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IMPACT OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWN ON HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA

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Abstract

In the past, the world has witnessed many epidemics such as Spanish flu, 1918, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Ebola but the COVID 19 turned out to be the biggest of health crisis in human history. The COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected the global economy including the educational system. The pandemic has brought disruptions in every sphere of life globally. It has direct effect on healthcare systems with ripple effect on human life. In every sphere of life, there has been paradigm shift in mode of delivery or doing the things. The ongoing pandemic has sparked fear of economic crisis and recession. On 24 March 2020, 1.3 billion people of India were asked to stay at home during its lockdown Schools and colleges have been closed down as precautionary measure across economy. According to UNESCO, due to school closures 1,576,021,818 learners were affected at global level as on 07 April 2020. The pandemic has hit severely many sectors like healthcare and pharmaceutical industry, hospitality-tourism and aviation, real estate and housing sector, sport industry, IT, media and food industry. The worst impact is on education sector. Aim of this article is to understand the impact of COVID19 on higher education sector of our country and how COVID19 widened educational divide in our economy.

Keywords: COVID 19, Education Sector, School Closure, Impact.

Introduction

To reduce the spread of Covid-19, most of the governments decided to temporarily close the educational institutions .2020 was the year world witness lockdown with the Corona virus pandemic. The decision was in wake of preventive measures of physical distancing and self-isolation. School closures are effective tool to decrease the spread of infectious diseases. Globally 825 million learners are affected due to closures of school as on 12 January 2021. May/June exams have been cancelled across all the countries as safety measures. Many placements' exams and entrance/competitive exams either was announced as cancelled or postponed for uncertain future. School closures had directly affected students, teachers and their families. UNESCO recommended distance learning program and open education modes to reach remote learners. According to UNICEF, closure of 1.5 million schools due to corona virus pandemic and the lockdown in 2020 impacted 247 million learners in elementary and secondary schools in India.

Objectives: In this article, attempt has been made to analyze the impact of covid19 lockdown on higher education system of India. This study examines the changed role played by student and teacher in view of online education. Suggestions are also given to continue with the higher education system in challenging environment in post pandemic period.

Methodology: This article is based on information gathered from various newspapers, study reports by various agencies like UNICEF, ASSOCHAM, journals and websites.

History of lockdown in world

Collins's dictionary has declared lockdown as the word of the year 2020. But 2020 is not the first lockdown in the history of the world. Let's look into the history to look back at lockdown the world saw in past. The first lockdown by the government was in 14th century named as Black Death (Bubonic plague), which affected part of Europe and others during 1346-1353. 25 million people were killed in the world. In 1348, Venice was the first city in the world to practice quarantine. The English word Quarantine is inspired from the Italian word trentino/ quarantine (40-day period)

In 20th century, the Spanish flu recorded first death in 1918. Due to the ongoing First World War and inaction of the government, the virus caused several deaths. Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) virus originated in China nearly 20 years ago and spread to many parts of the world. Chinese government adopted lockdown as safety measure.

Terror attacks in 2001 in USA also forced short period of lockdown in the country. In India, Jammu and Kashmir was in absolute civilian lockdown after the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019.

Impact of covid-19 lockdown on economy

The lockdown imposed by governments due to outbreak of COVID-19 had created severe challenges to all sectors of governance. There was abrupt halt in all economic activities. The intensity of covid19 differs from one to other sector beyond directly causing job loss, displacement of labour and misfortune deaths. The worst affected sectors of the pandemic during the lockdown



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period are aviation, education and health, hospitality, transport, real estate, mining, utilities, financial activities, construction. Agricultural and rural activities will worsen Pandemic caused supply chain disruptions. International Monetary fund warned that the worst recession will be witnessed since the Great Depression.

Impact of covid-19 lockdown on higher education sector

India ranks first in terms of youth population in the world with nearly 600 million people below the age of 25 years. Any decision with respect to this age group has direct impact on global level. According to UNESCO, 73 countries declared nationwide closure of schools and universities by 16 March 2020. According to UNESCO Monitoring report, 192 countries implemented nationwide closures affected nearly 99% of world's student population. Due to school closures academic integrity was adversely affected. The global pandemic has its manifold impact on education sector, specifically on teachers and learners. 290.5 million Students around the world were affected due to closure of schools and universities. In India, over 32 crore students are hit by the pandemic as schools and colleges were shut due to nationwide lockdown imposed by government on 25 march 2020, according to UNESCO and more than 157 crore students across 191 countries.

In India, on 16 march nationwide lock down was for schools and colleges. On 19 march 2020, university grants commission asked all universities to postpone exams till 31 march 2020, later till July. Online learning was encouraged besides distance learning. 34,337,594 students in tertiary education sector were affected. Students and teachers lost continuity in traditional teaching of face-to-face learning to virtual mode of delivery. Students enrolled in higher education at colleges and universities are referred as college students.

According to All India Council of Technical Education 180 professional colleges, including engineering colleges and business schools were shut down during the academic year 2020-21.

The impact of closures of educational institutions for physical learning and substituted by online or distance learning had an impact as follows:

1. Impact on student community

The senior students or the outgoing batch of students experienced the most disruptions in learning and evaluation in their final stage of college education. Many young graduates were challenged by job prospects in market due to global slowdown. March 2020, University Grants Commission of India directed all higher education organizations to extend the date of final semester examinations leading to state of anxiety and utter confusion. Many students feared loss of jobs from India and overseas due to covid 19 restrictions. Many external examinations were postponed and almost internal assessments were cancelled. It had negative impact on students learning. This uncertainty created anxiety among students. Many institutions managed the internal assessment through online mode.

In absence of physical learning environment, students are missing on interactions with their teachers, peers and friends besides missing extracurricular activities like sports, music and dance. Many are missing out the socializing during lunch or break time. In physical classrooms students tend to develop social, emotional and cognitive behaviors. Due to schedule timetable, disciplined life routine got disrupted during this crisis period. Undoubtedly, the outcomes and effectiveness of online learning in distance mode in home environment is yet to be realized in coming years.

2. Impact on academic activities/processes

All educational activities were ceased due to closure of institutions. It affected forthcoming academic activities directly like semester examinations and evaluation, admission, entrance examinations, competitive tests were postponed. Physical learning process was replaced by virtual mode in short period of time. Digital technology was adopted by institutions to deliver teaching. Virtual environment of teaching-learning was being promoted and motivated. Collaborative research was affected adversely. Many institutions conducted online conferences, webinars, workshop and Faculty Development program. Policy makers and industry collaborated to develop resilient digital infrastructure to provide teacher training. Many workshops are being conducted in ICT tools used in online teaching and to guide teachers to create e-content for virtual classroom teaching.

3. Impact on teachers

The primary challenge was for teachers to continue teaching-learning process in virtual platform. Within very short time, many educational institutions conducted orientation programmes, faculty induction programmes and training sessions to provide support services to teachers for adopting new mode of teaching. It encouraged the faculties to become technology savvy. the paradigm shift to teaching in virtual mode made many teachers adapted the new technology but created job insecurity for those who feared to cope up with new technology in such time Various digital modes were adopted like Google meet, Skype, YouTube live, face book lives, WebEx etc. they started to use electronic media for sharing information with students on Whats app, Google



drive, telegram, twitter, e-mail. Students were directed to send the scanned copies of the assignments to the institution through mail. the role of teachers will be changed as facilitator as students have access to e-content and learn new technical skills.

Closure of educational institutions due to global pandemic brought many socio-economic issues:

1. Online learning- many institutions began conducting classes via software without prior hands-on training such as zoom, Google class room, Google meet.
2. Unequal access to internet technology-many students from rural areas or disadvantaged families could access to fast, reliable internet. Physical libraries being closed, many students faced challenges in learning. Due to lack of access to technology, difficulty was faced by many students. It disrupted their learning process.
3. Unequal access to educational resources-International council for Open and distance Education issued special website to provide webinars, tips for online teaching and e-resources for teachers.
4. Healthcare of students-working parents were forced to leave children alone when schools were closed, it led to risky behaviors like peer pressure or substance abuse.
5. Food insecurity-many children depend on mid-day meals provided in schools. When schools were closed, many students and their families were affected by food insecurity.
6. Learning outcomes for students- in absence of physical class room teaching, parents were asked to facilitate online learning at home. It was very difficult for parents in disadvantage society. In absence of traditional teaching, students lost interest in online learning as it lacked interaction element.

Measures taken by government

Government ensured that even during lockdown, none of the students lost an academic year. Government directed industry representative to collaborate with educational institutions in designing the curriculum to bridge gap of academia- industry. To bridge the digital divide gap, government took many proactive steps like SWAYAM PRABHA DTH, University Grant Commission issued guideline on examinations and academic calendar for all the universities in view of lockdown due to COVID 19 on 29 april 2020 and 6 July 2020 with respect to examinations, academic calendar, admissions for forthcoming academic year, online teaching-learning. On 24 September 2020 fresh guidelines for academic calendar of first year under graduate and post graduate students were issued. Online teaching-learning was emphasized using Google classroom, Cisco WebEx meeting, you tube live streaming, SWAYAM platform, SWAYAM prabha, e-yantra, virtual labs, FOSSEE, application of spoken tutorials, National digital Library, electronic journals.

During the pandemic, the Indian National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO has been working online to carry forward the mandates of the respective sub commissions. To provide digital education with equity, the Ministry of Human resources Development and its associated institutions are promoting online education through online platform and TV and Radio for remote learners. Following are the online resources developed by government:

- DIKSHA-for school education class 1-12
- e-PATHSHALA for 1-12 class
- NATIONAL REPOSITORY OF OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES (NROER)
- SWAYAM-COVERING SCHOOL CALSS 9-12 AND HIGHER EDUCATION
- SWAYAM PRABHA-covering school education of 9-12 and higher education
- NISHTHA-integrated teacher training portal
- Digitally accessible information System (DAISY0-study material for visually and hearing impaired students.
- NATIONAL DIGITAL LIBRARY
- Young India combating COVID with Knowledge, Technology and Innovation (YUKTI)-unique portal and dashboard to monitor and record efforts and initiatives of MHRD
- Manodarpan –initiative by Ministry of Education to address the mental health and psychosocial aspects of students, teachers and parents.

Post covid 19 teaching- learning

Post pandemic entire education scenario may change, with least scope of returning back to earlier traditional way of teaching-learning. UGC also has instructed to teach 40% online and 60% offline in physical space in traditional way. Following trends may become the upcoming trends

- Open and distance learning
- Blended learning
- Learning with social distancing
- Shifts systems in institutions
- Change in pedagogy and assessment system



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Findings

- Continuity of online learning and Learning Management Software to be adopted by teachers.
- Strengthening remote online learning platforms to achieve the national goal of equity with justice.
- Inclusive learning for marginalized section of society
- Online internship programs and research projects.
- Unified learning system-integrating classroom learning with e-learning modes.

Limitations of study

This study is only limited to impact of COVID-19 on higher education sector in India. It does not include the school education. There are no empirical facts to support due to lack of data collection with respect to number of students and teacher impacted during the ongoing crisis. This provides ample scope for future researchers to carry forward their study.

Conclusion

Education plays an integral role in nation building in nurturing competitive workforce globally. India is on the path of digital revolution in education sector to bridge the existing education gap. Despite its challenges, India is proving its willingness to support the education of its future generation. Indian education sector is in dire need of digital infrastructure to ensure equitable learning for all. There is a need for India to adapt and develop resilience towards transforming our challenges into opportunities. It is important to understand that there has been a shift in teaching -learning process capable to impact future generations too. The importance of e-learning has been realized by various stakeholders in the education system.

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