this made them techno-savvy. Also, they mentioned that it was the only way to conduct classes/practice teaching during lockdown hence helping them to complete the prescribed curriculum for the internship. Around 40-50% of STs opined online classes helped in sharing the content with teachers instantly and provided flexibility in meeting time. Some other cited advantages were dilution of

distance between the teacher and taught, and feeling no nervousness. However, on being asked to choose between online and offline modality of internship, only 4% of the students preferred online over offline. STs also shared their fear as a prospective-teacher of not being able to handle some aspect of the real classroom such as non-disciplinary behavior of students, tapping the emotions of students, involving students in hands on training, difficulty in teaching higher-order thinking skills, time management in actual classroom settings. STs majorly feared that may not be able to give proper and instant feedback to students as they did not encounter real students in a real classroom.

There were some aspects where both offline and online teaching were equated by students, the most being the use of teaching aids, teaching skills like explanation and reinforcement, and providing feedback by students and teachers. Some other aspects reflected by students were whiteboard usage, demonstrative experiments and effective communication. The least equated aspect was the use of non-verbal communication effectively as in online classroom it was seriously missing. Altogether, 15.2% of students rated the online internship programme of their institution as 'excellent', 61.6% of the students rated it as 'very good' and the remaining students rated it to be 'fair'.

STs came up with some firm suggestions to improve the online internship programme. One of the most prominent suggestions was to tie-up TTIs with schools. Also, student teachers recommended that there should be an adequate supply of resources to organize innovative classes such as raw materials for making a variety of 2D/3D teaching learning materials (TLMs). A valid suggestion of increasing the bandwidth of internet connectivity was made that could lead to a non-stop communicative cycle through online classes. The number of student activities in online classes should be increased beyond regular teaching sessions such as quizzing, seminars, and discussion forums. Online learning helps the teacher and students to seek different learning tools and this opportunity should be readily explored. A positive suggestion to have a blended mode of internship was made by some respondents as well. Some suggested for the organization of more number of classes as in many of the TTIs the required number classes were not organized. Some also mentioned that teachers should observe/supervise their online classes throughout so that students can be benefitted from their timely feedback. It seemed that in few institutions the internship component was diluted and compromised from the TEs end.

ii) Findings obtained through the telephonic interview

As per the response some students were further selected for the conduct of a telephonic interview. In total 13 students were chosen for extracting further information on their perceptions and experiences of teacher training internship during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Following are some extracts from some of the important conversations,

A student teacher expressed dissatisfaction towards internship as follows;

"I can definitely say that this internship program organized during pandemic has not been efficient enough. We have not been provided with enough classes to practice the teaching skills. I am rather disappointed with this program. Also except one or two teachers, others were not at all interested in clearing our doubts. Practically we have not taken enough classes with students due to lockdown, and it will definitely affect our teaching later on."

It meant that internship wasn't a fulfilling experience for some who wanted more out of it.

Another student felt,

"As we don't have proper micro-teaching practices, we were less confident in making lesson plans and so it took huge time in making one lesson plan"

The main aim of the internship programme is basically to instill the virtues of good teachers, confidence being the fundamental trait to be possessed by a teacher. Some students felt this lacking made them less prepared for the teaching profession.

One student teacher expressed the worry by stating,

"I am more worried about the resource constrain on part of students in order to study online."

It is very obvious that online classrooms are still not democratic classrooms as the access and quality of digital platforms are not uniformly available to all. Hence it is worrisome on part of the efficiency of digital classrooms.

One student teacher reacted to the curriculum load however it was the only complaint of its kind. He mentioned,

"There is only one thing to mention regarding this online internship, institutions will have to reduce their lesson plan and other files which are made during the internship."

When asked what is that one regret they have about online internship, an array of responses were expressed the most prime being the absence of real students and a real classroom environment. One student teacher commented,

"I missed the chance to practice my learned skill upon real students in the classroom".

Another student teacher mentioned,

"the one thing I will regret is the lack of thrill and experience of real classroom and school management."

Online classrooms were lacking the effectiveness in connecting to students, real-time communication and engagements with students, and the liveliness of the classroom. Due

to almost negligible real-time student interactions, what we learnt seems very artificial and mechanical.

The mindset of student teachers was reflected in some of the responses where they expressed emotions such as anxiety, nervousness, and fear. They somehow felt that there were many missing components in the online internship specifically addressing the emotional aspect of real classroom dynamics.

One student teacher equated online classroom with mechanical experience regretting,

"I am missing the emotional aspect of a real classroom. Had it been offline classes this would have been not the case. There is no replacement of real students and their emotions that makes a classroom alive."

Another student teacher remarked that as the prospective teachers they lack self-confidence,

"I realize how it is important to be confident to become a teacher. Online classes may not boost confidence unlike the practice in the real class."

Poor internet connectivity was also pointed as a major drawback of online classes. Shortened duration of the internship, shortened lesson plans, and its delivery was not justified. In that limited time frame incorporating all skills and appropriate TLMs was a difficult task regretted by some students. As reflected in the words of a ST,

"poor internet connectivity is the major hurdle in the way of online internship and online internship lacks many important aspects of teacher training."

One student teacher reflected on her experience mentioning,

"online internship was not totally online. For some time when the schools reopen we were allowed to take classes however the number of students were less and we could not take much class. This internship is not worth the actual internship that used to take place before COVID -19 pandemic. The teachers also most of the time were unavailable for our queries except for one or two teachers who actually listened to the doubts."

Altogether through the telephonic interview, a lot of information in connection to student's experience could be gathered that facilitated a deeper introspection of the unique scenario of teacher training internship during COVID 19 pandemic.

Findings related to Objective 3

The third objective of the present study was to find out the perception of TEs regarding the effectiveness of the internship programme organized during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to fulfill this objective, questions were framed to seek the opinion of the TEs in order to know their perceptions regarding the conduct of different modes of internship amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. 24 TEs from 13 institutions of different states of India

were sampled using a descriptive survey. Initially, a structured questionnaire was used and with a few selected respondents, a telephonic interview was conducted. Based on the responses the findings are divided into two sections, firstly the findings through the questionnaire and secondly the findings through the telephonic interview. Table 3 provides information related to TEs.

i) Findings obtained through the questionnaire

The online internship was a first-time experience for all the institutions. The third research objective sought to document all these first-hand experiences through the lens of the TEs. It was found that except for one institution, the rest all institutions managed with microteaching component of the pre-internship curriculum. A majority responded to practice between 5-13 teaching skills mostly comprising of skill of writing of instructional objectives, setting induction/introduction, probing, questioning and explanation. Total 13 TEs responded that they could manage to practice a maximum of more than 10 essential teaching skills. It was interesting to note that in a majority of institutions (54%) due to online mode some new set of microteaching skills were practiced, unlike the earlier years. The teacher-educators mentioned the specific problems which they faced during the organization of micro-teaching skills like, few offline classes of micro-teaching (60.9%), poor internet connectivity (52.2%), lack of enthusiasm among the pupil-teachers (39.1%), lack of preparedness for the online teaching-learning process (30.4%), and inadequate cycles of micro lessons (52.2%). TEs also mentioned that due to the pandemic there was mental pressure on both, STs and TEs. Despite all the issues, 2 (8.7%) teachers rated the micro-teaching programme as 'excellent', 4 (17.4%) teachers as 'very good', and 17 (73.9%) teachers as 'fair'. One respondent did not respond as microteaching was not done in their institution.

As far as simulated teaching sessions were concerned in the majority of the institutes 3-10 classes were conducted and few institutions could manage with more than 10 classes per subject specialization. However, in very few institutions only 1-2 simulated classes were organized owing to the lockdown period.

Table 3 Data related to Teacher Educators (TEs) from 13 Teacher Training Institutions (TTIs)

Name of the teacher training programme	Number of Units in B.Ed.	Semester in which Internship was done	Mode of the pre-internship programme	Mode of the internship programme	During lockdown was the practice teaching

					conducted by your institution?
2 Years B.Ed. (83.3%)	50 students (1 unit) 41.7%	2nd Semester (8.33%)	Offline (29.2%)	Offline (25%)	Yes (83.3%)
4 Years Integrated B.Ed. (8.3%)	100 students (2 units) 45.8%	3rd Semester (29.16%)	Online (33.3%)	Online (62.5%)	No (16.7%)
2 Years D.El.Ed. (4.2%)	More than 100 students (12.5%)	4th Semester (41.66%)	Blended (33.3%)	Blended (12.5%)	
3 Years Integrated B.Ed.-M.Ed. (4.2%)		3rd-4th Semester (4.16%)	Not done at all (4.2%)		
		7th-8th Semester (8.33%)			
		7th Semester (4.16%)			
		2nd, 4th, and 5th Semester (8.33%)			

The teacher faced problems in organizing simulated teaching as well. Based on their responses the biggest problem emerging out was non-availability of face-to-face interaction as mentioned by 19 of TEs. Some other problems were lack of adequate number of classes, incomplete communication cycle in online mode due to poor internet connectivity and the problem of a short duration of simulated teaching. The same problems were cited for practice teaching where it was conducted through online mode. The TEs of the institutions that organized simulated teaching through offline or blended mode reported about less number of offline sessions. Altogether 79.2 % of TEs rated the simulated teaching programme 'fair', 8.3 % mentioned 'excellent', 8.3 % mentioned as 'very good', 4.1% mentioned as 'poor' and none of them considered this programme as 'very poor'.

The biggest problem during the pandemic period was the non-availability of practice schools and due to it, in most of the institutions practice teaching was just like extension of simulated teaching. The teacher-training courses are professional courses and thus internship is an integral component of the course which in turn is dependent on schools for internship. The concept of attaching dedicated schools to TTIs for the internship is an inevitable requirement which unfortunately was difficult due to the shutting of schools amidst the pandemic and its need was felt by most of the TTIs. During practice teaching, a variety of teaching methods were used by STs and the TEs reported on this aspect of internship as well. The lecture and discussion methods were most used methods (87.5%, 21 respondents) followed by demonstration (58.3%, 14 respondents), analysis and synthesis (54.2%, 13 respondents), inductive and deductive method (54.2%, 13 respondents), story-telling method (41.7%, 10 respondents) and observation (33.3%, 8 methods) and laboratory and direct method was least used method. Mentoring is an essential component of internship and it was tried to find out the involvement of TEs in practice teaching and in response 79.2 % of the TEs reported about their involvement in the virtual supervision of the STs. As practice teaching did not differ to simulated teaching, STs were divided into groups and parallel classes were organized. But a majority of institutions could manage without the parallel classes as 41.7% of the respondents mentioned that at a time only one class was conducted. 62.5% of teachers rated the internship programme to be 'fair' and 29.2 % of them found it to be 'very good' despite the pandemic hurdle. On being asked for their preference, the majority of TEs (91.7%) preferred offline internship over the online internship, except a few (8.3%, only 2 respondents) found the online mode better over the traditional offline mode. On the whole when being asked regarding the advantages of online practice teaching/internship programme, a lot of favourable responses were presented. The most frequently cited response (91.7%) was that an online internship programme enabled the students to use ICT in the teaching-learning process more than offline classes and the only way to conduct classes/practice teaching during the lockdown. 8 respondents (33.3%) mentioned that students were happy because they were able to take classes from their own houses and it was worth time-saving. 5 respondents (20.8%) and 4 respondents (16.7%) mentioned respectively that there was no constrain of timing as classes could be conducted even during evening time and pupil-teachers felt no nervousness owing to online modality.

The TEs also gave many suggestions to improve the online mode of internship, such as B.Ed. institutes should tie-up with some schools so that practice teaching can be performed with real students, to motivate students to organize innovative classes through an online platform, to increase the number of student-activities in online classes, and organization of more number of online classes.

i) Findings obtained through the telephonic interview

In order to seek further information, seven TEs were interviewed further through telephonic interviews. For this purpose, an unstructured interview schedule was prepared. Based on the interview a close look at their perceptions was recorded. In order to improve the online internship, various suggestions were placed by the respondents. Some of the important suggestions were to strengthen internet connectivity by increasing the internet bandwidth more specifically in the rural and tribal regions. One teacher educator from the north-eastern institution mentioned,

"online class purely depends on network and gadgets and we have to think about the students especially in rural areas and tribal people"

The importance of offline mode of the internship has been the only method tried in the Indian setting and the first time experiences of the TEs were very precious in order to understand the success of online internship which can be tried in upcoming sessions as stated by a teacher educator as

"online teaching-learning process taught many new innovative ICT tools enabled technology which makes online platforms more inviting for teacher training internship and should be continued in years to come because of tremendous advantages it offers; a blended form of an internship is thus the new call of the day"

Majority of TEs however favoured offline mode over the online mode. Most TEs highlighted the significance of offline internship and reiterated the fact that nothing can replace it as far as internship is concerned. In the words of one of the teacher-educators following was mentioned,

"online cannot replace offline training and should not be expected to"

In a similar context another teacher educator mentioned*,*

"Offline class gives more experience than the online class. Each child has to acquire some qualities through offline classroom experiences. But online class has some qualities as well".

All together the telephonic interview further enabled to have a close look at the unique circumstances faced by TTIs in the face of the COVID 19 pandemic.

Discussion

The COVID 19 crisis promoted online education perhaps for the first time in the higher education public sector providing first-time experiences with new pedagogical practices through virtual platforms of learning. In 2020 and 2021 for the first time an online interface is adopted in TTIs spanning from pre-internship, internships, and post-internship online sessions. It was a successful attempt and is in the process of documentation in terms of teachers' and trainees' first-hand experiences. The aim of the internship program is to impart teaching skills among the STs. An internship program is an effective way to give training to the student-teachers about the real world of work. It gives an opportunity to integrate theory and practice, plan and deliver lessons properly, critically analyze their own and peers' teaching styles, and improve them in the light of feedback given by supervisors. But due to COVID 19 pandemic, the majority of the internship programme of B.Ed. in the respective dedicated semester during 2020-21 has to be conducted in online/blended mode, though some of the activities had been carried out in offline mode also in different Teacher Training Institutes across the country. This concept of alternative modality of internship was introduced in various B.Ed. course structures throughout the country which was quite challenging for all the teacher education institutions.

The student teachers missed many aspects of real classroom experience such as the absence of real students and their curiosities which was reported by 86% of them, followed by the absence of liveliness of classroom, discipline, noise & silence, and classroom- as reported by 62.4% of them which is consistent with the findings of Alam, 2021; and Tabassum, 2021. This was followed by a lack of real classroom dynamics like bodily movements, classroom spaces, and vicinities, not being able to address real student problems and paying individual attention, non-verbal cues of students as reported by almost 40-50% them. Around 20-30% of students mentioned other real classroom experiences such as some out-of-the-box discussions and non-mechanical approaches to teaching, completely missing in online classes which are similar to findings of Tabassum, 2021.

Professional courses are characterized by internship programmes which can't be alienated. It gives prospective teachers hands-on experience to be an effective teacher by including classroom teaching, classroom management, evaluation, handling different responsibilities such as morning assembly, mid-day meal, student support and mentoring, organizing co-curricular activities, administration, etc. But during the lockdown period, the complete internship programme is negatively affected as TTIs adopted an alternative mode and most of the TEs and STs were completely unfamiliar with that. In such a situation, it is a high time when there is a need to modify the curriculum of teacher-training and include training and skills related to online classes in regular internship programme. This will lead the STs to acquire techno-pedagogical expertise. It is not shocking that the STs and TEs both reported the same issue i.e. the role-playing of peer students prevented the STs to have an experience of actual students. It was the most convenient one to

organize the classes but with so many margins. This arrangement didn't allow developing different teaching skills. To make the whole process smoother and to subdue the reported issue TTIs can tie-up with the schools. Even during normal time also TTIs should convince these schools to allow the trainees to conduct few classes through online mode. This will not only provide a platform of innovative practice teaching in the respective real class but will also reduce the classroom burden that most of our Indian schools grappling with. The STs and TEs also reported regarding the less number of classes for simulated and practice teaching and practice teaching was only the extension of simulated which made all the process very tedious. This tie-up will support to solve this hitch also.

Despite all its shortcomings, at the time of lockdown virtual classrooms emerged as an opportunity that bridged physical distances. This feature of virtual classroom can be utilized to give varied experience to prospective teachers. In practice TTIs make arrangements for training in the nearby schools. If online teaching is taken as opportunity, the TTIs can go to give some training in those schools which social environment is completely different. TTIs which are located in the rural areas can tie-up with the schools of urban areas to give some different type of exposure and same can be done by the urban area TTIs. If the TTIs are resourceful, they may make some arrangements to give some exposure of abroad schools.

One more major issue which has been observed during online internship is use of teacher centered methods, techniques and skills instead of student-centered. This is the main responsibility of TEs to orient and train their students to use more the student-centered one to ensure the better learning and understanding.

Conclusion:

The whole teaching-learning shifted to online platform during pandemic lockdown and internship too. The problems faced by STs and TEs during internship program such as internet connectivity, lack of communication, non adaptability to virtual platform, lack of enthusiasm for teaching and learning, mental pressure etc. were the same as other online classes but some inimitable problems which were allied only with internship program especially with the teacher education internship program were artificiality in the training, lack of teaching-learning resources, inadequate micro-teaching cycle, more use of teacher-centered methods, short internship-period etc. Every effort was made by the TTIs to provide a meaningful training by removing the shortcomings and some of the best results have also come out like use of ICT, handling the online learning and online platforms, self-learning, saving time and energy, which could not have happened in traditional training style. How long the COVID or other similar problems will continue to affect the world and education is not known, but given suggestions by STs and TEs as adding blended mode of training to the curriculum, tie up with the schools for internship will help the teacher education program to be ready for the future. 21st century is in dire

need of human resources who are well equipped to face any kind of emergent challenges which can be frequent to encounter. COVID-19 pandemic introduced virtual mode of internship perhaps for the first time in Indian context but it will be a matter of further investigation to see teaching competencies of the STs trained through virtual mode in comparison to the STs trained through traditional mode.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Acknowledgment

Funding

References:

- Abdollahi, A., Mahmoudi-Aliabad, M., Mehrtash, V., Jafarzadeh, B., & Salehi, M. (2020). The Novel Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 Vulnerability Association with ABO/Rh Blood Types. Iran J Pathol. Summer,15(3),156-160. 10.30699/ijp.2020.125135.2367
- Abuhammad, S. (2020). Barriers to distance learning during the COVID-19 outbreak: A qualitative review from parents' perspective. Heliyon, 6(11) e05482. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e05482
- Alam, A. (2021). School Internship Programme (SIP) for Teacher Trainees during the Outbreak of COVID-19. 10.90937/974.003
- Al-Amin, M., Zubayer, A.A., Deb, B., Hasan, M. (2021). Status of tertiary level online class in Bangladesh: students' response on preparedness, participation and classroom activities. Heliyon, 7(1), 1-7. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e05943
- Almahasees, Z., Mohsen, K., & Amin, M.O. (2021). Faculty's and Students' Perceptions of Online Learning During COVID-19. Frontiers in Education, 6:638470. 10.3389/feduc.2021.638470
- Almendingen, K., Morseth, M.S., Gjølstad, E., Brevik, A. & Torris, C. (2021). Student's experiences with online teaching following COVID-19 lockdown: A mixed methods explorative study. Plos One, 16(8): e0250378. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal. pone.025037
- Anjum, S. (2020). Impact of internship programs on professional and personal development of business students: a case study from Pakistan. *Future Business Journal,* 6(1) 2: https://doi.org/10.1186/s43093-019-0007-3
- Apriyanti, C. (2020). Distance learning and obstacles during Covid-19 outbreak. Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar, 7(2), 68-83. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343192148_DISTANCE_LEARNING_AND_OBSTACLES_DURING_COVID-19_OUTBREAK/fulltext/5f1b177aa6fdcc9626ae620b/DISTANCE-LEARNING-AND-OBSTACLES-DURING-COVID-19-OUTBREAK.pdf?msclkid=47f07b44cf8a11ec9b88554fc7e5f845
- Asgari, S., Trajkovic, J., Rahmani, M., Zhang, W., Lo, R.C., & Sciortino, A. (). An observational study of engineering online education during the COVID-19 pandemic. PLoS ONE 16(4): e0250041. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0250041
- Auger, K.A., Shah, S.S., Richardson, T., Hartley, D., Hall, M., Warniment, A., Timmons, K., Bosse, D., Ferris, S.A., Brady, P.W., Schondelmeyer, A.C., & Thomson, J.E. (2020). Association between

Statewide School Closure and COVID-19 Incidence and Mortality in the US. JAMA, 324(9), 859-870. 10.1001/jama.2020.14348.

- Bibi, N., Alvi, G.F., Davis, C.J., & Ishaque, M.M. (2020). Problems faced by students during online classes due to COVID-19 lockdown: Comparison of public and private sector colleges. 19(4) 3095-3103. 10.17051/ilkonline.2020.04.764683

- Calhoun, K.E., Yale, L.A., Whipple, M.E., Allen, S.M., Wood, D.E., Tatum, R.P. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on medical student surgical education: Implementing extreme pandemic response measures in a widely distributed surgical clerkship experience. The American Journal of Surgery, 220 (1), 44-47. 10.1016/j.amjsurg.2020.04.024

- Dani, R. Kukreti, R., Negi, A., Kholiya, D. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 on Education and Internships of Hospitality Students. International Journal of Current Research and Review Research, 12(21), 86-90. http://dx.doi.org/10.31782/IJCRR.2020.SP54

- Dhawan, S. (2020). Online Learning: A Panacea in the Time of COVID-19 Crisis. Journal of Educational Technology Systems. 49(1) 5–22. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0047239520934018

- Fauzi, I., & Khusuma, I. H. S. (2020). 2020). Teachers' Elementary School in Online Learning of COVID-19 Pandemic Condition. Jurnal Iqra' : Kajian Ilmu Pendidikan, 5(1). 58-70. https://doi.org/10.25217/ji.v5i1.914

- Garbe, A., Ogurlu, U., Logan, N., & Cook, P. (2020). COVID-19 and Remote Learning: Experiences of Parents with Children during the Pandemic. American Journal of Qualitative Research, 4(3), 45-65. https://doi.org/10.29333/ajqr/8471

- GoI (1966). Report of the Education Commission (1964-66): Education and National Development. Ministry of Education, Government of India. https://archive.org/details/ReportOfTheEducationCommission1964-66D.S.KothariReport/page/n19/mode/2up

- GoI (1986). The Teacher and Society: Report of the National Commission on Teachers-I. Government of India. https://indianculture.gov.in/system/files/nvli_pdfs/1964.pdf

- GoI (1990). Report of the Committee for Review of National Policy on Education 1986. Government of India https://www.educationforallinindia.com/1990%20Acharya%20Ramamurti%20Report.pdf

- Gupta, S. (2019). Perceptions and Experiences of B.Ed. Students about Internship and Sessional Work. MIER Journal of Educational Studies, Trends & Practices, 9(), 109-120. https://www.mierjs.in/index.php/mjestp/article/download/1383/1023

- Isumi, A., Doi, S., Yamaoka, Y., Takahashi, K., & Fujiwara, T. (2020). Do suicide rates in children and adolescents change during school closure in Japan? The acute effect of the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic on child and adolescent mental health. Child Abuse & Neglect, 10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104680

- Jawabri, A., (2017). Exploration of Internship Experience and Satisfaction Leading to Better Career Prospects among Business Students in UAE. American Journal of Educational Research, 5(10), 1065-1079. 10.12691/education-5-10-8

- Kim, J. (2020). Learning and Teaching Online During Covid-19: Experiences of Student Teachers in an Early Childhood Education Practicum. International Journal of Early Childhood, 52,145–158. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-020-00272-6

- König, J., Jäger-Biela, D.J. & Glutsch, N. (2020). Adapting to online teaching during COVID-19 school closure: teacher education and teacher competence effects among early career teachers in Germany, European Journal of Teacher Education, 43(4), 608-622. 10.1080/02619768.2020.1809650

- MHRD, GoI (1986). National Policy on Education- 1986. Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. https://ncert.nic.in/pdf/nep/Policy_1986_eng.pdf\

- Mukhtar, K., Javed, K., Arooj, M., & Sethi, A. (2020). Advantages, Limitations and Recommendations for online learning during COVID-19 pandemic era. Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences, 36(COVID19-S4): COVID19-S27-S31. https://doi.org/10.12669/pjms.36.COVID19-S4.2785
- NCTE (2009/10). National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education: Towards Preparing Professional and Humane Teacher. National Council for Teacher Education. https://ncte.gov.in/website/PDF/NCFTE_2009.pdf
- NCTE (2014). NCTE Regulation 2014. National Council for Teacher Education. http://www.ncteindia.org/regulation/Regulati on_2014(Hindi%20&%20English).pdf
- Özüdoğru, G., (2021). Problems faced in distance education during Covid-19 Pandemic. Participatory Educational Research (PER), 8(4), 321-333. http://dx.doi.org/10.17275/per.21.92.8.4 Id: 888492
- Parveen, S., & Mirza, N. (2012). Internship Program in Education: Effectiveness, Problems and Prospects. International Journal of Learning and Development, 2(1), 1–5. https://doi.org/10.5296/ijld.v2i1.147
- Patra, S., Patro, B.K., Acharya, S.P. (2020). COVID-19 lockdown and school closure: Boon or bane for child mental health, results of a telephonic parent survey. Asian Journal of Psychiatry, 54. 10.1016/j.ajp.2020.102395
- Rasmitadila, Aliyyah, R. R., Rachmadtullah, R., Samsudin, A., Syaodih, E., Nurtanto, M., & Tambunan, A. R. S. (2020). The Perceptions of primary school teachers of online learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic period: A case study in Indonesia. Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies, 7(2), 90-109. https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/388
- Selvaraj, A., Vishnu, R. Ka, N., Benson, N. & Mathew, A.J. (2021). Effect of pandemic based online education on teaching and learning system. International Journal of Educational Development, 85. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2021.102444
- Ullah, A., Ashraf, M., Ashraf, S. & Ahmed, S. (2021). Challenges of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic encountered by students in Pakistan. Journal of Pedagogical Sociology and Psychology, 3(1), 36-44. http://www.doi.org/10.33902/JPSP.2021167264
- Vlachosa, J., Hertegard, E., Svalerydb, H.B. (2021). The effects of school closures on SARS-CoV-2 among parents and teachers. PNAS, 118(9)1-7 e2020834118. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2020834118
- Zaman, A., Banna, H., Rakib, M.A.A., Ahmed, S., & Khan, M.M. (2021). Impact of Covid-19 on University Final Year Internship Students. Journal of Software Engineering and Applications, 14 (8), 363-388. 10.4236/jsea.2021.148022
- Zhang, W. Lu, X., Kang, D., & Quan, J. (2022). Impact of Postgraduate Student Internships During the COVID-19 Pandemic in China. Frontiers in Psychology, 12. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.790640