



In Association With



Dev Samaj College of Education for Women, Ferozpur, Punjab

Published Proceedings of National Level Webinar on Covid- 19 Pandemic: Impact and Challenges before
Higher Education Sponsored by ICSSR,

New Delhi

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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. 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 & 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 revolutionise the teaching & learning process to improve the experience of both; teachers and learners during the pandemic

Keywords: COVID-19, Higher Education,

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 obstacles as entire population donot 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 are usually held during this period and also different entrance test of various universities and competitive examination was 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

New trends in teaching & learning will emerge

Beyond the top band of institutional excellence with private universities setting best practices, Indian academia has been in need of transformation, long before the onset of the pandemic. There is an opportunity to rethink the traditional education system now. Digital learning is leading the charge as a mainstay, and many new trends are picking up momentum across the globe. Multidisciplinary and modular pedagogy that afford transferable

skills and customised learning will succeed. Post-pandemic times could see a blend of e-learning and mainstream face-to-face teaching with a boost from traditional universities and the ed-tech sector. Opportunities for student mobility and practical exposure through exchange programmes, internships, participation in conferences, and more could likely be off the table for some time. Innovative new forms of collaboration and alternative paradigms are needed to drive learning, research and teaching. Sharing of knowledge between institutions globally through joint-teaching, virtual guest lectures, etc. could give students an enriched global perspective in these difficult times. A paucity of contemporary teachers has been a pressing challenge already, and it is growing more serious. Faculty are being called upon to redesign course content to meet the current and future needs. Moving away from traditional pedagogies in most average institutions, the demand for quality educators will shape the way higher education moves forward from this crisis.

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 on 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 for Covid-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. If we 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 to lockdown.

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

Many challenges are created by Covid-19. The HEIs have responded positively and adopted various strategies to face the crisis during the pandemic. The Government of India has also taken number of preventive measures to prevent spread of pandemic Covid-19. The MHRD and University Grants Commission (UGC) have made several arrangements by launching of many virtual platforms with online depositories, e-books and other online teaching/learning materials, educational channels through Direct to Home TV, Radios for students to continue their learning. During lockdown, students are using popular social media tools like WhatsApp, Zoom, Google meet, Telegram, YouTube live, Facebook live etc. for online teaching learning system. ICT initiative of MHRD (eBroucher- <https://mhrd.gov.in/ict-initiatives>) is also a unique platform which combines all digital resources for online education (Pravat, 2020a). UGC has released Guidelines on Examinations and Academic calendar in view of COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown on 29th April, 2020 (UGC notice). All terminal

examinations have been postponed and shifted to July 2020 and suggested commencement of classes from August 2020. UGC has also prepared complete calendar for the academic session 2020- 2021 with new dates keeping in view of the lockdown. Some of the digital initiatives of UGC & MHRD for higher education during COVID-19 are pointed as below:

- e-GyanKoshis 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 e-GyanKosh are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved by Indira Gandhi National Open University(IGNOU).
- Gyandarshanis 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
- Gyandharais 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, and through chatmode.
- 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 platforms are described by the author in the previous paper
- National Digital Library of India (NDLI) 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 provides hands on experience on embedded systems. It has about 380 Lab and made 2300+ colleges benefited.
- FOSSEE 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 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 remoteaccess 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 researchscholars.

- National Educational Alliance for Technology (NEAT) 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.

Post Covid-19 Trends of Higher Education in India Change is inevitable which has been forced upon the society due to Covid-19. The opportunities created by the pandemic Covid-19 will lead towards a better tomorrow. Tomorrow will be a new morning which will entirely be in our own hands. New technologies will certainly challenge the traditional paradigms such as classroom lectures, modes of learning and modes of assessment. The new trends will allow the education sector to imagine new ways of teaching learning and some trends may be pointed as below.

1. May encourage personalised learning: Learning may not be confined to classes or to any specific boundaries. Students may be the virtual learners with one teacher leading dozens of students in the new age. The learning modules may be modified to suit different learning styles and the learning contents may come from different sources to meet the learners' aspirations and needs. Students may pursue their learning in the new paradigm as per their choice. Many parents may be reluctant to send back their children to schools/colleges suddenly after the end of lockdown. Some poor family parents who have lost their livelihood during the pandemic may not be able to afford the expenditure to send their children to institutions. This may lead to home education for another fewmonths. Student safety and well-being issues are important deciding factors for students and their parents for movement to international institutions for higher study. New modes of social distancing will continue for quite some time and may affect on-campus face to face teaching learning. Most of the parents will prefer to find workable alternatives closer to their home and may restrict for less movement within the country due to the pandemic. The international education has also been affected by the crisis. Many international universities have been closed and are delivering all educational activities online. Many international conferences in higher education have been cancelled or turned into a series of webinars. So, the national and international student movement may be diminished.

2. Learning with social distancing may continue. All will maintain social distancing and avoid warm handshake, hug, personal greeting, and intimacy for a long time. Invisible restrictions may constraint the fun & joy of campus life. Sports, Gyms, tournaments may be in low gear for a longer period resulting less physical activities of students. The need for social distancing may imply lesser students in each class. So, most of the educational institutions may work in different shifts per day which may put more pressure on the teaching and administrative staff of the institution to manage. Learners from low-income families and disadvantaged groups

are the more likely to suffer as they may not afford high-speed internet connection and required technical gadgets for online learning. It will widen the gap between privileged and unprivileged learners creating inequality. Teaching learning may run with technology. More and more students will depend on technology and digital solutions for teaching learning, entertainment and connecting themselves with the outside world. Students will use internet technology to communicate virtually with their teachers and fellow learners through E-mail, WhatsApp, Videoconference, Instant message, webinar or any other tool. Artificial Intelligence (AI) may help teachers to deal with assessment, evaluation, preparing marksheets and monitoring the performance of each student easily. AI may use digital platform extensively to reduce burden of examiner in handling examination and evaluation systems. If these activities are made simpler, the academicians would be able to concentrate more on course development, qualitative teaching-learning and skill development.

3. Demand for Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and online learning may grow. Covid-19 has forced the human society to maintain social distancing. It has created more challenges to continue teaching learning by maintaining social distancing. To meet these challenges there is more demand for ODL and online modes of education and the same trend may continue in future also. Blended learning combines both face to face and online learning modes. Covid-19 has accelerated adoption of digital technologies to deliver education and encouraged the educational institutions to move towards blended mode of learning. All teachers and students became more technology savvy. The traditional face to face mode with post Covid-19 technology mode will lead the education towards blended mode of teaching learning and it may transform the structure of the education system. In India, lots of students or their parents take education loans for higher education. If the employment market does not pick up, student debt crises may rise and create serious issue. Students may face increased stress, anxiety and depression due to their student loans. There is no recruitment in Govt. sector and fresh graduates fear withdrawal of their job offers from private sectors because of the pandemic Covid-19. Many Indians might have returned home after losing their jobs overseas due to Covid-19. Hence, the fresh students who are likely to enter the job market shortly may face difficulty in getting suitable employment.

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