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COVID-19 and its impact on education

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has not accepted any national boundaries and spread all over the world affecting a large population of the world regardless of nationality, level of education, income, or gender. The education system was also affected. The education institutions were closed and more than 32 crores of students have been badly affected by the nationwide lockdown and restrictions. COVID-19 has created many challenges and at the same time taught us the opportunities to strengthen our technological knowledge and infrastructure. The online teaching system which was a dream at a time emerged as reality during this period. There are so many positive and negative effects of the online learning process. The government has also introduced various platforms for online learning. We concluded with the interference that online learning is not an alternative to offline learning.

Keywords: COVID, pandemic, online, education, learning process.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has not accepted any national boundaries and spread all over the world affecting a large population of the world regardless of nationality, level of education, income, or gender. COVID-19 is declared a pandemic by World Health Organisation (WHO) on March 11, 2020. The first case of COVID-19 in India was reported on 30th January 2020 when the world was not taking this ailment seriously. The spread of the disease was so fast that our government decided to lock down the country on 25th March 2020 to save the life of the citizens and to check the spread countrywide. The country was expecting the lockdown will be short-lived, but it remains for months together and many restrictions were imposed to curb the spread of the disease. It is natural that the pandemic has hit the most vulnerable hardest. The education system was also affected. The education institutions were closed and more than 32 crores of students have been badly affected by the nationwide lockdown and restrictions. UNESCO has estimated that 14 crores of primary students and 17 crores of secondary students were affected in India during the pandemic. Students from privileged backgrounds, supported by their parents and eager and able to learn, could find their way past closed school doors to alternative learning opportunities but those from poor & disadvantaged backgrounds often remained shut out when their schools and colleges shut down.

Although after a few months the lockdown was released the restrictions of social distancing, wearing the mask, and cleaning the habit of hands are still there. The lockdowns in response to COVID-19 have interrupted orthodox schooling with nationwide school closures. The classes are suspended indefinitely and all examinations of schools, colleges, and universities are postponed till the opening of the institutions. Even the entrance examinations for professional courses are suspended till the cases of pandemic subsides. While the government through the online educational community has made desperate efforts to maintain learning continuity during this period but students have had to rely more on their own resources to continue learning remotely through the Internet, and television. Teachers also had to adjust to new tutorial concepts and modes of delivery of teaching, for which they may not have been trained. Learners in the most downgraded groups, who don't have access to digital learning resources or lack the resilience and engagement to learn on their own, are at risk of falling behind. Economic growth is expected to halt in the future because learning loss will lead to skill loss, and the skills people have to relate to their productivity. Of course, slower growth from the loss of skills in today's students will have long-lasting effects. However, when considered over this term, the impact becomes significant. In other words, countries will continue to face reduced economic well-being, even if their schools

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immediately return to pre-pandemic levels of performance. Soon, it is realized that the lockdown and the restrictions are teaching us many new lessons to manage our education system. COVID-19 has created many challenges and at the same time taught us the opportunities to strengthen our technological knowledge and infrastructure. The online teaching system which was a dream at a time emerged as reality during this period. The teachers are assigned the job to teach students via the internet and delivering their lectures through live videos using Zoom and Google meet like apps. Educational what's app groups are formed to discuss the problems of the students and to communicate with parents. These systems were more effective in developed nations where high-speed internet is available and less effective in countries like India where internet speed is not so fast and the reach for smart mobile penetration is low and laptops and computers are not available for students. The primary education system is not responded to these new measures as the students and the teachers are not well equipped with digital facilities. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a severe impact on higher education as universities closed their premises although higher education institutions were quick to replace face-to-face lectures with online learning.

The impact of the crisis on education

The spread of COVID-19 has sent serious shockwaves across the country. The pandemic is unprecedented for most of us in our lifetimes. It has caused severe human suffering and an enormous loss of life. The sudden and exponential rise in infected patients has overwhelmed hospitals and health professionals and put significant strain on the health sector. As governments grappled with the spread of the disease by closing down entire economic sectors and imposing widespread restrictions on mobility, the sanitary crisis evolved into a major economic and social crisis. All this has implications for the education system which largely depends on government spending. Spending on health and the sanitary sectors is the prime responsibility of every government and the resources are scarce. So, it is the education sector that suffered the most. We may summarise the negative as well as positive impacts of COVID-19 as under.

Negative Impacts

- All educational activities have been hampered due to the lockdown and restrictions. Classes have been suspended for an indefinite period.
- Most of the recruitment for new jobs, competition examinations for professional courses, and placement from the colleges are also affected. This increases the employment rate which is already at its peak due to job losses.
- The educators and teachers are not prepared for the online process. Most of the teachers are just conducting their lectures on new online platforms. They are not able to clear the doubts of the students as they can in the traditional system.
- Many students who are studying outside India, returned back and their education has been stopped. Most of them were also working part-time for their overseas expenses. They have lost their jobs. Many students who have already been selected for the overseas job may not be able to join. If the condition of COVID-19 got

spoiled for a long period, these students may not be able to complete their studies.

- The closure of schools and colleges has put additional responsibility on the shoulders of the parents. Only a few parents are able to guide their wards due to inadequate education levels.
- Government's mid-day meal program is designed to provide healthy food to low-income group school-going children. The closure of schools has a negative impact on the nutritional food intake of these children. Some studies have indicated that mid-day meal is one of the main contributing factors to inducing parents to enroll their children in schools.
- It is observed that most of the students have no access or limited access to fast internet facilities. In fact, many of them have no smartphone, laptop, or computer. All the educational facilities revolve around these gadgets.
- Many small-town schools were closed as the management is not able to get the fees and have to pay salaries for their permanent teaching and non-teaching staff.

Positive Impacts

- Government initiations for online learning got a boost. It compels all teachers and educators to be tech-savvy. Education institutions are also developing their infrastructures for online teaching and learning. In fact, they are moving towards the blended mode of education and are providing facilities for online and offline learning.
- Many new online platforms emerged. The demand for online digital systems increased manifold. New software and hardware companies are open to providing infrastructure facilities to education institutions. Much new software developed.
- The pandemic has created new ways of communication like teleconferencing, tele-meeting, virtual meetings, educational webinars, and e-conferencing.
- A lot of e-learning material is developed by prominent teachers and thus the process is still in progress. Now students are using soft copies of the lectures instead of earlier hard copies.
- Many digital libraries are established with numerous books, articles, study materials, and thesis works.
- Electronic media is used for education purposes. U-tube, what's app, and Facebook are the new media platforms that are also available for education purposes.
- Students have learned to use a digital medium for the learning process. Open and distant learning programs have again got prominence. The open and distant learning mode encourages the self-learning process of diverse resources.
- Now, the students may use their time management in a better way as the learning process is round the clock.

Government Initiatives on the education system

The Digital India vision of the government of India emerges as a vital tool for the e-education system during this COVID-19 crisis. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has made arrangements for the online educational portal, educational channels through Direct to Home TV, and Radio programs for students learning. Some of the digital initiations for learning are

listed below:

- **Diksha:** It is a unique portal of e-learning content. It has more than 80000 digital books for classes 1 to 12 jointly created by CBSE and NCERT in different languages. It has a wide range of video lessons, textbooks, worksheets, and assignments. The contents of the study are prepared by more than 250 teachers of different subjects. Diksha is available online as well as offline.
- **E-pathshala:** E-pathshala is an e-learning app developed by NCERT for students of classes 1 to 12 in multiple languages and for different subjects. Thousands of e-books, flip books, audio, and, videos are uploaded to the web portal of NCERT.
- **Swayam:** It is a nationwide online educational platform that provides multiple courses for undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate levels in almost all subjects. Professional degrees and post-degree courses in engineering, humanities, law, and management are also covered for easy and efficient study. This is a unique platform for conventional as well as professional education.
- **Swayam Prabha:** It is an online educational channel available for students twenty-four hours. The content of this channel is available all over India using DD free dish, a set-up box, or an antenna. It has 34 DTH channels that provide school education and higher education. The contents are repeated several times so that the students may choose the time of their convenience. This educational channel is part of the prime minister's e-vidya program.
- **E-PG Pathshala:** As the name suggests, it is for postgraduate students. E-PG Pathshala is an initiative of the MHRD under its National Mission on Education through ICT (NME-ICT) being executed by the UGC. The content and its quality is the key component of the education system, high quality, curriculum-based, interactive e-content in 70 subjects across all disciplines of social sciences, arts, fine arts and humanities, natural & mathematical sciences, linguistics, and languages have been developed by the subject experts working in Indian universities and other R & D institutes across the country. Every subject had a team of principal investigators, paper coordinators, content writers, content reviewers, Language editors, and a multimedia team.
- **Nishtha:** National Initiative for School Heads and Teachers Holistic Advancement: It provides training to teachers for new and improved teaching systems as per their requirements. It is the largest teachers' training program and is expected to cover 10 lac of teachers all over India.

These initiatives of the government are progressive and it is fact that most of them exist long ago but the main benefit accrues only during and after the lockdown period. It is the first time in the history of India's education system that education has been shifted from a face-to-face model to an online model. Earlier there were instances where online coaching was in use, but this is the first time our whole education system has been shifted to a complete online model. It was not an easy task for teachers as well as students. Teachers willingly or unwillingly have had to quickly get accomplished with the online mode of teaching.

The student community was also adamant. They have had to let to their school or college life, and stay indoors in front of laptops, computers, or mobile phones to attend online classes. Those students who are more receptive easily adopted the new learning method than those who prefer to learn in traditional teaching methods. Some of the members of the teaching community remain sceptical about the success of online learning patterns. Adoption of this new system is without a choice of either of both as it was clear when and how the traditional method of learning will be back. The government is unable to predict the future of the education system. The government has already invested a large sum of money in online teaching systems and so they are in no hurry to shift offline patterns till the danger of the pandemic exists.

Though university finance is reduced because the money is shifting towards the health sector, they are able to sustain the crisis. Small and medium-sized private education institutions are worst affected and have to close some of their wings. Small village and small-town schools are closed due to tumultuous finance.

Reopening schools, colleges, and universities will bring unquestionable and remarkable benefits to students but reopening is possible only when after all the restrictions will be removed. Reopening schools will bring economic benefits to the families of students by enabling their parents to return to work and the government has to consider the health issue as a top priority. No one can deny the importance and benefits of a face-to-face education system but the pandemic is directing us towards a blended learning system where offline and online systems will persist in the future. To adopt digital technology adoption for learning, several issues need attention. First and foremost is the development of an appropriate interface for learning and the required infrastructure. Digital technology is fast changing and adoption of this fast-changing technology is necessary. Online education patterns cannot take the place of the offline system and so it cannot be undermined. Offline education pattern includes experimental learning that is necessary for students to enhance their skill set and employability. The pandemic is guiding the complete education system towards a new paradigm of blended learning and a new relationship of teacher-student psychology.

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