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IMPACT & CHALLENGES OF COVID 19 : HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The impact of pandemic COVID-19 is observed in every sector around the world. The education sectors of India as well as world are badly affected by this. It has enforced the world wide lock down creating very bad effect on the students' life. Around 32 crore learners stopped to move schools/colleges and all educational activities halted in India. The spread of pandemic COVID-19 has drastically disrupted every aspects of human life including education. It has created an unprecedented test on education. In many educational institutions around the world, campuses are closed and teaching-learning has moved online. Internationalization has slowed down considerably. This paper aims to explore both the positive and negative impacts of COVID-19 on education are discussed and some fruitful suggestions are also pointed to carry out educational activities during the pandemic situation and issues of social justice in the context of the digital divide in Higher Education and major policy implications for Higher education after Covid-19 pandemic and highlights some measures taken by Govt. of India to provide seamless education in the country.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Impact, Challenges, Higher education, India*

INTRODUCTION: The outbreak of COVID-19 has taught us that change is inevitable. It has worked as a catalyst for the educational institutions to grow and opt for platforms with technologies, which have not been used before. The education sector has been fighting to survive the crises with a different approach and digitising the challenges to wash away the threat of the pandemic.

Some measures taken by HEIs and educational authorities of India to provide seamless educational services during the crisis are discussed. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, many new modes of learning, new perspectives, new trends are emerged and the same may continue as we go ahead to a new tomorrow.

The higher educational institutions and universities were forced to be shut down due to COVID-19 pandemic and came up with an alternative to resume the teaching-learning process via digital mode of education. Due to many short coming in digital mode of education, it is now necessary to reopen the educational institutions.

In India, about 32 crore learners stopped to move schools/colleges and all educational activities brought to an end. Despite of all these challenges, the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have reacted positively and managed to ensure the continuity of teaching-learning, research and service to the society

with some tools and techniques during the pandemic. This article highlights on major impacts of COVID-19 on HEIs in India.

The Covid-19 pandemic is not only a global health problem but also has severe impacts on human and social life, including employment, education, agriculture and the other spheres of the world economy.

According to UNESCO, around 1.3 billion learners across the world were not able to attend school or university as of March 23, 2020, and current UNESCO statistics put this figure at over 1.5 billion (McCarthy, 2020).

Urvashi Sahni, a fellow at the Center for Universal Education, said, “Technology has the potential to achieve universal quality education and improve learning outcomes. But in order to unleash its potential, the digital divide (and the embedded gender divide) must be addressed”.

As online classes have been used as an alternative to regular classes under the circumstances of the Covid19 pandemic, internet and technology services should be considered as a necessity and not a luxury. Access to online libraries, books, journals should be created to promote learning that is happening remotely.

Sarkar (2020) maintains that adequate facilities must be developed for differently-abled students. There is a need to work collaboratively with other universities and edutech companies to bring about innovative solutions in making digital learning hassle-free and effective. According to Judith Boettcher, an expert in online teaching, “we learn as social beings in a social context” (Miller, 2016).

According to Miller, encouraging of cooperation and faculty-student connections are two of the principles of Chickering and Gramson and these are connected to the idea of interpersonal connectedness. The only alternative left after the Covid-19 pandemic is moving to an online mode of teaching-learning.

Thus, educationists, academic leaders and others are constantly trying to find out whether the students are actually intellectually engaging with the course and its materials when they are a home or at any other place away from the university campus and when there is no scope for face-to-face learning.

Teaching-learning to continue on an online platform requires students to understand how the course will be carried out online, including discussions from textbooks, class activities, home works and submissions and assessments. Thus, there is a need to make the students understand the structure and requirement of the course when carried out on a digital platform .

There is a need to work on creating social presence during the online course. Some tools can be used to make the presence felt by the participants of the online course such as asking student’s personal information, encouraging interaction exchange between students, supporting video communications so that the facial expressions of the students and their voices are also clearly heard and seen. Moreover, Miller argues that there is a need to exchange social cues and generate the feeling that there is authentic interaction between the members in the virtual platform. The success of the online course is definitely dependent on this other than making the online class pleasant.

Higher Education Status During Covid-19: Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic by various Universities across the World as Covid-19 has influenced global higher education, the universities across the world have been responding to Covid-19 in different ways. Some of the universities in Australia, like Monash University and Victoria University, have temporarily stopped their regular learning to design online learning. At the same time, universities like University of Queensland continued face-to-face learning with physical distancing protocol with online recordings (Crawford et al., 2020).

In India, all academic activities were suspended after the announcement of the University Grants Commission (UGC) on 19 March to postpone examinations in all universities until the end of March.

All the State and central universities like the Gulbarga University, Kalburgi, VIT University, Belagavi, Bengaluru University and Bengaluru city university, Bengaluru and University of Karnataka announced to defer all academic activities and close their hostels, and even private universities like CMR University, Christ University, KLE University, Bengaluru SRM Institute of Science and Technology were declared the summer vacation for students.

Some renowned universities in the US, like Harvard University, and MIT decided to move online completely from 23 March 2020 onwards. Many universities in the US moved Spring Break by one week to allow the transition to online. It is reported that only 5 percent (260 out of 5,300) higher education institutions in the US could shift to online instruction with minimal on-campus presence, and most higher education institutions have made the transition to online mode (Crawford et al., 2020). Pedagogical Tensions: Content delivery versus Learning The efforts made in the education during the Covid-19 pandemic is to ensure no dip in academy.

In China, all schools and universities were on halt till the Lunar New Year, with a planned return on 31 January, next year. There was a plan on postponing the spring semester as announced on 26 January. China's Ministry of Education had declared on 28 January that this would extend to all schools and universities across the country, and universities and also many standardized tests like GRE, GMAT, IELTS and TOEFL (Crawford et al., 2020).

Impact of Covid-19 on Higher Education: An economic recession could impact HEIs in various ways like decrease in employment opportunities for university graduates who are likely to enter the job market in the next few months, possible delays or inability of students in paying tuition fees and education-related other expenses, 4 and government's inability to meet commitments to public-funded institutions as per the requirements.

The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) estimates that Covid-19 may cause the global economy to shrink by nearly 1% by the end of 2020, while the International Labor Organization (ILO) projects an increase in global unemployment of between 5.3 million and 24.7 million, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) projects a 13% to 32% global trade decline this year.

The changes in student behaviour towards the mode and preference of particular degree programs might become a significant impact after the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the impact would vary from context to context, the overall impact on higher education is likely to be quite significant.

The International Association of Universities (IAU, 2020) survey also indicates that the Covid-19 has had an impact on international student mobility at 89% of HEIs. The type of impact is diverse and varies from institution to institution, but everywhere it has been negative. As far as research is concerned, 80% of HEIs reported that research has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic at their institutions.

The most common impact of Covid-19 has been the cancelling of international travel (at 83% of HEIs) and the cancellation or postponement of scientific conferences (81% of HEIs). Moreover, scientific projects are at risk of not being completed at a bit more than half of HEIs (52%). The IAU Global Survey also reveals that almost 80% of the respondents believe that Covid-19 will have an impact on the enrolment numbers for the new academic year. Almost half (46%) believe that the impact will affect both international and local students. Some HEIs, especially private ones, reported that this impact would have negative financial consequences (IAU, 2020).

The sudden shift to the online mode of education With Covid-19, we are seeing how yesterday's disruptors can become today's lifeguards. While traditional institutions once viewed online education as a threat, it has come to their rescue.

However, lecturers are still struggling to maintain the same depth of engagement with students they could have in a classroom setting. Any particular method of working becomes successful and adopted widely only when the method is effective and efficient in bringing about a change for the better. The effective ways of teaching, conducting assessments and ensuring teaching-learning to be interesting, engaging and context-specific are crucial for online mode of education. Some of the partnerships sparked between universities, online education companies and

However, remote learning is just a first step and experimental in the long journey to offering online education as it includes ensuring effective student engagement tools and teacher training.

Challenges: Digital divide Authors like Di Maggio et al. (2001); Norris and Conceicao (2004); Ono and Zavodny (2007), maintain that education and mostly higher education results in the adoption of technology at a higher rate.

However, Kirkwood (2001) argues that the internet is an important tool responsible for enabling higher education for the population of the world and according to Tien and Fu (2008), the internet helps in bringing out better outcomes in terms of quality in education (Rye, 2008). The shift from face-to-face to distance teaching did not come without challenges, the main ones being access to technical infrastructure, competencies and pedagogies for distance learning and the requirements of specific fields of study (IAU, 2020).

The sudden shift from classroom learning to digital learning has created the digital divide between rich and poor. While higher education institutions in developed countries have managed well to implement digital learning, higher education institutes in African and South Asian countries have to overcome many challenges before shifting completely to digital modes of learning.

The access to technical gadgets, technical infrastructure are some major reasons behind access to higher education and thus, enabling the divide. Miller (2016) also states that debates regarding Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have faced criticisms like the environment of learning is of an impersonal nature and the students may have to learn largely on their own. Many students might not be prepared to use technology as effectively.

According to Miller, a lot of college students might not have the technical skills that are required to navigate through the online learning activities and mastering of instructional technology in an effortless manner is not guaranteed just because they are capable of handling the social media accounts that well.

The discourse of online teaching-learning Even if one has the required skills to operate the virtual platforms, the technology might simply fail leading to the vanishing of assignments, computers crashing etc.

Even the electricity might not be present properly across all the places from where participants are accessing. Trying to run 6 videos and audios on the online platform, running of programs on the computer and other activities on the online mode and integration with the learning management system of the college might result in problems on the virtual platform .

Challenges of academic dishonesty and cheating are also to be taken care of in the virtual mode. Some of the theories on why students cheat suggest that there is more cheating that is happening online because of anonymity and distance between the students and faculty .

However, this can also be addressed and prevented by explaining the students properly, creating opportunities so that students engage meaningfully with the content and holding them responsible for generating evidence that they have mastered the content.

The Digital Divide in India Attending online classes requires long hours of internet, peaceful space and one device/ phone dedicated to each student in a family, might not be affordable for everyone.

Thus, according to Sarkar (2020), online classes have added to the already existing feelings of vulnerability among students. According to the Key Indicators of Household Social Consumption on Education in India report, based on the 2017-18 National Sample Survey, less than 15% of rural Indian households have Internet (as opposed to 42% urban Indian households). A mere 13% of people surveyed (aged above five) in rural areas — just 8.5% of females — could use the Internet. The poorest households cannot afford a smartphone or a computer (The Indian Express, June 8, 2020).

Thus, the pandemic has exposed the deeply rooted inequality and hierarchy between the rich and poor in the Indian education system. It can be argued that the digital divide negatively affects the enrolment

in higher education institutes and lack of digital access further pushes out students from colleges and universities in India.

Solutions: The purpose of understanding the concept of the digital divide is to understand how accessing the internet and the impact of the use of the internet is deeply rooted in the social conditions of a students' day to day life. There are two major perspectives on the issues of the digital divide.

One being the socio-economic aspects which take into consideration age, race, education, and gender. For example, Tien and Fu (2008) examine the divide by doing research on the major socio-economic factor that affects the utilization of computers by the students of Taiwan who are undergraduates.

Keil (2005) points out another perspective which considers a divide in the form of the digital generation gap (Rye, 2008). The second perspective involves spatial variations. This kind of research can focus on rural-urban dimensions. For instance, Raju (2004) mentions that a majority of the population in rural areas are excluded from the fast digital development in India (Rye, 2008).

According to Wilson (2006) financial, physical, content, cognitive, design, production, political and institutional access are eight different aspects of the digital divide. Livingstone (2004) points out another approach, which focuses on the concept of digital literacy- handling and understanding of the same.

Warschauer (2003) argues that accessing online information does not have to do much with the Internet, but definitely has to do with the cultural, economic, political and linguistic contexts that give shape to the meaning of the internet in people's lives. The inequality does not exist in the digital but it exists in the social and this concept contains the inherent constraint of the material orientation (Warschauer, 2003; Rye, 2008). The focus is on how one uses the technology.

There is a digital divide between those students who have access and have not accessed to the new technology. Between these two groups, there is a gap which divides the privilege from the underprivileged and the poor from the rich. Thus, there is a need to bridge the gap and enable the underprivileged to join the group of the privileged and rich. 8 There are some solutions as to how this can be done. One of them being, providing equal access to the new technology as social divide is caused due to the limited access that an individual has (James, 2003).

“Leapfrogging” is another technique where those who do not have access join the ones who have access and try to bridge the gap (Bunt-Kokhuis, 2001) However, physical distancing should be ensured during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The access means, on the one hand, reducing the barriers like social, geographical and financial and making higher education available to all and on the other hand means organizing their lives in such a manner that they can enrol themselves for higher education (Rye, 2008).

Carr-Chellman (2005), states that new digital technology and the Internet plays an important role in this process. Technology also becomes an important factor in access to education as access to technology will lead to access to education. Thus, technology is a tool to connect students with teachers and peers and also a method to gain knowledge. However, digital divide shows that technology is exclusionary in nature. It is not always about being a part of the virtual mode of education rather than the

Conclusion: It intends to critically understand the issues related to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on higher education and the sudden shift of education to the online mode of teaching and learning, opportunities and challenges of online mode of education, largely around the issues of digital pedagogy.

In a country like India, as all students do not belong to the same socio-economic background and have to take care of domestic chores, family members and children, managing with limited space in the house, managing with a limited budget and poor connectivity in rural areas etc. may cause them to deal with discomfort, frustration and shame.

So, some of the post COVID-19 trends which may allow imagining new ways of teaching learning of higher education in India are outlined. Some fruitful suggestions are also pointed to carry out educational activities during the pandemic situation.

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