



Impact of COVID-19 on Indian Education System

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ABSTRACT

Indian education system is still not mature at both the urban and rural area. Midday meal is the program organized to attract the students to get education. Under these circumstances government imposed nation wise lockdown on March 25th, 2020 to combat COVID-19, has made severe impact on the education system. India has the world's second largest school system, after China. According to UNESCO, 63 million teachers were affected in 165 countries. A total of 1.3 billion learners around the world were not able to attend schools or universities, and approximately 320 million learners are affected in India alone. It has changed the traditional education system to the educational technologies model in which teaching and assessments are conducted online. Both the positive and negative impacts of COVID-19 on Indian Education system are observed.

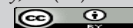
This paper aims to identify the difficulties and challenges faced by teachers during online teaching and the impact of COVID pandemic on Indian education system. Also, various concerns related to online education are illustrated and suggestions for government, stakeholders, and teachers are also given.

Keywords: COVID-19, Pandemic, Indian Education System, Digital platform

In India, the COVID-19 outbreak has been declared an epidemic in all its states and union territories. To combat COVID-19, lockdown was imposed on March 25, 2020 which has adversely affected the education system in the country. It has changed the traditional education system to the educational technologies (EdTechs) model, where teaching and assessments are conducted online. 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

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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.

COVID-19 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. 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.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries and all continents. Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94 per cent of the world's student population, up to 99 per cent in low and lower-middle income countries. The crisis is exacerbating pre-existing education disparities by reducing the opportunities for many of the most vulnerable children, youth, and adults – those living in poor or rural areas, girls, refugees, persons with disabilities and forcibly displaced persons – to continue their learning. Learning losses also threaten to extend beyond this generation and erase decades of progress, not least in support of girls and young women's educational access and retention. Some 23.8 million additional children and youth (from pre-primary to tertiary) may drop out or not have access to school next year due to the pandemic's economic impact alone.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON EDUCATION

Education is undeniably crucial in contributing to a country's welfare and an individual's growth, but it has been jeopardized by the emergence of COVID-19. It has had a huge impact on the lives of millions of kids. There have been a number of severe targets that have had to be met since the lockdown was implemented. Education was also hampered by the economic crisis, which reduced its output. According to studies, the epidemic has denied almost 32 crore students of an education. This is being referred to as a national crisis, with an increase in unemployment as a result.

During COVID 19, 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.

Positive Impacts on Education System

Though the outbreak of COVID-19 has created many negative impacts on education, educational

institutions of India have accepted the challenges and trying their best to provide seamless support services to the students during the pandemic. Indian education system got the opportunity for transformation from traditional system to a new era. The following points may be considered as the positive impacts:

1. **Develop the use of soft copy of learning material-** In lockdown situation, students were not able to collect the hard copies of study materials and hence most of the students used soft copy materials for reference.
2. **Improvement in collaborative work-** There is a new opportunity where collaborative teaching and learning can take on new forms.
3. **Rise in online meetings-** The pandemic has created a massive rise in teleconferencing, virtual meetings, and webinars and e-conferencing opportunities.
4. **Enhanced digital literacy-** The pandemic situation induced people to learn and use digital technology and resulted in increasing the digital literacy.
5. **Improved the use of electronic media for sharing information-** Learning materials are shared among the students easily and the related queries are resolved through e-mail, SMS, phone calls and using different social medias like WhatsApp or Facebook.
6. **Worldwide exposure-** Educators and learners are getting opportunities to interact with peers from around the world. Learners adapted to an international community.
7. **Better time management-** Students are able to manage their time more efficiently in online education during pandemics.
8. **Demand for Open and Distance Learning-** During the pandemic situation, most of the students preferred Open and Distance Learning mode as it encourages self-learning providing opportunities to learn from diverse resources and customized learning as per their needs.
9. **Skill Enhancement:** 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.
10. **Positive Mindset:** They 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. Teachers 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 opportunities. It becomes a part of their daily routine activities while their class.

11. 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.

Negative impact on education system

Indian education system has suffered a lot due to the outbreak of COVID-19. It has created many negative impacts on education and some of them are as pointed below:

- i. Educational activity hampered-** Schools are closed and classes have been suspended. Different boards have already postponed the annual examinations and entrance tests across India.
- ii. Unpreparedness of teachers and students -** Teachers and students are unprepared for online education; they were not ready for this sudden transition from face to face learning to online learning.
- iii. Parents' role-** In urban area some educated parents are able to guide but some may not have the adequate level of education needed to teach children in the house.
- iv. Digital gadgets:** Especially in rural area many students have limited or no internet access and many students may not be able to afford computer, laptop or supporting mobile phones in their homes, online teaching-learning may create a digital divide among students. The lockdown has hit the poor students very hard in India as most of them are unable to explore online learning according to various reports.
- v. Create Difference:** This online teaching-learning method creates a big gap between rich vs poor and urban vs rural students.
- vi. 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.

Government's Digital initiatives 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:

- i. Diksha:** Diksha portal and application contains e-content for teachers and students according to the various state board curriculum for classes 1 to 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.
- ii. VidyaDaan:** 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.
- iii. 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.
- iv. 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.

- v. **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.
- vi. **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 under prepared 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.

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 has impacted immensely the education system of India. Though it has created many challenges, various opportunities are also evolved. The Indian Govt. and different stakeholders of education have explored the possibility of Open and Distance learning by adopting different digital technologies to cope up with the present crisis of COVID-19. India is not fully equipped to make education reach all corners of the nation via digital platforms. The students who aren't privileged like the others will suffer due to the present choice of digital platforms. The priority should be to utilize digital technology to create an advantageous position for millions of young students in India. It is need of the hour for the educational institutions to strengthen their knowledge and Information Technology infrastructure to be ready for facing COVID-19 like situations. Even if the COVID-19 crisis stretches longer, there is an urgent need to take efforts on maximum utilization of online platforms. India should develop

creative strategies to ensure that all children must have sustainable access to learning during pandemic COVID-19. As online practice is benefitting the students immensely, it should be continued after the lockdown. Further detailed statistical study may be undertaken to explore the impact of COVID-19 on education system of India.

The government along with policy-makers, 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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