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COVID 19: IMPACT ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

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. 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. 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. 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. **Keywords:** Covid-19, higher education, impact, India.

Introduction

On March 11, 2020 World Health Organisation (WHO) declared Covid-19 as a pandemic. Covid-19 has affected more than 4.5 million peoples worldwide (WHO). In India, the first affected case of Covid-19 was detected on 30 January 2020 in the state of Kerala and the affected had a travel history from Wuhan, China. In India, the first death was reported on March 12, 2020 and the nation observed Janta Curfew for a day on March 22, 2020. India again observed 14 hours Janta Curfew on March 24 to combat the Coronavirus pandemic and assess the country's ability to fight the virus. Then, the 1st phase of lockdown was announced by the Prime Minister on March 25, 2020 for 21 days. Monitoring the effects of the virus, Indian Government has been extending the lockdown period in different phases and the lockdown 5.0 was declared on April 30

which is effective from 1st June to 30th June 2020. In all the phases of lockdown starting from lockdown1.0 to lockdown 5.0, the educational institutions throughout the nation have never got any relaxation to start their educational activities. Thus, pandemic Covid-19 impacted significantly on the education sector. According to the UNESCO report, Covid-19 has affected nearly 68% of total world's student population as per the data taken during 1 stweek of June 2020.

Outbreak of Covid-19 has impacted about 1.2 billion students and youths across the globe by school and university closures. Several other countries have also implemented localized closures impacting millions of additional learners. In India, more than 32 crores of students have been affected by the various restrictions and the nationwide lockdown for Covid-19. Most Governments around the world have temporarily closed educational institutions in an attempt to control the spread of the pandemic Covid-19. This worldwide closure has impacted drastically the world's student population. Governments around the world are making efforts to diminish the immediate impact of closure of educational institutions particularly for more vulnerable and disadvantaged communities and trying to facilitate the continuity of education for all using different digital modes of learning. According to a survey report of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India, conducted on higher education it was observed that there are 993 universities, 39931 Colleges and 10725 stand- alone institutions listed on their portal, which contribute to education. Even though the country has been adapting to the new-age learning, but there still lies an obstacle in achieving entire success as only 45 crore people of our total population of the country have access to the internet/e-learning. The people residing in rural areas are still very much deprived of the technologies and therefore hampering the cause of online education. The Covid-19 pandemic taught the entire society on how necessity is the mother of invention by allowing educational institutions to adopt online learning and introduce a virtual learning culture. The pandemic has been steering the education sector forward with technological innovation and advancements. The pandemic has significantly disrupted the higher education sector. A large number of Indian students who are enrolled in many Universities abroad, especially in worst affected countries are now leaving those countries and if the situation persists, in the long run, Usually, this is the time young students write entrance exams, consider which colleges to apply to in India, or make plans for studies abroad. But there's nothing usual about the times today. The Covid-19 pandemic has shocked the world. The pressure on students and higher education institutions is high. Schools and universities have been closed and exams postponed. Classrooms are going virtual and admissions for the upcoming academic year are fraught with confusion. According to UNESCO, over 320 million students in Indian schools and colleges are currently impacted the pandemic has pushed the world to drastically reinvent ways of coping with the 'new normal'. After the initial phase of complete overhaul, it is critical to understand the short and long-term impact and future measures.

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 shade digital leraning 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.

E-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 thedifferent 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 facilitate improvement in collaborative work.

Impact on Higher Education

Pandemic Covid-19 has severely affected the total educational system of India as well as the globe but some of the most impacted areas of higher education of India are as pointed below.

1. Destabilized all educational activities: Outbreak of Covid-19 has compelled lockdown in every sector including education. The institutions got closed with cease of educational activities and created many challenges for the stake holders. So, the various activities like admission, examinations, entrance tests, competitive examinations conducted by various boards/schools/colleges/ universities are postponed. Many entrance tests for higher study got cancelled which created a great challenge in the life of a student of higher education. The primary challenge was to continue teaching learning process when students, faculties and staff could no longer be physically present on the campuses. The obvious solution for the institutions was to depend online teaching learning. However, within a relatively short time, HEIs have been able to provide support to the students through online modes. Covid-19 has accelerated adoption of digital technologies to deliver education. It encouraged all teachers and students to become more technology savvy. The HEIs have started conducting orientation programmes, induction meetings and counseling classes with the help of different e-conferencing tools like Google Meet, Skype, Youtube live, Facebook live, WebEx etc. to provide support services to the students. This initiative has taken to create an effective virtual environment of teaching learning and to create motivation among students for online activities. The teachers and students improved the use of electronic media for sharing information by making use of WhatsApp, Google drive, Telegram, Twitter etc. They have been sharing important documents with the group members and creating online local repository also. Students are advised to submit the scanned copies of the assignments to the institution through email. Institutions have also started receiving internship reports and projects through email during the lockdown forCovid-19.

 2. Mixed impact on Academic research & Professional Development: Covid-19 has both negative and positive impacts on research. If we take the negative side, it has made impossible for researchers to travel and work together with others nationally and internationally. Some joint research work or project work are made complicated to complete. Some scientific laboratory testing/research work could not be conducted. Ifwe look at the positive side, academicians got much time to improve their theoretical research work. Academicians got acquainted with technological methods and improved their research. Webinars and conferences became

normal methods for sharing expertise among students and academicians around the globe with similar issues. They could get much time to concentrate on professional development by doing research and to improve knowledge by sharing ideas through webinars and e-conferences. They enhanced their technical skill and could get the scope for publishing articles in journals, publishing books in this free time.

3. Severely affected the educational assessment system: Most of the external examinations have been postponed and almost all the internal assessments have been cancelled. The cancellation of assessments has negative impact on students' learning. Many institutions have been managing the internal assessments through online mode using different digital tools but the postponement of the external assessments, has a direct impact on the educational and occupational future of students' life. This uncertainty has created anxiety among students as they are stuck in the same grade/class without promotion. Similarly, many students who had appeared final/board examinations would suffer a lot as by the time they get their certificates, it might be too late for them to apply for the forthcoming academic year in other countries due tolockdown.

4. Reduced employment opportunities: Many entrance tests job recruitments got cancelled which created negative impact with a great challenge in the life of a student of higher education. The Indians who have been doing their jobs abroad became upset of their job withdrawal also. In India, there is no recruitment in Govt. sector and fresh graduates are in pressure of fearing withdrawal of job offers from corporate sectors because of the pandemic situation. Many students may lose their jobs from India and overseas. The pass out students may not get their job outside India due to various restrictions caused by Covid-19. All these facts imply towards increase of unemployment rate due to this pandemic. With increase of unemployment situation, the interest for education may gradually decrease as people struggle for food rather than education.

Emerging approaches of India for Higher Education during Covid-19

- e-GyanKosh (http://egyankosh.ac.in/) is a National Digital Repository to store and share the digital learning resources which is developed by the Open and Distance Learning Institutions of India. Items in eGyanKosh are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved by Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU).

- Gyandarshan (http://www.ignouonline.ac.in/gyandarshan/) is a web based TV channel devoted to educational and developmental needs for Open and Distance Learner. A web-based TV channel devoted to educational and developmental needs of the society

- Gyandhara (http://ignouonline.ac.in/Gyandhara/) is an internet audio counseling service offered by IGNOU. It is a web radio where students can listen to the live discussions by the teachers and experts on the topic of the day and interact with them through telephone, email (gyandhara@ignou.ac.in) and through chat mode.

- Swayam provides Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) with 140 universities approved credit transfer feature. Swayam Prabha provides high quality educational programs through 32 DTH channels transmitting educational contents. e-PG Pathshala (https://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/) is for postgraduate students. Postgraduate students can access this platform for e-books, online courses and study materials. The details of these three digital plat forms are described by the author in the previous paper (Pravat, 2020b).

- e-Adhyayan (e-Books) is a platform that provides 700+ e-Books for the Post-Graduate courses. All the e-Books are derived from e-PG Pathshala courses. It also facilitates play-list of video content.

- e-Pathya (Offline Access) is one the verticals of e-PG Pathshala which is software driven course/content package that facilitates students pursuing higher education (PG level) in distance learning as well as campus learning mode. It also facilitates offline access.

- National Digital Library of India (NDLI) (https://ndl.iitkgp.ac.in/) is a repository of e-content on multiple disciplines for all kinds of users like students (of all levels), teachers, researchers, librarians, library users, professionals, differently-abled users and all other lifelong learners. It is being developed at Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur. It is designed to help students to prepare for entrance and competitive examinations, to enable people to learn and prepare from best practices from all over the world and to facilitate researchers to perform inter-linked exploration from multiple sources. It is a virtual repository of learning resources with a single-window search facility. It is also available to access through mobile apps.

- e-Yantra (https://www.e-yantra.org/) provides hands on experience on embedded systems. It has about 380 Lab and made 2300+ colleges benefited.

- FOSSEE (https://fossee.in/) is short form for Free/Libre and Open Source Software for Education, which is developed to promote open source software for education as well as professional use.

- Virtual Labs (http://www.vlab.co.in/) has developed web-enabled curriculum based experiments designed for remote operation. It has over 100 Virtual Labs consisting of approximately 700+ web-enabled experiments which are designed for remote-operation. It provides remote-access to Labs in various disciplines of Science and Engineering. These Virtual Labs caters to students at the undergraduate level, post graduate level as well as to research scholars.

- e-ShodhSindhu (https://ess.inflibnet.ac.in/) is a collection of e-journals, e-journal archives and e-books on long-term access basis. It has 10,000+ e-journals, 31,35,000+ e-books. It provides access to qualitative electronic resources including full-text, bibliographic and factual databases to academic institutions at a lower rate of subscription.

- Shodhganga (https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/) is a platform for research students to deposit their Ph.D. theses and make it available to the entire scholarly community in open access. The repository

has the ability to capture, index, store, disseminate and preserve Electronic Theses and Dissertations submitted by the researchers.

- VIDWAN (https://vidwan.inflibnet.ac.in/) is a premier database and national research network which has profiles of scientists/researchers and other faculty members working at leading academic institutions and other Research & Development organisations in India.

- National Educational Alliance for Technology (NEAT)(https://neat.aicte-india.org/) is an initiative for skilling of learners in latest technologies through a Public-Private partnership model between the Government (through its implementing agency AICTE) and the Education Technology companies of India. It brings the best technological products in education pedagogy on a single platform for the convenience of learners.

- SAKSHAT (https://sakshat.ac.in/) is one Stop Education Portal for addressing all the education and learning related needs of students, scholars, teachers and lifelong learners. The portal provides the latest news, press releases, achievements etc related to Ministry of HRD. So one can visit SAKSHAT to know the world of online learning.

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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