

Research Article

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Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Higher Education in India

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Abstract

The Covid-19 outbreak has caused disruptions of the entire world economy and caused a huge impact on all sectors including the education sector. The national lockdown and the health crisis ceased educational activities. World-wide all the campuses were closed and teaching had transformed from offline to online. In India, all educational activities being interrupted due to a national lockdown. Policy makers were facing many problems in formulating a new policy related to the education system. Despite all such challenges, the higher education Institutions have managed to ensure the continuity of education and made every possible endeavour to maintain the continuity of education amongst the students.

This paper focuses on the major impacts of the pandemic on higher educational institutions and highlighted the numerous measures adopted to ensure consistency in education. Due to Covid-19, many innovative approaches, naive trends and novel interactive software's have emerged to maintain the education system. In India, 37.4 million students stopped to attend schools, colleges and universities. The educational reforms in India in the COVID-19 period seems to develop a novice approach which opens up various avenues. Higher educational institutes have adopted innovative ways of teaching and learning and research. In this manuscript, some viable suggestions are also proposed to carry out learning and development activities during the pandemic.

Keywords

COVID-19 pandemic, Higher Educational Institutes (HEIs), on-line education, learning and education.

Introduction

The outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic has increased the education gaps across the world. Though the pandemic is novel, it has affected humanity drastically. The pandemic surge has created educational disruptions and health concerns enormously which is hard to manage by global health care systems. It has been found that no nation across the world is immune from the coronavirus pandemic, and the entire world has affected by the spread and the overwhelming effects of the pandemic. The Covid-19 virus has no boundaries, and the impacts were reckless and severe. It has tremendously transformed the lifestyles of the entire world within a short period and billions of people being forced to stay at home', 'observe self-isolations', learn and work from home. It has seized the movement of people, travelling, trade or association. COVID-19 not only caused a total lockdown but it has also led to the millions of deaths of people including, women, and the elderly worldwide. It was more worrisome to know that reports from various continents, including, America, Africa, Asia, and Europe indicated a continuous increase in the number of cases and high mortality due to COVID-19.

The pandemic has spread across the world and pushed the world to adopt pandemic protocol i.e., maintain the social distancing, wearing of masks, washing of hands, and proper sanitization to mellow down the virus transmission. The national lockdown brought a radical shift in the education sector and significantly derailed the education sector which is detrimental to a country's economic future. The coronavirus outbreak came into existence on December 31, 2019, when China informed the World Health Organisation (WHO) of a gush of pneumonia cases of an unknown cause of Wuhan City in Hubei Province. Subsequently, the disease spread to more provinces in China, and the rest of the world. The WHO has now declared it a pandemic. The virus has been named SARS-CoV-2 and the disease is now called COVID-19 (The Hindu, e-newspaper). Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that can

cause mild to moderate upper-respiratory tract illnesses such as the common cold, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) (Psych Central).

India reported its first confirmed case of Coronavirus on 30th January 2020 in Kerala. The affected had a travel history from Wuhan, China. In India, the first coronavirus death was reported on 12 March 2020 and to mitigate the spread of coronavirus, Junta-Curfew was announced for 22 March and again on 24 March 2020. It was highly challenging for the nation to decide how to respond to such an unprecedented situation? Then, the nation has observed the 1st Phase of lockdown on 25 March 2020 for 21 days and gradually, it got extended till the 5th Phase i.e., 30 June 2020 leading to incessant cases of the pandemic. Though pandemic affected significantly marginal on the education sector associating with the other sectors.

According to the UNESCO report, the Pandemic outbreak impacted about 1.2 billion students and youth across the globe. Several other countries have also declared the closure of schools and university impacting millions of learners. The worldwide closure has drastically impacted the learning and development resultant which students from Asian countries are quite reluctant to take admission in western countries. The biggest challenge for the developed countries to get foreign students, Chinese students make up around 33.7 % of the foreign national students whilst Indian students comprised 18.4%. According to a Covid-19 Survey by the Institute of International Education (IIE), 830 Chinese students have been unable to attend their classes in the US. While this may be a small percentage of the total international student population, again the question arises: How long will this last?

India has become the second-largest market for E-learning after the US. The sector is expected to reach US\$ 1.96 billion by 2021 with around 9.5 million users (Education & Training Industry in India, March 2018). One of the biggest concerns

for the education sector at large is the percentage of international students that make up the domestic higher education markets. In the US alone, Chinese students make up 33.7 per cent of the foreign student population, while Indian students comprised 18.4 per cent.

Objectives of the Study:

The main aim of the study is to analyse the impact of Covid-19 on higher education in India and also to identify measures adopted by higher educational Institutions to continue learning and education. The study also focuses on various challenges faced by the students and teachers during the pandemic.

Conceptual Framework

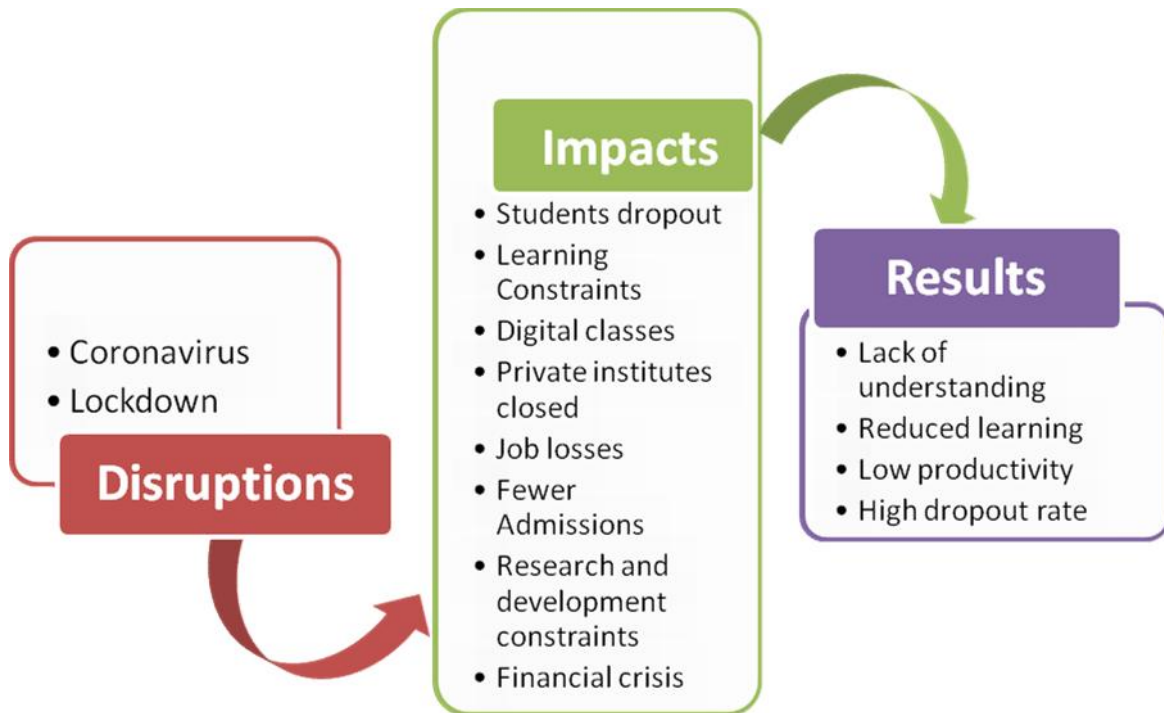


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology:

To analyse the study, data was collected from the web reports published by national and international agencies. Due to lockdown and SOPs, it was not possible to gather the information physically. Hence, data was collected and compiled from observations, web-based reports, journals, newspaper and e-contents related to the impact of Covid-19 on the higher education system in India.

Literature review

The vulnerability revealed by the pandemic appears to be a wake-up call to the entire education system in India and has affected not only education but teacher’s education in particular. The sudden closure of universities and schools bound the teachers and students to rapidly adapt to remote teaching. The need to create learning environments for teachers doing their teacher education preparation implied decisions, choices and adaptations to meet not only the expectations of students but also the requirements

of teacher education as well as the conditions in which both universities and schools had to operate (Flores and Gago 2020). The rapid, unexpected and 'forced' transition from face-to-face to remote teaching has entailed several challenges and constraints but also opportunities that need to be examined. Existing literature points to an 'emergency remote teaching' (Bozkurt and Sharma 2020) or 'emergency eLearning'. There are difficulties associated with poor online teaching infrastructure, technically inexperienced teachers, the information gap and the complex environment at home (Zhang et al. 2020). Besides, lack of mentoring and support (Judd et al. 2020) and issues related to teachers' competencies in the use of digital instructional formats (Huber and Helm 2020) have also been identified.

Though, the teachers were having issues related to the commencement of online classes and conducting virtual classes. In the educational crisis, it is vital to understand more about online teaching-learning productive and its potential uses. As such, it is essential to go beyond emergency online practices and develop quality online teaching and learning that result from careful instructional design and planning (Hodges et al. 2020). Though the online mode of teaching has compelled educators to adapt to digital classes.

The pandemic's impact on education has been colossal. UNESCO reports staggering numbers: "Over 1.5 billion learners in 165 countries are affected by COVID-19 school closures." And "in Africa, about 297 million learners have been affected," research scientist Moses Ngware. "Never before have we witnessed educational disruption on such a scale," said UNESCO director-general Audrey Azoulay (Bangani. Z., 2020).

Impacts of Pandemic

After the initial phase of lockdown, it was a highly critical and erratic to predict the pandemic outcomes and the greatest concern was - Can India emerge from the unprecedented crisis with a new perspective and able to resume higher education? The sudden closure of universities, and school has forced to shift face-to-face classes to virtual classes due to the protocol associated with to maintain the social distancing and to prevent community transmission. Consequently, the policy makers opted for online classes and selected the most advanced e-learning tools and education-based portals for effective and smooth learning. Though, digital classes may have certain constraints like accessibility and affordability issues for many students and especially those who lived in remote areas. According to Miller (2014), a lot of colleges might not have the technical skills that are required to navigate through online learning activities and mastering institutional technology effortlessly is not guaranteed, just because they are capable of handling social media accounts that well. It is evident from the available data that pandemic has severely affected the overall education across the globe. The unprecedented situation put on halt the education system and everything has been paused. The impacts are as follows-

Closure of Higher Education Institutions

Sudden closure of higher education institutions tends to increase pressure on students, teachers and parents especially those with limited digital know-how, limited resources and students who are staying in remote areas. It increases the burden on parents not only to facilitate all the learning resources but also to supervise them and to ensure that they are attending the online classes regularly.

However, HEI closures could increase student debt, prolong the graduation or post-graduation time, and shatter the academic calendar and academic dreams of the students. Protracted HEIs(Higher Educational Institutions)closures

may result an increase in the rate of students' dropouts due to financial crisis, loss of interest and limited resources. Academics-related jobs were also affected; many private HEI were closed which led to job loss or pay cuts as an educator can teach thousands of students in the on-line

classes comparing to face-to face classes as the digital platform provides wide access. Perhaps, due to online classes, students are deprived of learning and development opportunities, social/physical activities, cultural activities, no communication and no socialisation which are essential for innovation and creativity.

In addition to this, the vital concern was how to implement the online system without any delay? Many teachers were not computer savvy, secondly, whether all the teachers equipped with modern gadgets or not, thirdly, Internet service is available in that area or not? Lastly, HEIs had an issue regarding the cost of education-based software or opt for a free online platform which will not hinder the online teaching? Perhaps, there were so many issues related to online classes, student's attendance, assessments, examination and students/parents' apprehensions against the change, this transition also confronted by various resistance forces. Moreover, lack of proper technological support, the paucity of technically advanced faculty and other constraints making the paradigm shift highly challenging. Students and academician both were having various issues regarding the commencement of online classes. Well, everything sorted out impeccably and now online education system is the most admirable mode of teaching due to the ease, comforts and cost effectiveness.

Halted all the educational activities:

The coronavirus pandemic affected educational systems worldwide, leading to the widespread closures of schools (Wikipedia, 2020b). All the educational institutions got closed with the ceasing of educational activities and created many challenges for the stakeholders (Pravat, 2020a) Hence, all the educational related activities such as admissions, classes, coaching classes, examinations, entrance tests, competitive exams,

board exams, internships, conferences, seminars, fair, exhibitions, training and development activities etc. were closed and postponed till the further notification. All universities, colleges and schools were closed and deserted. It was completely bizarre for the students and academic

fraternity. The pandemic has compelled the world to re-invent ways for coping with the perilous situation. Everyone was quite skeptical about the future.

Job Losses

Pandemic has reduced the employment opportunities. Many job-related recruitment exams got cancelled which created adverse effect on students of higher education. Many Indians returned back due to downsizing. In India, there is no recruitment in Govt. sector and corporate sectors also either cancelled or postponed the fresh appointments due to pandemic. Many students lost their jobs in India and overseas due to various constraints. All these led to increase in unemployment rate and with increase of unemployment situation, the interest for education may gradually decrease as people struggle for food rather than education (Pravat, 2020b). The national economy is reinventing to generate more employment and recuperating from financial crisis.

Following are the measures adopted for the continuity of education

The global COVID-19 pandemic had a direct impact on the academic scenario due to lockdown across the continents. There was a paradigm shift in the teaching-learning process globally. It has led to addressing the digital divide, re-orienting the curriculum, blended learning is a new reality, a quality shift in faculty training, redefining a teacher role, need for a wider cadre of teachers, physical engagement to be replaced by e-learning and eco-friendly learning system. Google Classroom is a cloud-based Learning Management System and is the future in education which now educators and learners will have to adapt. It is a free web-based tool developed by Google and the first version was

released in August 2014. It was designed to minimize teaching time and to make the teaching process more organized and highly communicative. It has productivity tools like emails, documents and storage. It puts forth a paperless revolution in teaching-learning.

The objectives of Google Classroom are paperless teaching-learning, resource sharing, online resource integration, distribute and collect assignments, assignment grading and enrich classroom communication. It has various benefits such as it is user friendly, customizable and economical. Two training versions i.e. fundamental training and advanced training are available in Google Classroom. The certifications available on Google for educators are certified trainer, certified innovator and G Suite collaboration. On line, learning provides a platform wherein we can share our knowledge and expertise without any constraints. During the pandemic Covid -19 situation it was very challenging to visualise about the dissemination of education and other works, but thanks to the technology which contributed enough in making the impossible possible. Presently, the most preferred tool for the teachers is to stay connected with their students and share the explicit or implicit knowledge through virtual classes during the pandemic.

At last, the entire education system alters into an online education system and it emerged as the most viable way. Some HEIs/ schools preferred to use synchronous sessions through free online platforms and ministry of education initiated various educational platforms for the students and well equipped them to get the education. Even lecture recording facility is also available for the educators so that if any student missed the classes due to technical inefficiency then the student can access the recorded classes provided by the teacher. Following are education/ service providers software's:

- ✓ GoToMeeting.com
- ✓ Skype.com
- ✓ Google Classroom/Open Online education (edu.google.com)
- ✓ Youtube.com

- ✓ Blackboard.com
- ✓ coursera.org
- ✓ memory.com
- ✓ alison.com
- ✓ edx.org
- ✓ easyclass.com

- ✓ vedamo.com
- ✓ Khanacademy.org
- ✓ TED-Ed (ed.ted.com)
- ✓ futurelearn.com
- ✓ MOOC.org
- ✓ Shodhganga

<https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in>

- ✓ VIDWAN (<https://vidwan.inflibnet.ac.in/>)
- ✓ National Educational Alliance for Technology(NEAT)(<https://neat.aicte-india.org>)
- ✓ Gyandarshan(<http://www.ignouonline.ac.in/gyandarshan>)
- ✓ e-GyanKosh(<http://egyankosh.ac.in>)
- ✓ openculture.com
- ✓ academicearth.org
- ✓ google hangouts (hangouts.google.com)
- ✓ Zoom
- ✓ Whatsapp.com

Some schools also purchased customised software like Microsoft Teams and Cisco Webex for their students.

The use of the technologies facilitates online classes, teacher -students interaction, connection and association. Academicians can interact with their students from any location, and lectures schedules can be fixed at any convenient time.

Higher Education is going through a massive transition. Traditional practices in higher education are undergoing a revolutionary evolutionary process. Modern Education today is also facing an impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on pedagogy. Pandemic is acting as a catalyst in changing the current educational practices around the world. In these unprecedented times, faculty and industry professionals are using online digital platforms like Zoom, Cisco Webex etc., more and more, for imparting education to students. Digital learning adopted by all educational institutions extensively in the changing world scenario. Course curriculum, scheduling of examinations,

credit transfers etc. are going to be tailor-made as per the requirement of the students in near future i.e, they will be demand-oriented. Unless educational systems become flexible and have a portability concept of courses and credits, traditional educational systems most likely will

become irrelevant in near future and there will be no takers of services offered by them.

The Next Generation Learning is the New Norm and E-learning will lead us to excellence in academics. Smart or intelligent people willing to adapt to new pedagogy are going to grab the opportunity in the rapidly changing scenario in the education sector. How we work is all changing. There is technology evolution in the IT (Information Technology) sector and in today's world e-learning is becoming the dominant mode of learning. IT is transforming academia altogether. IT is being used in admitting new students, teaching ongoing students, conducting examination and evaluation, payment gateways, interviews, virtual visits, conclaves, seminars interacting with recruiters and alumni etc. Technology-assisted HR evolution is useful, unstoppable and adorable. The teachers of today will have to equip themselves with street smart technology and will have to set their performance standards. Personalized online learning needs to be developed and new engagement strategies need to be worked out by the faculty. Next-generation learning has challenges like equity and accessibility to technology, requires self-discipline, not the best for all learners, lack of control, too much time on the computer, lack of support at home and computer literacy. The next-generation teacher has to be a computer literate person with digital literacy and always ready to learn.

MOOC -Massive Open Online Courses -This is the initiative taken by the Government of India to encourage online learning. It has contributed tremendously in the area of education through e-PG Pathshala with 3200 experts, 70 subjects plus 723 papers. In addition to this, MOOC has also launched SWAYAM-PRABHA free DTH channel for education from MHRD, Government of India. It is telecast the educational programmes

24x7. MOOC has launched with the concept of three cardinal principles of education policy such as access, equity, and quality. The main agenda of the MOOC is to be accessible to all the learners including the most disadvantaged group irrespective of any geographical boundaries

across India or abroad during pandemic. MOOC also assigned National Coordinators for the smooth operations covering all the educational programmes including degrees and diplomas. SWAYAM is the main platform for e-learning where the faculties and students are enrolling for the courses of their choices. It is launched in 2017 and It has been observed that the growth of MOOC is continuously rising upward since its inception. The enrolment rate in e-learning has risen to 61% since January 2020.

As change is a constant phenomenon hence; there is a need to change the pedagogy with the emergent of technology because a millennial generation is highly demanding and fast. Educators have to transform themselves to meet the students' expectations. The education pattern has changed with the intervention of Information technology transforming academia such as virtual interviews, virtual corporate tours, payment gateways, online engagement etc. Hence, blended learning or collaborative learning is to be included in the teaching pedagogy. The educators must enhance their skill to enhance the students' knowledge and make them engaged.

Finally, the resolution for the above concern is to adopt more feasible digital approaches and venture into the digital world. The digital world was the only viable option available for academia and students. Gradually, all the educational based activities conducted smoothly and efficiently. and post-pandemic situation, the use of online learning and virtual education may become the most essential part of higher education. It is quite obvious that pandemic has diverted the education system into a new dimension.

Conclusion

The outbreak of pandemic affected all aspects of human activities globally whether its education, research, sports, entertainment, transportation, worship, social gathering/interactions, or economy, businesses, and politics. Indeed, the entire world was tensed due to COVID-19 threats, in the real sense, the situation was challenging,

and the education sector remains one of the worst-hit by the Covid-19 outbreak. In many educational institutions across the world, universities were closed and teaching-learning has moved online. In India, about 32 crore learners stopped to move schools/colleges and all educational activities brought to an end. Despite all such challenges, the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have responded positively and managed to ensure the continuity of teaching-learning, research and service to the society with digital tools and techniques during the Covid -19. Various measures were already taken by HEIs and educational authorities of India to pursue education.

The pandemic has forced the world to reinvent new ways to cope up with 'new normal'. The pandemic has also exposed the grey areas of the recent higher education system and the need to train educators in digital technology. In the post-COVID-19 situation, e-Learning and virtual education may become the most viable form of the education system across the world. The higher education institutions, universities and school adopting strategies to ensure maximum learning outcomes and enhancement in educational quality. Although, the economies of various countries have been devastated by the pandemic and economic or financial crisis have impacted families. Even some of the parents discontinued the education of their children due to financial crisis.

This study has analysed various impacts of Covid-19 on higher education in India. The Covid-19 created an opportunity for change in Indian pedagogical approaches and intervention of virtual education in all levels of education. As we are unable to predict that how long the pandemic situation will continue, a gradual transition towards the online/virtual education is the

demand of the current scenario. This would involve better accessibility, flexibility in education, advanced service platforms to meet the expectations of students. All educational service providing organisations need to be mobilized to provide proper access to the disadvantaged groups of population. Virtual education is the most

preferred means of education during the outbreak of Covid-19. The post pandemic education seems to be an education with widely accepted online/digital education which may perhaps be a parallel system of education.

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