

**A DYNAMIC CHANGE IN THE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION OWING TO THE
PANDEMIC EPISODE - A STUDY ON POST COVID-19 LOCKDOWN IN INDIAN
CONTEXT**

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Abstract

Novel coronavirus, which is called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) has been the major cause for the massive global infections causing deaths in hundreds and thousands. The terrifying rather bloodcurdling impact of COVID-19 has traumatized the world to the core. Governments of almost all the countries have shut the doors of all sectors in the name of lockdown to contain the spread of the pandemic. In India, the government at the centre had imposed a nationwide lockdown stunning all activities all of a sudden. A critical and a decisive concern need to be on the sectors of health, water and sanitation but that has to be done more vigorously on the needs of education as it cannot be sidelined or forgotten. It will have a detrimental effect on the society at large if it goes unaddressed. With the closure of all the educational institutions, the learners over 90 percent across the world and 320 million students in India - from KG to PG - have drastically been affected. Any interruption in education will have long term implication on the younger generation. There can be no two different opinions that education is life saving one for most vulnerable children that provides them safety besides instilling in them hope for a dazzling future. This article brings out ideas how the educational system can be made swift and stretchy to resist all such global crisis in future.

Keywords: Coronavirus, Work From Home, Digital learning, Blended learning, E-learning environment, Global-linked education

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Introduction

The academic year 2020-21 will be the worst hit in all aspects and so a pressure is on the educational institutions to develop teaching-learning mechanisms thereby ensure the effective methods of implementing the programmes assigned. The pandemic has glimmered a way of realization across nations that the present way of existence will not work any longer. It has almost wrecked the perception of the majority of the people about the normal human life. COVID-19 has upended the education of students, career of the youth, hope of the parents and the livelihood of the teachers. It is high time the policymakers should ponder over the right and effective measures to meet out the future of education.

The union government has stressed the need of e-learning programme. Many steps have been taken to leverage the tightest corner by offering online classes and e-learning modules either at free of cost or with attractive discounts. Interestingly these steps and measures have overwhelming response from students from almost all walks of life. They find the learning interesting and interactive though not up to the level of classroom teaching. The situation has prompted, undoubtedly, the education experts and policy makers to rethink about the present, conventional mode of education. The present education needs to be replaced with digital teaching which alone can be feasible solution to fill the chasm in the field of education that has been crept in during the lockdown period. In fact, digital education is likely to be assimilated in the mainstream education which will facilitate the learning for all irrespective of diverse geographies in India.

Work From Home (WFH) is the culture that has been boomed owing to the outbreak of the pandemic making social distancing as a mandatory one to curb the crisis out of COVID-19. Even illustrious Multi National Companies (MNC) with technocrats as employees have been facing unprecedented challenge in ensuring the business as usual. They connect themselves with many online platforms. Keeping on the same track, the educational institutions opt for diverse digital platforms to stay connected with students and to facilitate them for uninterrupted learning. Questions are raised regarding the equality of the digital learning availed by the students of rural and urban areas. It has come to light that many colleges and higher educational institutions have already started making use of these digital platforms like Zoom app. Students are connected well

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through video conferencing. Though they pose some security concerns, students feel undeterred by them.

Challenges

Postponing the examination and conducting them online are glaring threats before the system of education. Teaching online unremittingly during the lockdown period has become an imperative challenge as the situation is new and unheard of. The teachers have to focus on the well-developed course, which has been conducted in physical classrooms, to be developed for online teaching. Purposeful and precise online course materials that support the teacher as well as the student should be prepared to create the e-learning environment. This mode of online education should be a powerful alternative to the traditional and conventional system of education not only to alleviate the fear of learning in the minds of learners but also to compensate the impediments caused by the pandemic. The educational institutions are in position to consider the prevailing harsh conditions as a blessing in disguise and to make teaching-learning process through digital medium reach all the learners in future.

No doubt the governments at the centre and in the states have been focusing on facilitating the ICT-based education by providing opportunities to access to digital learning. SWAYAM can be taken as an example. As they have to tread along the path of uncertainty facing the crisis now, they rely on the technology based education that has become an imminent one. The pandemic has pushed the policy makers across the nations to go for a paradigm shift by taking efforts to empower the stakeholders at all levels. Technology has to be channelised properly to fulfill three factors such as fair and even-handed access to learning, deliverance of matters and efficiency in administration.

The novel coronavirus has made education across the world to experience major changes apart from huge disruption being faced. Most of the states in India, though they claim to have achieved, are yet to shift the way of imparting education so as to face the rapid innovation. The brains of the present stake holders, which have been systemised to adopt the age old methods, do not utilize the potential to acquire knowledge through modern methods.

The onus, on the other side, has been tremendously put on the parents as well whose involvement in the learning process of their children was comparatively minimal in the past. As the learning process is being done at home using multiple platforms for digital contents, the parents

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must see to it that the children are properly equipped with Smartphones and internet connectivity. A substantial section of Indian population does not have access to any technological tools. It is a main task for the government to play a proactive role to identify and reach out these vulnerable sections.

It cannot be ruled out that Smartphones are considered to be a luxury for majority of the households though almost 80 percent of the population enjoys mobile connection. Interactive Voice Response (IVR), WhatsApp, YouTube, Google Classrooms, Google Meet, Zoom etc., which are some of the apps being prominently used at present, must be deployed to get through all the online teachings. Further, teachers have to ensure the participation of students, gauge their attention, and ascertain their focus on the subjects taught.

Impacts of Covid-19

1. Students become passive in learning

The prevailing situation has made the students shift to online learning without any preparation. In India like most other countries, the curriculum was not designed for online mode of education. The students in rural areas who are supposed to be the backbone of the education system have been put into risk of losing interest owing to many reasons. Though a try has been made to connect the student community with the latest technology to make them get benefitted out of online teaching, majority of the students remain untouched due to the digital divide existing in the country. Thus, the sudden emergence of online teaching has made the students passive in learning.

2. Teachers are unprepared and ill-equipped

Teaching online needs a kind of attention and practice. Not all the teachers are good at it as they are not prepared for the sudden transition from conventional method to digital one. The physical presence of students boost the morale of the teachers in the classroom which is absolutely absent in the online teaching. In fact, the video platforms being used by the teachers for conducting online classes now are not the real online teaching-learning process. It needs dedicated platform specifically designed for the purpose.

3. Admission process is worst hit

The higher education institutions, particularly self financed, face a key threat in the area of student admission, and even to retain the students admitted. Losing students in an institution is like

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loss of blood from a human body. The risk of getting students needs the institutions to revamp their admission criteria, procedures and practices and go for new methods to reach out the target group.

4. Set back in Travelling and Physical presence

As the opportunities for massive teleconferencing are in the rise among the institutions for academic meetings, seminars and conferences, there grows the chance of using online platforms as a requisite one. Though it is justified that the events and meeting can be conducted anywhere globally, the travelling from one place to another, far and wide to have personal acquaintance and interaction will terribly be at a stake.

Overcoming the challenges

1. Blended learning

The higher education institutions must shift to a system of blended learning in which face to face teaching and online platform yielding the same effect are the minimum norms. The teachers have to become technical savvy by going through in-service training programmes so that they can face the prevailing trend.

2. Updated learning materials

It is high time the institutions improved the quality of the teaching-learning materials pertaining to the situation. Materials need to be transparent and in a format fitting to blended learning. Quality in content and delivery should be the priority.

3. Mutual sharing of work

Opportunities must be created to have both teaching and learning take new dimensions and monitored. While the teaching fraternity is insulated, the interest of the student community should also be protected. Teaching of one person from an institution may be listened and observed by other people of different institutions. The strong bond between the teachers and the students benefit them both.

Solutions

It is the responsibility of the teachers to undergo a shift that transfigures the learning community to attain the online education. They have to assume the role of facilitators to provide quality contents in a personalized support. They have to enhance their technical competencies along

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with subject expertise and assessment pattern. For that, they require extensive support from all quarters in terms of training programmes to update their skill in the areas of handling the ICT tools. Faculty Development Programme (FDP) or Staff Development Programme (SDP) can be offered to them focusing on strengthening the modules, content delivery and assessment in online education. Blended learning modules can be imparted to them to have flexibility and expediency. Resource sharing through cloud storage will be the most needed thing in future which will be based upon the quality of training on digital teaching and the way how the systems and modules are collaborated.

The academic burden of teachers in terms of conducting online classes and fulfilling the criteria meant for NAAC and NIRF cannot be dispensed with. Technological knowledge may help them reduce time they spend on non-teaching activities. The government has to take initiatives to conduct virtual training courses to develop the professional ethics of the teachers. It is learnt that the Government of Maharashtra, through SCERT in collaboration with a professional body, conducted many such training programmes for the officers and teachers since the lockdown has been declared.

Resolutions

The present scenario has brought a significant change in teaching and carrying out the curricula. Modernization and efficiency have been thrust. Those aspects which were considered basic and elemental to education need a complete change to accommodate all the online processes of teaching learning as life skills. Everyone on earth has to move on towards a paradigm shift to fetch the qualities like resilience, adaptability, association, compassion, creativity and expression. Learning in post lockdown will have a new purpose to serve, a key divergence from the so called information-focused education to technological-focused, global-linked education. Integrated and experiential learning is possible only through implementation of technology in the educational institutions in future.

There can be no unenthusiastic opinions that technology has already emerged as a key part in the field of higher education. It has to be interconnected with the modules of present educational system. The system content and delivery modes should harness and utilize technology to the fullest. The gen Z students have no other way to go out from the use of technology as it has become an extension of their consciousness. Online platform will occupy an indispensable place to empower learning as a way of life. As the present generation is seriously impacted by the crippling

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pandemic, they can manipulate the development of education by being in the position to learn from it.

It may be weird to ask the students to go back to the way of life they led before pandemic. There are hues and cries that the conditions will prevail for longer and the emotional, psychological and mental health of students cannot be compromised. Travelling in a jam packed buses or trains and sitting in a crowded classroom would be a menace in future. The world of education requires, badly, a diverse focal point in the days to come as health and life will be the issues of concern.

Here are some ways how the workforce can be executed in the educational institutions after the lockdown:

- Institutions which reformulate and redefine themselves to build the better insight and foresight will succeed.
- Contactless teaching-learning will be reinforced in ways that reform the attitudes of students pertaining to the technological aspect of education.
- The Governments at the centre and in the states will become emboldened to take vigorous steps to enable students to be high-tech oriented.
- Educational institutions will be forced to go for modernization to integrate the classroom and online teaching.
- As repercussion of the pandemic, homes will become classrooms instead of 'school is the second home' concept.

Conclusion

The world will never forget the changes the pandemic has brought in and the lessons learned during the lockdown period. It has become a catalyst to go for a paradigm shift. The subject of health, a paramount issue at global level, will force people of all quarters to adopt new approaches. The younger generation should adapt to the modern technology as it is doubtful if the world will go back to the pre-pandemic period once the threat of COVID -19 is over. It is obvious that India is not only going through a transformation in the higher education sector but also a reformation of the educational system.

Reference

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