IMPACT OF COVID -19 ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

Dr. Priyanka Kumari
Associate Professor, DPG Degree College
Gurgaon, Haryana, India

Abstract

The rapid spread of pandemic Covid-19 has drastically disrupted every aspect of human life including education. It has created an unprecedented test on education. Universities and college campuses are places where students live and study in close proximity to each other. They are also buzzing cultural hubs where students are brought together from nations around the world. Recently, the foundations of this unique ecosystem have been impacted significantly by the of the coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak, creating uncertainty regarding the implications for higher education. In many educational institutions around the world, campuses are 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. Although higher education institutions were quick to replace face-to-face lectures with online learning, these closures affected learning and examinations as well as the safety and legal status of international students in their host country. The pandemic has pushed the world to drastically reinvent ways of coping with the 'new normal'. After the initial phase of complete overhaul, it is critical to understand the short and long-term impact and future measures. Despite of all these challenges, the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have reacted positively and managed to ensure the continuity of teaching-learning, research and service to the society with some tools and techniques during the pandemic. This article highlights on major impacts of Covid-19 on HEIs in India. Some measures taken by HEIs and educational authorities of India to provide seamless educational services during the crisis are discussed.

Keywords: Higher Education, Covid -19, Online Teaching Learning, Challenges of Higher Education and New Normal.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected educational systems worldwide, leading to the near-total closures of schools, universities and colleges. The COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped at national borders. It has affected people regardless of nationality, level of education, income or gender. But the same has not been true for its consequences, which have hit the most vulnerable hardest. The pandemic times which blow around the globe, leaving no space untouched. They certainly have left a very memorable impact in the field of education. By the end of March 2020, the pandemic was everywhere, resulting in the closure of most of the schools, colleges and universities in India. Though there were many negative impacts from the COVID-19 outbreak on the field of education, there was also a positive impact which could take the education system and its methods a step higher. The pandemic has opened gates to innovative methods of transmission of knowledge across the globe. It was very challenging to India as many people live in areas without internet, and others attend more poorly equipped government-run schools/colleges. Many efforts were made to continue education at all levels with online methods, but it could not be made available to everyone. Thus, pandemic Covid-19 impacted significantly on the education sector. According to the UNESCO report, Covid-19 has affected nearly 68% of total world's student population as per the data taken during 1st week of June 2020. Outbreak of Covid-19 has impacted about 1.2 billion students and youths across the globe by school and university closures. Several other countries have also implemented localized closures impacting millions of additional learners. In India, more than 32crores of students have been affected by the various restrictions and the nationwide lockdown for Covid-19. This worldwide closure has impacted drastically the world's student population. Looking at the positive side of the pandemic's impact on education, I would surely say that the learning cells in our brains became active to think about and analyse how to continue with the education of young minds. COVID-19 accelerated the adoption of digital technologies to deliver education. Education institutions moved toward blended learning and encouraged teachers and students to acquire technology savvy. Soft technology, online, webinars, virtual class rooms, teleconferencing, digital exams and assessments became common phenomenon, where otherwise we might have merely defined them — or they might have come into practical use a decade later or more.

Review of Literature

Noting the seriousness of the Covid 19, Lock down was ordered in India under the provisions of the Epidemics Diseases Act 1897 and the Disaster Management Act, 2005. All establishments wherein a large number of human presences was ordinarily present – factories, offices, schools, colleges, universities, restaurants, theaters, malls, shopping complexes, businesses and so on were ordered to be closed so that the cost of life could be reduced as much as possible. Being that the months of March, April and May are crucial months in a student's life as all exams upto UPSC level are scheduled in these months, a decision was taken to cause for education content to be delivered to the students, via the online route. In this connection, the Govt of India has made available online courses and

MOOC courses for students and teachers so that they do not have to miss out on their courses. Resources such as the DIKSHA portal containing video lectures, e-worksheets, e-textbooks and assessments, e-Pathshala and the National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER) portal were made available for students up to 01 to 12th standard in the country. In addition, SWAYAM a MOOC database of 1900 courses was made available for interested students (University level and above) so that they may be able to enhance their skill level, while at home. Further, the existing network of SWAYAM PRABHA, A network of 32 DTH channels was made available on all leading DTH Platforms (TataSKY, Dish TV etc.) (World Bank).

The Govt of India has played a major role in the development of e-learning in India and the DeITY (Department of Electronics and Information Technology) is developing tools and technologies for promotion of e-learning by supporting Research and Development projects at various academic and educational institutes revolving around content development, R&D technology initiatives, human resource development projects and faculty training initiatives to improve literacy through distance education in order to improve general literacy and education levels in the country. 17000 crore Rs has been allocated for this purpose in the FY Year 2017-18 by the Govt of India for boosting the Skill India Mission. This investment has had a beneficial effect for the domestic and foreign product and services providers in the e-learning market in the country. (Arnab Kundu, Dr. Kedar Nath Dey, 2018)

(Subedi et al., 2020). While adapting to the new changes, staff and student readiness needs to be gauged and supported accordingly. The learners with a fixed mindset find it difficult to adapt and adjust, whereas the learners with a growth mindset quickly adapt to a new learning environment. There is no one-size-fits-all pedagogy for online learning. There are a variety of subjects with varying needs. Different subjects and age groups require different approaches to online learning (Doucet et al., 2020). Online learning also allows physically challenged students with more freedom to participate in learning in the virtual environment, requiring limited movement.

(Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020). The use of suitable and relevant pedagogy for online education may depend on the expertise and exposure to information and communications technology (ICT) for both educators and the learners. Some of the online platforms used so far include unified communication and collaboration platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, Canvas and Blackboard, which allow the teachers to create educational courses, training and skill development programmes (Petrie, 2020). They include options of workplace chat, video meeting and file storage that keep classes organized and easy to work. They usually support the sharing of a variety of content like Word, PDF, Excel file, audio, videos and many more. These also allow the tracking of student learning and assessment by using quizzes and the rubric-based assessment of submitted assignments.

Objective of the Study
- To find out the impact of Covid- 19 on higher education in India.
- To analyse the opportunities available for higher education in online learning resources.
- To evaluate the challenges faced by the higher education during covid-19.

Research Methodology
The research paper is based on collection and analysis of the secondary data. The secondary data is composed of the literature available in different scholarly research articles belonging to several national and international journals. Secondary data is collected and analyzed from the Govt of India reports, UNESCO report, UGC and AICTE and other websites.

Impact of Covid -19 on Higher Education of India
The switch to online education has been ensuring that students suffer no loss of studies and their progress is being tracked simultaneously with timely evaluation. It is probably a first for India to experiment with the education system and make a paradigm shift to the virtual world, blending classrooms with online learning. Alchemising education with technology and forming a collaborative strategy to tread ahead while providing online lectures will also enable the students to learn creatively. Due to Covid-19 both students and teachers are impacted. The students have been impacted by losing face-to-face learning at higher educational organizations (HEOs) Students who are waiting to start their higher education are also getting difficult in selecting the dream institutions. The teachers have been affected significantly by losing their continuity in conventional teaching activity and they have been forced to adopt virtual modality. Especially, in developing countries the improving and young institutions are being faced difficulty in maintaining their financial status due to the overall effect of Covid-19 in the normal life of every lay man's business. In India, many private educational organizations had decided to collect less fees The COVID-19 may possibly create a severe blow on the professions of this academic years' graduates. Also, the senior students are experiencing foremost disruptions in learning and evaluation in the closing portion of their college educations and the young graduates would face heavy challenge on job market due to global recession.

According to union health ministry (UHM) around **361,010** people died due to Covid-19 in India as of 10th June 2021 and around **29,253,912** people are affected by Covid-19. The 2nd second wave of Covid 19 has impacted more and death rate was higher in comparison to the 1st wave. After all the challenges the higher education department is still continue with the online learning resources. Due to the worst corona virus 2nd wave impact CBSE central board of school examination cancelled their 10th and 12th Board examination. In India, around 1000 universities and around 40,000 colleges are conducting classes through online.

Opportunities for Higher Education in online Learning Resources

Keeping the doors for learning open during the covid 19 online learning resources has played a key role in continuation of Higher Education. Initiatives of the Indian Government and Higher Education Institutions to deal with the Crisis Indian universities, realizing their commitment to students and the community, displayed adaptability, agility, and innovation in dealing with the pandemic. While academic continuity planning was of prime importance, they also understood the need for emotional support, healthcare infrastructure, building awareness, and creating new learning opportunities. Many key reform initiatives were undertaken by the universities to build resilience, ensure continuity, and create an impact in times of COVID-19.

Transition to digital

Online education is conducted in two ways. The first is through the use of recorded classes, which, when opened out to public, are referred to as Massive Open Online Course (MOOCs). The second one is via live online classes conducted as webinars, or zoom sessions. Universities require high-speed internet and education delivery platforms or learning management systems, besides stable IT infrastructure and faculty members who are comfortable teaching online. Students also need high-speed internet and computers/mobiles to attend these sessions or watch pre-recorded classes.

There are many platforms created to enable online education in India. These are supported by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), and the department of technical education. There also are initiatives like e-PG Pathshala (e-content), SWAYAM (online courses for teachers), and NEAT (enhancing employability). Other online platforms aim to increase connectivity with institutions, and accessibility to content. These are utilised for course materials and classes, and running of online modules. They include the National Project on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL), National Knowledge Network, (NKN), and National Academic Depository (NAD), among others.

The National Law University of Delhi was among the first to have an open MOOC among the law schools in India, and in March, after the Covid-19 crisis broke out, it opened the course out to the public. Students can avail of study materials in law as well as digital resources as entrusted by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and MHRD. The National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL), a project of MHRD initiated by seven Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT), along with the Indian Institute of Science Bangalore, was created in 2003 to provide online education. The aim was to have web and video courses in engineering, sciences, and management. Bharathi Balaji, head of operations at NPTEL India, says Covid-19 has pushed institutions, faculty and students on to online learning like never before. "NPTEL has grown since it was started, but the level of percolation was only decent. In the past six years, we have explained to people what it means to use online education, and tried to break down their inhibitions. Now, because of Covid-19, there is no option but to adapt and utilise online education.

Challenges Faced by higher education during Covid-19

Online education is not so easy as speaking into the microphone at one end, and connecting a laptop and listening in on the other; there are challenges faced at both ends of the spectrum. Covid-19 has forced universities across India, and the world indeed, to suspend physical classrooms and shift to online classes. In India, while this transition has been smooth for most private universities, the public ones are still adapting. Education is not just about classes. It is about interactions, broadening of ideas, free-flowing open discussions, debates, and mentoring of each student. While we try to do all of this, a lot gets lost in translation on the online platform." Many students and professors are having different opinion about online learning. Students at Jindal Global Law School, highlights the difficulties, especially for a discipline like law, where discussions and debates form the backbone. "We cannot engage online in the same manner as we would in a class. Viva, moots, debates, and classroom discussions on polarising topics require nuanced perspectives — these lose their flavour when done online. Chancellor and Professor of History at Ashoka University, agrees that mentoring, debates, and casual conversations are better in traditional classrooms. "There is just no comparison. I find students asking fewer questions online. The greatest advantage of face-to-face teaching is eye contact. It is easy to gauge if students are following what I am saying. There is an excitement present in the real classroom." The biggest negative (of shifting classes online) has been the absence of face-to-face contact with students and their cutting off from the university library. Students often do not have access to online facilities, especially the underprivileged ones who live in places with poor connectivity. Higher education is seldom about exams, classes, or grades. Rather, it is about an experience that prepares a student to become a functioning member of the work force,

with requisite knowledge, skills, and life experiences. Students have complained about lack of clarity going forward and what the plan of action would entail, especially with respect to examinations, results, internships, and placements. While most institutions of higher education are trying their best in this situation, nobody knows what will happen next. Despite exponential growth in the country's sector, India's student population faced a uniquely difficult set of circumstances in the wake of Covid-19. Many of those who weathered the pandemic restrictions from family homes saw their newly remote education suffer from a lack of access to the resources they utilised on campus. There were numerous reports of discrepancies in the quality of digital learning depending on a student's location, with urban areas typically delivering a more stable internet connection than their rural counterparts.

Most educators across institutions agree that there is a need to invest in creating standardised online education platforms, and not using apps and Google hangouts only; and to train both students and teachers. Others highlight the necessity to introspect on the nature of these platforms and how students are taught using different online tools and methods, while keeping accessibility and equity challenges in mind. There is also the need to understand all this across academic disciplines and institutions.

Online education for teachers
Advantages
* Allows innovative methods of teaching with the help of technology and online tools
* Allows reaching out to a large number of students across geographies
* Especially useful for distance learning

Disadvantages
* Online teaching takes time and practice
* There is little consensus on how students can be evaluated in a fair manner
* Inability to have a face-to-face connect with students and facilitate free conversations, discussions, and mentoring
* Inability to reach all students because of technological limitations

Online education for students
Advantages
* The ability to learn using different online tools and methods
* No disruption in learning because of the pandemic
* Listening to recorded and live conversations and working at their own speed

Disadvantages
* Lack of free-flowing conversations, debates, and discussions
* Technological difficulties related to weak devices or access to the internet
* Getting used to learning and being evaluated online
* Studying while living at home, with family and other distractions

Findings
The COVID-19 Pandemic has revealed some of the major loopholes in the Indian education system. Decisions related to education once attained will have long term significance in the future of the education system in the country. Furthermore, the closure of schools/colleges has had a severe impact on vulnerable and marginalized students. One of the critical trends that can be followed is the need to have a blended approach to online learning. Following that the increase in investment on the upgrading of the technology infrastructure of institutions requires accurate limelight. Stress needs to be given to training the teachers. Apart from that, updating curricula across major sectors and focus on Start-ups and Entrepreneurship should rise.

The pandemic has resulted in highlighting the existing inconsistency of the education system. The time to act for a better future and make a difference is now, and the academicians and administrators have a significant role to play in this.

A traditional proverb says that a wise teacher makes learning a joy. Having said that, investment in the biggest assets of education, which are teachers, can be an extremely fruitful decision. Encouraging innovation and creativity as well as maintaining communication with Teachers, Parents, and Students can do wonders.

Taking extra care of the mental health of all stakeholders by removing any form of stigma revolving around it will make a lot of difference. Additional precautions and guidelines should be taken care of whenever an institution is opening up. Last but not least,

creation of a dedicated Technology and e-learning task force within the educational institutions should be a primary focus for the upliftment, development and growth of the institutes.

Conclusion

COVID-19 has significantly changed lives worldwide, from how people work, learn, teach, and deliver or receive an education. The disruptions caused in the academic world forced educators to innovate, experiment, and learn how to teach effectively via remote tutoring methods. The global pandemic is accelerating the transformation of higher education, forcing our society to revisit and rethink the existing educational models, their real value, and how they are delivered. Even though the pandemic necessitated a sudden transition to the online environment, many higher educational institutions predict a permanent transition to the virtual environment. While flexibility was one of the main drivers of the growth of virtual learning but safety and cost have been the most promising points in recent times. However, there are two sides to every coin, and likewise, remote education comes with its pros and cons. For better or worse, virtual learning is here to stay. Higher education will continue to evolve and reinvent itself to adapt to the new-age educational and instructional models.

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