Online Education during COVID-19 and Future Concerns: Indian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

An alarming event in human lives recently has been the sudden breakout of the novel corona-virus pandemic. This pandemic has made us feel that in-campus teaching can't work in the current situation. The big shift, a shift in the use of technology which we have seen in teaching in recent times has become the trend. Thus schools have been converted into the digital space. Consequently, teachers started using different virtual platforms, social media and online meeting platforms without proper training, and institutional support. During the epidemic, education is going through different problems and unprecedented concerns. Multiple positive or negative impacts can be seen due to lockdowns which forced us to think about how we can strengthen the education system. This pandemic also exposed how we were under prepared to deal with such an emerging crisis in education. This paper highlighted the trends that emerged during the pandemic and the impact of Covid-19 on education. Also, various concerns related to online education are illustrated and suggestions for government, stakeholders, and teachers are also given.

Keywords: COVID-19, Pandemic, Online education, Open Pedagogy, Digital platform

An inevitable consequence of the COVID-19 outbreak fell upon the education system. It has induced panic, stress, and confusion regarding the present and future of education as the teaching was disrupted by the pandemic to a large extent and consequently, anxiety has been raised among students, parents, and teachers. As per the UNESCO report, this pandemic has impacted around 120 crores of students across the globe. In India, more than 32 crores of students have been affected by the various restrictions and the nationwide lockdown in which around 27 crores of primary and secondary school students are affected. This pandemic has made us feel that in-campus teaching can't work in the current situation. As the outbreak continues to worsen, educational institutions have laid out a virtual teaching-learning regime as an unplanned and sudden shift from in-campus classroom teaching to online mode and make it a routine practice. The big shift, a shift in the use of technology that we have seen in teaching in recent times has become the trend, which otherwise we call the pandemic shift. All the educational regulatory bodies in India also recommended online education to continue the teaching-learning process. Thus schools have been converted into the digital space. Consequently, teachers started using different virtual platforms, social media online meeting platforms without proper training, and institutional support. But many of the optimist educationists considered the coronavirus as a boon for the Indian education system as COVID-19 has fabricated an environment for reframing the traditional

teaching-learning process and for envisioning the new normal in the coming years. We have learned lessons from this experience and are still learning for our future practices. As an educationist, we have mainly focused on the trends of teaching in times of the pandemic, exploring and continuously trying to find new opportunities, and strengthen ourselves to face the challenges related to the implementation of online education.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Education

During the epidemic, education is going through different problems and unprecedented concerns. Multiple positive or negative impacts can be seen due to lockdowns which forced us to think about how we can strengthen the education sector by developing 21st-century skills in teachers and learners so that they can easily meet with future demands. Some of the negative impacts are listed below:

❐ **Mental Health:** As the schools were closed from the early months of 2020 when it was a crucial period of admissions in schools and examinations in higher education. Academic sessions have become disrupted. Even examinations could not be taken. Results have been prepared based on unimaginable averages and calculations in school education but for higher classes, it is yet to be finalized and still in the dark. This causes mental health issues among students, teachers, and higher authorities as well. Students are more anxious about their careers and teachers are worried about their jobs and the management of classes remotely.

❐ **Quality of Teaching Learning:** Quality of learning is directly concerned with the quality of teaching. But, because of a sudden change in teaching-learning methodology without any planning affects the quality of education. Teachers are trying to do their best but lack of orientation and training related to instructional design that for online education they are unable to organize educational practices effectively. As a result, students' learning levels have decreased and they are not even aware of how they can manage and improve their learning in a digital environment. They become passive learners and their interest in studies is also lost.

❐ **Work-Life Balance:** Lockdown has forced all the working fellows to work from their home consequently alters work patterns and their lifestyles. A healthy work-life can be maintained by time management skills. Someone good in these skills could manage effectively but others who don't possess these were unable to manage their family life and work-life together. Especially in the case of working women, the condition was very awful. UNI, July survey findings showed that 69% of the total participants who are working from home said that their workload had increased due to household chores in this pandemic time and 13% of participants faced their household work doubled.

❐ **Health Issues:** The flip side of online teaching and learning is the increase in screen time and its impact on our physical well-being. Teachers and students spend more time on screen. Eye specialists recently reported that eye problems have increased in times of the pandemic due to the increase in screen time. So, we have to be very careful about using screens for all our daily work, teaching, learning, and other activities.

❐ **Social Divide:** A huge rural-urban gap exists in the Indian education system and the COVID-19 outbreak has promoted this gap. It has created two classes in society: one who has the facilities that are necessary somehow for online education like smart devices, internet speed, and others who have deprived of all these necessary facilities, etc. The online mode of the teaching-learning process is often discriminatory to poor and marginalized students. I have experienced that some of the students have no enough money to purchase their books as their parents either lost their jobs or their business has come to standstill because of lockdown. They do not have pleasures like rich children, due to which online education is like a dream for them.

❐ **Missing of Real Touch:** Online teaching and learning is not real. But online teaching is most similar to touching someone with gloves. Touching someone with gloves can not make them feel of reality. Some argue that nothing compares to real. It's OK to use gloves during the pandemic time, the same way it's OK to

use online teaching in times of disruption. Not forever, as we are real people, real teachers dealing with real students. We need real learning space for developing emotional and social attributes among the students.

Though the pandemic has suspended all the services including education, Indian education institutions accepted the unexpected situations as a challenge and brought innovations to carry out the education properly. This disruption and teaching caused by the pandemic is a blessing in disguise, as it forced all of us to act quickly and embrace the alternatives. Of course, when there are not many choices, it's easy to choose if we were in such a situation so we could just use the online duty. So, despite various negative effects of the pandemic, there are some positive impacts too in the education sector such as:

❑ **Skill Enhancement:** Change is the natural phenomena and accepting, adapting, and acclimatizing are the three main aspects to deal with any change in human life. Many of us feel like we are in imprison and the coronavirus has put the nation on hold. But on the other side teachers are juggling with ICT tools to manage their online classes and also developing their skills especially technical skills so that they can easily facilitate the positive digital learning environment according to their students' needs. Despite the huge challenge, they enrolled themselves in the number of MOOCs (massive open online courses) offered by various learning platforms like Swayam, Coursera, edX, and Future Learn, etc.

❑ **Transition in methods of teaching and learning:** Lockdown has played an important role in the adoption of digital technology, due to which everyone is increasingly using it. Teachers and students both are forced to work in a new normal and try to manage online education. They started applying various ICT tools and become more techno-savvy. Online education becomes the game-changer for the current education system. It has changed the way of receiving and imparting education and the fundamental concept of teaching-learning during the pandemic. Revolution has come to the Indian education system as it revolves around the technology and chalk-talk teaching model is transformed into a tech-

driven student-centered learning environment. Consequently, online education will be the key contributor to the future of education.

❑ **Positive Mindset:** Teachers are devoting quarantine time for their professional development with this belief that they will cope with the present situation and will do better for their students. They are using their learned skills and utilize available resources at the utmost. In the case of students, they are also devoting their time to attend online classes, complete their academic activities, and goggling for syllabi so that they can prepare themselves for exams and future job opportunities. It becomes a part of their daily routine activities.

❑ **The Emergence of a new model of learning:** The pandemic presents a good chance for education institutions to implement another pedagogy that utilizes digital and ICT tools to facilitate academic activities while teaching remotely. Current conditions demand thinking about new modes of learning without compromising the quality of education. Over the period we will be forced to go in such a form of education that is the amalgamation of offline (face to face, traditional, in- campus learning) and online learning that is 'Blended Learning'. Therefore, it may be the mode of learning soon. The use of open educational practices may grow and open education may be preferred for getting knowledge globally.

❑ **Kind and Compassionate:** Another interesting positive effect of this disruption is that many of us have become very kind and compassionate, compassionate towards others because we all are in this reality. So we learn to be more caring and compassionate towards others as we need it ourselves. It's good to see teachers being kind to students and parents and students are very understandable to teachers much better than before, so that's a shift.

❑ **Local to Global:** During the lockdown, many workshops and FDPs were organised by several institutions across the nation. For this purpose teachers are attending these workshops and FDPs to learn better ways to run their classes remotely and trying to reach the doorstep of every student. Consequently, all over the

world teachers are using various technological tools to manage online classes. Not only from the local institutions but also the international institutions' teachers as well as students are learning different ICT tools for its use in an effective manner.

Digital initiatives of the Government of India during Pandemic

Digital India's vision of the Indian Government seems to be a vital instrument in solving the issues and challenges of the present scenario, where every sector especially the education sector is caught in a crisis due to pandemic. The pandemic has accelerated the use of digital technology for imparting education and to handle the tough situation.

The Ministry of Education, India has taken various steps to educate many of the school students during the lockdown. Several online portals and educational TV channels, Radio programmes have started for students to continue learning at their home. Many social media tools like WhatsApp, Youtube live etc. for online teaching-learning are also started for the training of teachers and students. The digital initiatives of MHRD for education during COVID-19 are listed as below:

❑ **Diksha:** Diksha portal and application contains e-content for teachers and students according to the various state board curriculum for classes 1to 12. This e-content includes textbooks, video, and worksheets and also evaluation modules in various languages and created by more than 250 teachers across the nation under the guidance of CBSE and NCERT. The application can be easily downloaded from the Google play store and can be used online and offline as well.

❑ **Vidya Daan:** It is a national program of DIKSHA to ensure quality education for school students from various states/UTs of India. Individuals, educationists, subject experts from government and non-government organisations may donate/contribute e-learning resources (lesson plan, videos, quiz, etc.) for school education, to ensure quality learning under the Creative Commons license framework.

❑ **E-Pathshala:** It is an e-Learning app initiated by NCERT for classes 1 to 12 in various languages.

The app houses books, videos, audio, etc. aimed at students, educators, and parents in multiple languages including Hindi, Urdu, and English. In this web portal, NCERT has deployed 1886 audios, 2000 videos, 696 e-Books, and 504 Flip Books for classes 1 to 12 in different languages. Mobile Apps are also available.

❑ **National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER):** This portal provides several resources for both students and teachers in many languages and includes books, videos, interactive modules, and STEM-based games aligned to the curriculum for classes 1-12. It has a total of 14527 files including 401 collections, 2779 documents, 1345 interactive, 1664 audios, 2586 images, and 6153 videos in multiple languages. NROER is a storehouse of e-content of NCERT and other collaborative partners, available for all grades and various academic subjects. All the content can be accessed via NCERT's official YouTube channel.

❑ **SWAYAM:** SWAYAM is the national online education platform hosting more than 1800 MOOCs covering both schools (classes 9 to 12) and higher education in all subjects. A credit transfer is a unique feature for SWAYAM courses. During the pandemic, 92 massive open online courses for grades 9 to 12 are uploaded on the SWAYAM portal and it is a matter of pride that approx 1.5 crore students have enrolled in these courses. They can access all the course modules - text, videos, and assessment questions, etc.

❑ **Swayam Prabha:** Swayam Prabha DTH channels are meant to reach and facilitate those who do not have some kind of internet facilities or digital devices. 32 channels are started to telecast quality educational programmes by efficient teachers under the guidance of MHRD. Channels are set aside for school education and higher education separately to the telecast of live interactive sessions. The Department of School Education and Literacy is also tied up with various private DTH operators like Tata Sky & Airtel. Soon, the number of TV channels for school education will increase from 5 to 12 to transform into 'one class, one channel'.

Various Concerns and Prospects for Implementing Online Education

Some countries and some institutions were well prepared to face this, while others found it difficult, we would say in India, some institutions could very quickly bounce back and be resilient to face this new reality but not all. Until our university and school teachers have started using ICT tools and digital platforms for teaching online. Some consider that this bestride. Academic institutions that order the data to win online teaching and learning could quickly face and adapt to this disruption as they were familiar with it, while some others struggle to cope because they never updated with it. It's going to be the new opportunity while some of us caution about the potential challenges and the troubles that it might bring.

Despite the above coincidences, there are some major concerns about the implementation of online education because it has a mountain of issues and challenges in India such as lack of access to educational opportunities, improper guidance, negligence of the learner perspective, absence of teachers training, orientation programmes, inadequate instructional design, and low focus on collaborative learning, etc. Therefore, without meeting these challenges we cannot achieve the goal of inclusive and quality education. This pandemic exposed how we were underprepared to deal with such an emerging crisis in education. There are some suggestions for government, stakeholders, and teachers regarding effective implementation of online education for all:

❑ A Uniform standardised academic plan should be prepared for all the educational institutions to maintain the educational transaction during future emergencies.

❑ The necessary infrastructural facilities should be available to universities and colleges to start the online teaching-learning process if the risk of a pandemic is not averted.

❑ The government should have to ensure sufficient financial support for the upliftment of the entire education system to provide professional development orientation and training to the teachers so that a positive learning environment can be created for students.

❑ Stakeholders should also be involved in this planning process as they play an important role in structuring, developing, and monitoring the whole education, providing guidance for social and behavioural development of students, and contributing to the various resources which are not available in institutions.

❑ Strong feedback mechanisms and insistence should be adopted for continual improvement of the educational process for the smooth running of teaching and learning and to design effective interventions.

❑ For marginalized and disadvantaged students, the government should provide digital devices so that they can also benefit from online education and move with other students.

❑ Governments in collaboration with private agencies should take some initiatives towards the accessibility of internet connections in rural and remote areas.

❑ A change of mindset is also needed on the part of teachers. Technology has much evolved, advanced than ever before. It is very user friendly and it is not impossible any longer to deal with it, as we used to have struggled in the past. It is important to understand that technology is not everything but pedagogic practices. we have to prepare ourselves, especially at this time. It is a reality that we need to understand if we want to sustain in the teaching profession.

❑ A comprehensive framework for evaluating the performance of students should be needed that is aligned with teaching activities. It should be reliable and according to the availability of resources.

❑ Learner perspectives should be focused during the implementation of online education for all. As, traditional classes are teacher-driven, and all the decisions regarding what, when, how, and how much is taken by the teacher only. By focusing on individual learners the teacher can enhance interest, and involvement in different educational activities. Teachers must have to arrange all according to the capacity of the learner, availability of resources, and the skills that need to be taught.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 outbreak has played an important role in the last few months to think, plan, and organize our education system for a new normal. At present teachers are not habitual to this new educational environment. They are forcefully instructed to use an online platform for teaching. In this notion, the educational objectives could not be achieved up to the optimum level due to the lack of teachers' competencies required for digital pedagogy. No doubt teachers are doing their jobs as per their capacities and capabilities. But, there is a need to revise and reform the teacher education curriculum to meet the demands of 21st-century education that can strengthen education globally. The government along with policymakers, academicians, and youth have to work in tandem with an open mind and focus on the major areas of reform in the education system to meet with the demand of the societies and in the context of the global market. There is also a need for innovations and research in post-COVID-19 education so that we can easily suggest the possible way for transacting education to meet up the expectations of future generations.

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