



IMPACT OF COVID ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The impact of COVID-19 can be seen in every sphere of life. Especially when it comes to education; this is the biggest sector that has been adversely affected by this pandemic. It forced many great nations to enforce lockdown thereby bringing everything to an abrupt halt for a certain period of time. The digitalisation of education became a necessity in order to provide seamless education. This paper would be discussing the problems faced by the students in India who are pursuing higher education during this pandemic. This paper also tries to find out the positive & negative impact it had on the teaching, learning and evaluation methodologies at undergraduate level & what steps our policymakers have taken in order to provide seamless education to the students who are pursuing higher education in India. Some suggestions have also been pointed out in this paper with regard to how we can further revolutionize the teaching & learning process to improve the experience of both; teachers and learners during the pandemic.



Universities and college campuses are places where students live and study in close proximity to each other. They are also buzzing cultural hubs where students are brought together from nations around the world. Recently, the foundations of this unique ecosystem have been impacted significantly by the rapid spread of the coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak, creating uncertainty regarding the implications for higher education.

KEYWORDS: Covid, Education, Ecosystem, Pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

The impact of COVID-19 can be seen in every sphere of life. Especially when it comes to education; this is the biggest sector that has been adversely affected by this pandemic. It forced many great nations to enforce lockdown thereby bringing everything to an abrupt halt for a certain period of time. Right from the big businesses to educational institutions this Pandemic has literally altered and devastated the traditional ways of carrying out these things. The educational sector has been fighting to survive the crises. The teaching learning and evaluation methodologies have been completely altered by this pandemic. The digitalisation of education became a necessity in order to provide seamless education. This paper would be discussing the problems faced by the students in India who are pursuing higher education during this pandemic. This paper also tries to find out the positive & negative impact it had on the teaching, learning and evaluation methodologies at undergraduate level &

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Over the past weeks, education officials have been forced to cancel classes and close the doors to campuses across the world in response to the growing coronavirus outbreak. In addition, US institutions have switched classes to online learning, cancelled spring break trips and students studying abroad in China, Italy and South Korea have been encouraged to return home to complete their studies. While class closures, dips in enrollment at the beginning of a new semester and cancellations may be temporary, it's hard to foresee whether the novel coronavirus will result in long-term disruption to the higher education system.

UNDERSTANDING THE ECONOMIC IMPACT

One of the biggest concerns for the sector at large is the percentage of international students that make up the domestic higher education markets. In the US alone, Chinese students make up 33.7 per cent of the foreign student population, while Indian students comprise of 18.4 per cent.

While travel restrictions to and from China have been helpful in slowing down the spread of the disease, they have also left international students stranded. According to a Covid-19 Survey by the Institute of International Education (IIE), 830 Chinese students have been unable to return to the US to continue their studies. While this may be a small percentage of the overall international student population, the question remains: How long will this last? If the restrictions remain in place, the US higher education system could bear the brunt of an economic downturn. So, how should universities and colleges around the world adjust their learning styles to retain program enrollment and provide accessibility to students?

MAXIMISE ONLINE LEARNING

The most effective tool in keeping student retention and maintaining access to learning has been online courses. Universities across the US, in particular, have adjusted their programs in response to the spread of the coronavirus.

Stanford University has called off the remaining two weeks of in-class lectures, urging its professors to move any remaining lessons online. The University of Washington announced a ban on on-campus classes until after spring break, after a member of staff was diagnosed with coronavirus last week. Other universities, including New York's Hofstra University, New Jersey's Princeton University and Seattle University are making starting to make the move to virtual classes.

DEVELOP ROBUST SYSTEMS

While the majority of colleges and universities around the world integrate some form of online education into their coursework, moving all programs online may prove challenging. While some universities may already have strong online systems, smaller universities may struggle under the weight of the demand. University course creators should work closely with their IT departments to ensure their programs are able to be supported online.

One such university that is currently undertaking these measures is the University of Southern California, which is testing its online platforms to ensure its technology can handle its 7,000 plus lectures.

EDUCATE STUDENTS ON BEST PRACTICES

With online learning the way to go, universities should also ensure students and staff are protected while on campus.

While Covid-19 is a high risk for those over 60, traditional-aged university students face relatively low risks from the disease. However, in recent weeks, we have seen just how quickly the novel coronavirus can spread in areas with a high concentration of people – and university campuses are no exception.

Administrators should undertake simple measures to prevent the spread of the disease on their campuses. This should include instructing students on the appropriate protocols for hand washing, covering sneezes and coughs with their elbows, and self-isolating if they are experiencing flu or cold-like symptoms.

Educators should also be aware of students who have travelled extensively during the spring break, and remind those who have been abroad in heavily affected places to be mindful about returning to campus.

GATHER INFORMATION AND APPLY LEARNINGS

Universities and colleges yet to implement changes to campuses in response to the novel coronavirus should take cues from others who have already taken action. They should analyse the steps already taken by other educators to understand what has worked, what hasn't worked and how to tackle the challenges they may face. With the spread of the disease expected to worsen before it gets better, administrators should take quick action to safeguard their campuses and students in preparation for potential closures.

But it's not all doom and gloom. The higher education sector has withstood turbulent economic times in the past, and it will withstand them again. In a digital age, universities and colleges are better placed today more than ever to provide students with easy access to continue their studies online.

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of COVID-19 has forced many countries to enforce lockdowns that brought everything to a standstill including the teaching and learning process. The educational sector suffered the most due to this pandemic. This pandemic has made the world to observe social distancing in the public space. COVID-19 was first identified in Wuhan, China and then it gradually started spreading in other parts of the world. It was only in 2020 the WHO declared it as pandemic. It has claimed millions of lives across the world. According to the UNESCO report more than 90% of total student population in the world was affected due to the pandemic during the initial phase of its outbreak. It has caused a serious and very deep rooted impact on the social, economic and also psychological life of people in different parts of the world. The guidelines that were issued by the WHO which were ratified by the most of the countries across the world compelled the governments to shut down the institutions of mass gatherings. So along with the educational institutions the academic year end exams and also competitive exams were postponed indefinitely. This step was taken in order to slow down and contain the spread of Corona virus in India by segregating the people who were infected with COVID-19. This process came to be known as Lockdown wherein the Govt. had imposed severe restrictions on the movement and the gatherings of the people in order to control the spread of this airborne disease. So ultimately in this process all the educational institutions suffered a massive setback in India. All the educational institutions in India had to be shut down Right from the primary schools to the universities. The regular classes were suspended citing threat to the lives of the learners and the teachers. It also affected the lives of the aspirants who were preparing for competitive & entrance exams.

It has raised multiple issues right from the health to the wealth also affecting the day to day functioning of the life due to its rampant spread across the world and India is definitely not an exception to it. The economy has suffered severe setback which can be reflected in different sectors. One of the major and devastating impact this pandemic brought in the global education is , it led to sudden shift of education from classroom teaching to the online mode of teaching and learning that has

affected the teaching and learning process in Universities, colleges and schools and thus it has significantly disrupted the higher education sector in India. This shift in education has brought a great change in the pattern of learning with certain positive and negative impacts.

In the case of the country like India this online teaching has registered devastating impact on the lives of those students who are underprivileged and coming from very poor section of the society. In India it has also brought certain severe effects on the conventional learning process of face to face interaction even when some technical aids were introduced in the classrooms. However also it is important to note that there are still certain educational institutions in India which are not very well equipped to the modern technological facilities in the classroom. Thus we can say that with the introduction of new method of learning through digital mode of learning, learning became very easy to the students as they can sit at home and get access but at the same time some students also had to face problem due to the poor internet connectivity which brings to the notice that even after India is adapting to online learning methods, still there lies an obstacle as entire population do not have access to internet and E-learning facility. Rural people are still deprived of technology. Therefore, it is important to understand that there are positive as well as negative effect on the Indian society. This paper intends to understand the issues that are associated with the higher education in India due to COVID-19 and also to focus on certain drawbacks in the context of online education and its psychological impact on the lives of the students.

IMPACT ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Around the second week of March 2020, state government across the country began to shut down the schools, colleges due to COVID-19. As we all know that this was the crucial time for students as different University, college examination is usually held during this period and also different entrance test of various universities and competitive examination were to be held during this period. And since there found to be no immediate solution to prevent the outbreak of COVID 19, college, school and university closure had to be made compulsory to prevent the spread of virus. It has affected more than 285 million young learners in India. Students had to face severe problem as they were not aware of the future examination especially students who were in the final year and also those who were to answer entrance test. This closure of educational institutions disrupted the structure of learning, assessment and examination which made the Indian education system go through an irreversible teaching & learning crisis. And therefore sudden shift was made from traditional face to face classroom method to the online mode of education. It just became like the yesterday's disruptors became today's survivor. Online method was considered as the threat but today it has come to rescue. However, there were several issues that also started coming up along with the introduction of online mode of teaching in higher educational institutions (HEIs)

One of the significant question arises regarding online learning that whether it is effective? However, answer is that it is effective for those who have right access to the technology. Internet plays very vital role for better learning and for higher education. However, in the country like India all students cannot be expected to have all the required facilities due to different socio-economic background which might cause discomfort and frustration to students which might give the student the feeling of segregation and thus create digital divide between the rich who can avail all the facilities and the poor who cannot afford to purchase the equipment's that are required for E-Learning. So in India lot of people are not completely well equipped with all the facilities and many times they cannot get access to fast internet which is needed at the time of Teaching & learning process. Therefore, India is still facing this challenge of digital divide. Lack of student involvement during the online classes has increased absenteeism and poor performance. Unfortunately, student's passive role in the classroom became one of the significant reason for ineffective online teaching and learning process.

Mobile applications or virtual meeting platforms like Zoom, Google meet became the virtual meeting hubs. Educational institutions directed teachers to engage classes through online mode using the virtual meeting platforms like Zoom & Google meet. The teachers who were not well versed with modern technology and mobile applications had to struggle a lot to engage online classes due to the

sudden shift from face to face teaching to online teaching. Some teachers were just conducting classes because they were asked to do so. A lot of students were just joining the classes to mark themselves present. They hardly paid attention towards what was being taught by the teacher as the factor like class control doesn't exist on these virtual platforms.

Many entrance tests, job recruitment too got cancelled which created a negative impact on the lives of the students. All these imply towards increase in unemployment in India. Thus with the increase of unemployment situation, there were enough chances of diminishing interest for education due to the struggle for food. This growing issues has caused mental stress amongst the youngsters and youths who are the future of India. These were certain problems which affected the people in India who were severely affected due to the pandemic which created threat to the future of India.

Initiatives taken by the policymakers to make the educational system learner friendly

Though COVID-19 created many negative impacts on education, at the same time it has brought new dimension to the teaching learning process in India. Though there are many drawbacks of online learning, it became survivor during the worst situation in the country. It enhanced the digital literacy. People started learning and using digital technology. Electronic media was used for sharing information worldwide. Students and teacher got good opportunities to interact with different people around the globe improving the communication. Students preferred Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode of learning as it encourages self-learning. The HEIs also gave their positive response by adopting different strategies during this crisis situation. UGC, MHRD also have made available teaching and learning materials for students to motivate learning. Some of the digital initiatives have proved to be very effective during the COVID crisis. Some of them are listed below:

E-gyankosh, - One of the initiative taken by national government to shape digital learning learning resources which is developed by the open and distance learning institutions in the country. Study material is also made available for the students.

Gyandhara- It is internet service where students can listen live discussions made by experts and also can interact with them through telephonic Conversation-Adhyayan,

Swayam- It is said that SWAYAM covers over 1900 courses are available which covers school and higher education.

The Government of Goa decided to take up Herculean task by creating a new E-Learning platform called as DISHTAVO (Digital Integrated System for Holistic Teaching & Virtual Orientation).

Dishtavo-

The E- Learning platform called Dishtavo was especially developed during the COVID crises. It is very complex and holistic as it extraordinarily addresses the different study packages that consists of; B.A, B.COM, B.Sc. and so forth under the Goa University at the UG and PG degree level. It has been designed as per the guidelines prescribed by SWAYAM for MOOCS to enhance the experience of the learner and to make that platform more learner centric.

The main Motto of this platform is to create a repository of the e-content as in step with the prescribed syllabus by the Goa University. The principle cause is to provide the students with lectures both in online mode as well as in offline mode. Students can directly watch the lecture videos and download the reading material related to it from the DISHTAVO portal if they have access to the internet. If they do not have access to the internet, then they can ask the college to provide them with the lecture videos which they can copy in their pen drive & take those videos at home.

This initiative of the government of Goa has in the true sense changed the nomenclature of teaching and learning process. Those who miss out lot of things that are taught during online classes due to various reasons can watch the videos of the lectures from the DISHTAVO portal. Secondly this

platform has strengthened the educational system or one can say that it has made educational system immune against the serious challenges arising from pandemic or disastrous situations like this.

Development and change is one of the inevitable part of human life however during the pandemic people had to accept sudden change as it became necessary for the survival. It encouraged personalized learning which in long run will be beneficial for qualitative teaching and learning process. It also facilitates improvement in collaborative work.

SUGGESTIONS

- The format that is generally followed for internship, research programs etc. has to be modified to suit the current situation
- Methodology, certification, assessment parameters have to be revised and shall be modified according to the requirements of the current situation keeping in mind the quality benchmark
- In order to strengthen the backbone of e-learning the government should deploy the necessary infrastructure at remote places where people don't have access to internet; thereby fixing the internet gap which would facilitate students to learn digitally.
- Every state government in India should come up with creative strategies to make the education accessible to each and every student especially for those who come from marginalized, underprivileged and remote sections of the society.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of education is to enable oneself to better the world in which they live. Technology today has become need of an hour. It is difficult to imagine colleges and university education without the use of digital resources which has provided different educational and academic information. However, it is also necessary to understand that it shouldn't reinforce structures of power and inequality. It should not create digital divide between rich and poor. As we cannot expect in country like India to have availability of all required resources due to different socio-economic conditions in India. Online mode of learning can be the best mode of teaching if it can be accessed by all the sections of the society however it can pose threat if certain section of society cannot avail this facility and thus exclusion. It is therefore important to take cognizance of online education and plan for interventions that will prioritize greater inclusivity, connectivity and equitability. It is important that colleges and University understands the experience and issues of the students and prepare according the further and design the study pattern in such a way that all students benefits.

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