Impact of Covid-19 on Education

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Abstract

At the inception of 2020 world got hitwith a catastrophic pandemic, COVID-19. With 1.52 billion learners out of school and 184 country-wide school closures, education sector has been vigorously affected while impacting 87.6% of the world's total enrolled learners. Drop-out rates across the globe are expected to rise as a result of this massive disruption to education access. While other critical needs health, water and sanitation are responded well to, education cannot be ignored and it has an equal detrimental impact if left unaddressed. To mitigate the loss of education, world has resorted to online education. Online education is conducted in two ways- either through recorded classes or via online conducted lectures vis-à-vis video conferencing apps like Skype, Zoom etc. However the online education is not a facile task to perform as speaking into the microphone at one end and listening it from the other may involve various disruptions. The purpose of this paper is intended towards exploring the impact of COVID-19 on education and what steps are being taken to deal with the same across the globe.

INTRODUCTION

The petrifying impact of COVID-19 has shaken the world to its core. When it comes to sectors which have been badly impacted by this pandemic, education system tops the chart. The protection of children and educational facilities is particularly essential. Preventive measures are necessary to prevent the potential spread of COVID-19 in school settings. Leading to near total closure of schools, universities and colleges, education has been struck hard worldwide. The UNESCO report estimates that the ongoing pandemic is likely to impact over 290 million students across 22 countries.The closure of educational institutions has affected the structure of learning, including teaching and assessment methodologies.

Well, uncertain times calls for powerful measures and education system has been stepping forward. Nevertheless, the pandemic has prompted the experts to reconsider the conventional modes of education. The pandemic is functioning as a catalyst for the educational institutions to grow and opt for online educational techniques and platforms which they haven't used before. The pandemic has altered the entire scenario of the education system and changing times have also called for the survival of the fittest. Digital education is the only viable solution keeping in view the spread of COVID-19 to fill the void for classroom education until classes resume.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION

In an effort to contain the havoc caused by the pandemic, there has been a county wide closure of public places including schools, universities and colleges. This is

done to reduce the interaction between the students and teachers so as to practice social distancing. As per the report and survey conducted by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India on higher education, it has been observed that there are 993 universities, 39931 Colleges and 10725 Stand Alone Institutions listed on their portal, which contribute to education[1]. Reflecting the expanding horizons of the education industry, these institutions reflect the student density of India as the total enrolments in higher education every year are nearly 37.4 million.Until Coronavirus impacted the country intensely, the education sector was seen catching pace by every passing day.

The incumbent pandemic situation has not only affected the health of the people ,€but has seen to be hampering various industries and shaking them to their roots. With the universities, schools and colleges being shut down and syllabi stranded, the national lockdown followed by the health crisis caused by the pandemic has adversely affected the education of students. The pandemic has so far affected the education in the following ways:

a. Delays

With the ongoing social distancing and lockdown, standardized testing and admission to the schools, colleges and universities are being delayed. Some states in India have also considered to cancel or delay the standard admission procedure which includes conducting admission test by various colleges and universities and other competent and admission tests, while others are pondering over to extend the academic sessions.

While teachers and staff are coping to accommodate themselves to the new online platforms, the classes and semesters are being delayed as they need to switch their study material to a new teaching style. This involves learning, how to use online tools, evaluating how to transform hand-on learning material or discussion-based classes to latest platforms.

b. Challenges for staff and students

Both teachers and staff are learning how to cope with remote learning and communication. Many teachers are not equipped to use technology to impart learning to students while some students do not have means to make an access to the digital learning. Furthermore, disruption caused due to the slow internet connection is another major challenge while switching to virtual learning.

c. Challenges to low-income group

We live in a country where many families rely on the public school system, not only for education, but also for basic necessities like food and child care. With schools closed, many children are left without proper meals who were earlier dependent on the mid-day meals offered in schools.

Many children belonging to low-income group do not have access to computers or internet connection. Moreover, without proper technology, many children are forced to miss out on their education.

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[1]highereducationdigest.com , visited on June 11th,2020.

ALTERNATIVE TO STRANDED EDUCATION SYSTEM DURING PANDEMIC

a. Online classes

The outbreak of pandemic and lockdowns across the globe could be used as an ideal test for educational technology intervention for online distant learning. The crisis are always paired with opportunities and it's high time to recognize the full potential of technology for learning. To ensure that learning only grows and not recede, different stakeholders in the education space have been endorsing online learning in the wake of this medical emergency ,while keeping the students' safety and academic concern in mind.Pandemic has changed the education dramatically, with increased rise of e-learning ,whereby teaching takes place remotely and on digital platform. Mandatory virtual classes have been initiated by majority of private schools and other educational institutions on a daily basis, and thus, teachers are unfailingly delivering their lessons over various virtual call options like skype call, zoom call etc. Some education institutions are also providing pre-recorded videos of lessons to students where teachers explain the topics thoroughly.[2]

Research shows that online learning has proved to escalate retention of information while taking less time. There are, however, certain challenges to overcome.Without reliable internet access and/or technology, some studentshave been struggling against to participate in digital learning; this gap is seen across countries and between income brackets within countries.

b. Free online programs

In light of the ongoing pandemic situation and the obstruction caused to the normal education, many online education portals have been offering free educational tools to the students who are stuck at home. Not only this but also some are offering free online courses like language course, digital marketing course, content writing course, programming course, graphic designing course, financial management course, data science course etc. Such courses are helping students to keep their boredom at bay and discover new hobbies which can both be knowledgeable and exciting at the same time. Websites like UNESCO and Openculture are also providing with the list of different courses and also the resources for those who wish to learn at home.

c. Parental care

The young children whose schedule has been disrupted due to the lockdown in wake of the pandemic, their parents can help them in fixing their schedule at home. With online classes going on, parents need to look after their children while they are using laptops, tablets and mobile phones.

FAVOURABLE INFLUENCE OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION[3]

Any catastrophic transition is also likely to bring with itself some new opportunities as well which is likely to transform the higher education system worldwide.

Some of the key areas of opportunity are the following:

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[2]Indiatvnews.com, visited on June 9, 2020.

[3]www.indiatoday.com, visited on June 9, 2020.

a. Rise in Blended Learning

Given the present circumstances, Universities and colleges will shift to a model of blended learning where both conventional learning by face to face delivery along with an online model will become a norm. This will require all teachers to become more technology friendly and also engage themselves in training sessions for effective delivery to the students.

New techniques of delivery and assessments of learning outcomes will have to be embraced which opens the way for immense opportunities for transformation both in the areas of curriculum development and pedagogy.

b. Learning management systems to be the new norm

A significant opportunity will open up for those companies who have been developing and strengthening learning management systems for use by universities and colleges. This has major growth potential provided it is made affordable to all the educational institutions.

c. Improvement in learning material

There is indeed a great opportunity for universities and colleges to begin improving the quality of the learning material used to impart education to the students.

Since blended learning will become order of the day, there will be a push to find new ways for designing and delivering quality content. Moreover, use of learning-management systems will bring about more openness and transparency in academics.

d. Rise in collaborative work

The teaching community to a large extent has been encased and more so in a country like India. There is a new opportunity where collaborative teaching and learning can take on varied forms. In fact the teachers can collaborate among themselves as well to derive benefit from each other.

Finally, it is envisaged that online learning platforms could bring a massive rise in teleconferencing opportunities curbing travel time. A large number of academic meetings, webinars, seminars and conferences are already taking place and will continue to take place online which furthermore raises the potential of an online conferencing platform to emerge as a business model.

e. Rise in virtual learning

One of the opportunities to focus is virtual online courses and virtual internships, allowing the students to go beyond the limits of their regular curriculum and learning about the practicability of their professions.

Apart from virtual learning, colleges and universities are teaching much more than, just syllabus. Even some universities are also extending emotional support groups. Educating students to simultaneously deal with their anxiety, the current chaos, fear and chaos and also that it is natural for them to be in such distress among the crisis.

UNFAVOURABLE INFLUENCE OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION[4]

The pace of the spread, closure of educational institutions and transition from conventional learning to online learning was so rapid that it hardly gave any time to plan and envisage the potential risks or potential opportunities that such a abrupt change could bring.

Given such circumstances, it is pertinent to look at the impact and reflect on what has happened and what is likely to be transpired as we head forward in the era of online education.

The following are the negative impacts of COVID-19 on education:

a. Lethargic cross-border movement of students

Universities in countries such as Australia, UK, New Zealand, and Canada are highly contingent on the movement of students from China and India.

It is becoming more and more evident with the spread of the pandemic that this cross-border movement of students will take a beating at least for the next two to three years and thus ultimately leading to a major financial risk for universities in these countries who are already under financial pressure. Many parents will be reluctant to send their children abroad for higher education due to high risk from the pandemic.

b. Passive learning by students

The unanticipated shift to online learning without any planning especially in countries like India where the backbone for online learning is not well-built and the curriculum is not designed for such a format has generated the risk of most of our students becoming passive learners and losing interest due to low levels of attention span. Moreover, due to digital divide we may be leaving a large proportion of the student population untouched.

c. Unprepared teachers for online education

Online learning is a distinctive kind of methodology and not all teachers are equipped with it. In the absence of a dedicated online platform specifically designed for the purpose, online learning could turn out to be a difficult task not only for the students but teachers as well. The unpreparedness for online education has posed a huge burden of teachers.

d. Changing format of student recruitment

Universities and colleges worldwide are facing a major challenges in the area of student recruitment and retention.

The risk of losing student aspirants is incredibly high that they need to reconsider their admission practices, admission criteria and the overall recruitment process itself which includes new methods of outreach and application process itself.

e. Irregular access to online learning

Even though pandemic has forced us to shift to virtual learning, but still only 45% of the population of our country has access to internet and thus to e-learning. Furthermore, children inhabiting in rural areas are still very much deprived of the

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[4]www.indiatoday.com, visited on June 9, 2020.

latest technological advancements and thus hampering the cause of online learning. The population of students who aren't privileged are held back from educational access.

LEASONS LEARNED FROM THE PANDEMIC

The disruptions to the educational system across the globe calls for transformation and offers valuable lessons to bring reforms in educational curriculum and pedagogy.

a. Addressing the digital divide

Technology has the capability to achieve universal quality education and improve learning outcomes. But in order to unlock its potential, the digital divide (and its embedded gender divide) must be addressed.

'Only 23.8 percent of Indian households had internet access.In rural households (66 percent of the total population), only 14.9 percent had access while only 42 percent had access in urban household. And males are the primary users: 16 percent of women had access to mobile internet as compared to 36 percent of men.'[5]

It must be ensured that digital capabilities, the required infrastructure, and connectivity reachout to the remotest and poorest communities. Access to technology and the internet is the need of the hour in the age of information. It should no longer be a luxury.

b. Reorient the curriculum

While teachers are struggling to learn digital ways of interacting with their students, it is clear that we need to pay close attention to what we teach. What this crisis has taught us is that the curricula must be grounded in students' realities, cultivating critical, creative, and flexible thinking, resilience, and empathy in students.

c. Empower a wider cadre of teachers

This crisis has forced teachers to reinvent their roles from that of transferring information to enabling learning. To from teaching differently, encouraging self-learning, providing opportunities to learn from diverse resources to allowing customized learning for diverse needs through high-tech and low-tech sources, the shift to distance learning has provided many opportunities

If anything can be learnt from COVID-19 school closures and their associated challenges with distance learning, it is that there is an utmost need to liberate learning from outdated curricula and the disproportionate emphasis on information transfer.

CONCLUSION

In crux, it can be said that education has been widely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to contain the spread of novel coronavirus, education and learning is rapidly shifting to online. New educational opportunities have blossomed with the closure of educational institutions all across the globe. Students are able to have access to distinct teaching techniques which they couldn't earlier experience with classroom education. Educators are experiencing golden opportunity to do different things with greater flexibility.However, there are certain loopholes that need to be

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[5] 2017-18 National Sample survey

overcome in order to ensure that online educational access is made available to all the students irrespective of their financial background. This crisis has given an occasion to make progress in field of virtual learning and efforts must be done to make the most of it. Undoubtedly, this pandemic is going to stay with us for a while, and distinct precautionary measures are a must to sustain ourselves in the future. Pandemic has definitely revealed the society's ability to quickly evolve to challenges. Triggering a much need digital revolution, COVID-19 has transformed the way students receive education in India, resulting in a more integrated learning model.

SUGGESTIONS

a. Overcoming digital and economic divide

The very first obstacle to overcome is the digital and economic divide. As per the report of UN's International Telecommunications Union,only 47% of the population of developing countries used the Internet as compared to 86% of the population of developed countries before the outbreak of COVID-19.

> **"at least 60% of the student population has been affected by the pandemic, as many do not have the means or the instruments to access online teaching. Given that COVID-19 is having a vast impact on students, timely responses are needed."[6]**

Therefore, immediate steps need to be taken to overcome the digital and economic divide across the globe to grant an uninterrupted access to education. Governments and business groups can come forward to build a bridge over the digital and economic divide.

b. Chalking out a plan for students with disabilities

The most vulnerable sections of students is the one having disabilities as they require distinct support and teaching skills which are not always accessible through distant learning. Such children find it difficult to concentrate to their full capacity with online educational tools. Students with special needs who rely on in-person instructions may find it difficult to switch to online platforms.Online study portals should come forward with to offer online classes to cater to the needs of students having hearing disabilities.

c. Imparting expertise in online teaching to the teachers

This crisis has called for regular training session for teachers which would impart them with expertise for effective online teaching and also making them technology-friendly.

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[6]pointed out by the UNESCO Chair in Culture of Peace and Education at the Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja (Ecuador).