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ONLINE EDUCATION IN THE TIMES OF SOCIAL DISTANCING: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Education, truly speaking is that phenomenon which has a dynamic aspect in terms of being a lifelong progressive process, creating vibrant and civilized societies through shaping and individual's overall development. It involves the process of transmission knowledge, culture, values, capabilities, skills from one generation to another and brings about tremendous changes in the social structure. Today, due to rampant globalization, it has become a global commodity which can freely be exchanged by means of recent advancement in the field of ICT (Information and Communication Technology). Of course, the teaching and learning process was going on steadily and smoothly but the sudden outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has altogether altered the traditional pedagogical approach of teaching. Now, the educational institutions have shifted to online methods of teaching and learning which has bridge the gap of physical distance between the teacher and taught through e-learning, m-learning and virtual modes. This paper deals with the various aspect of online approach towards teaching and learning, issues associated with stakeholders/professionals presently along with its strengths and weaknesses.

KEYWORDS

Education, Globalization, ICT, Covid-19, Online teaching and learning.

INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions (schools, colleges, and universities) in India are currently based only on traditional methods of learning, that is, they follow the traditional set up of face-to-face lectures in a classroom. Although many academic units have also started blended learning, still a lot of them are stuck with old procedures. The sudden outbreak of a deadly disease called Covid-19 caused by a Corona Virus (SARS-CoV-2) shook the entire world. The World Health Organization declared it as a *pandemic*. This situation challenged the education system across the

world and forced educators to shift to an online mode of teaching overnight. Many academic institutions that were earlier reluctant to change their traditional pedagogical approach had no option but to shift entirely to online teaching–learning. With the sudden spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, the education system across the world has suffered a serious setback. This situation forced the educators to shift to an online mode of teaching overnight. Several academic institutes that were reluctant to change their traditional pedagogical approach had no option but to turn entirely on online teaching and learning as these institutes remained temporarily closed due to lockdown measures. Academic institutes have almost discontinued in person teaching and it so seems that it is uncertain to get back to normal teaching anytime soon in the future. Today, social distancing remains the pertinent measure to curb the menace. At this juncture, teaching and learning has metamorphosed into tech-enabled learning. E-learning platforms like Zoom, Google classrooms etc. seizing the moment and trying to fill the academic vacuum created by the closure of educational institutes. No doubt, this online process of sharing and imparting knowledge through multimedia platforms is the order of the day, but it is still requires effective designing, minute planning, strategic execution for the targeted clientele, good expertise and proper development of resources. We have to understand the various challenges associated with the online approach in the Indian context too and possibilities foreseen for effective teaching learning process amid such situation in future.

STRENGTH OF ONLINE MODE

In fact, online mode has rendered a great support in the teaching learning process during this Covid-19 crisis by accelerating learning through innovative instructional designs which include soft skills like communication skills, learning etiquette, time-management, team work spirit, peer-learning and knowledge exchange. Online approach happens to be student-centered and offers a great deal of flexibility in terms time and location. A great amount of time, money, energy is saved. In fact, one can easily access the content while travelling or sitting at any place in the form of recording of the lectures while simultaneously performing other tasks. Both the teacher and student feel comfortable to fix a suitable time to start the teaching –learning activity. There is all time availability and access of various online tools, lectures, audio, videos, texts, etc. to students who belongs to remote or backward areas. Here, a collaborative and interactive learning environment is created wherein students give their feedback and ask queries. This 'Anywhere-Anytime' feature of online learning mode is a welcome point. E-learning enables everyone to get education from the comfort zones of their home. Last but not the least, this mode of transaction has created interest among stakeholders who are now much compatible in conducting webinars, online workshops based on different themes, panel discussions held by expert, etc. helps one in the development of his/her cognitive abilities.

SHORTCOMINGS OF ONLINE MODE

Online mode of teaching and learning, besides its positive signs, it is aligned with negative signs too. It hampers the overall communication between the learner and teacher because of the loss of human touch. Users sometimes face technical glitch in terms of showing system error, poor network connection etc. during the ongoing teaching-learning process. Some students may not feel comfortable while online learning leading to confusion and frustration. There is non-compatibility between technology and psychology of the child which further aggravates the situation. Interaction becomes limited and time bound. Student belonging to disadvantaged section of the society may lack these devices like mobile, laptops, internet connection etc.

MAJOR ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Online mode of learning does faces may challenges with regard to learner's issues, teacher's issues and content issues. It is a challenging task for academic, institutions to engage students and involve them in the teaching-learning process, motivate the teachers to move from conventional offline to online-mode, changing their teaching methodologies and managing time. Content development, maintaining quality of e-learning process, e-content delivery, time and cost involved in e-learning are some other issues to be pondered and dwelt upon. It is not as easy as it seems, a considerable amount of investment is needed for getting the devices and equipment, maintaining the equipment, training the human resources and developing the online content. Therefore, an effective and efficient educational system need to be developed to facilitate education through online mode.

CONCLUSION

In the nutshell, to make online mode of learning more and more effective in such difficult times, we need to focus on the use of technology more efficiently and effectively to facilitate educational process. Such systems need to be developed in the educational institutions in order to make sure that no student is getting deprived of education due to their location, social class, ethnicity and so on. Online method of teaching support facilitate the educative process, but there is a dire need to weigh the pros and cons of technology and harness its potentials in this pandemic situation.

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