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Online Teaching amidst COVID-19 in India: An Outlook

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Abstract: The lockdown imposed in India on 25 March 2020 resulted in the indefinite closure of education institutes all across the country. The government and educational institutes were quick to respond, they shifted teaching from offline to online mode. This article aims to identify the approaches made by the higher education institutions for continues imparting of education amidst lockdown. The article also identifies the challenges faced by teachers in online teaching from their homes. The study is descriptive and analytical in nature and data has been collected from secondary sources like reports, news articles, blogs, interview videos, magazines, social media, and journals to achieve the objective of the paper. Based on the secondary sources' information, the article also advocates the learning curve for the future to deal with any such crisis impact on the education system of India. The findings revealed that higher education institutions (HEIs) have taken many initiatives in this pandemic situation for imparting education. But these initiatives have not been very successful from the teacher's perspective. Teachers faced may issue in online teaching such as lack of technical facilities, family interruption, lack of training, lack of clarity & direction, lack of technical knowledge. The learning curve of the article facilitates the HEIs to help them to execute the online educative in an effective manner.

Keywords: COVID-19, lockdown, online teaching, teachers, challenges, pandemic.

Introduction

Decision of the Indian government to impose complete lockdown in the country to curb the spread of infectious virus, COVID-19 adversely impacted all sectors of the economy (Joshi et al., 2020b; Gupta et al., 2020). Most staggering impact was felt by the education sector. Even when the government has announced to strategically lift the lockdown, decision on opening of schools and colleges is yet to be taken. It is assumed that educational institutes will be the last sector that will be operational. As per a report of UNESCO, around 63 million teachers got affected in 165 countries. 1.3 billion Students all across the world could not go to the college (UNESCO, 2020). To curb the adverse impact on education, Ministry of Human Resource Development promoted free digital e-Learning platforms like National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL), Study Web for Active Young Expiring Minds (SWAYAM), etc. (MHRD, 2020a). In order to continue the academics the ministry recommended to use online platforms to impart education. Online education necessitates three key constituent for its success. The first constituent is "institution". The institution provides the necessary platform to teachers and students for successful implementation of online teaching and learning. The institution needs to provide clear instruction and direction, technical support, training, institutional-based technologies, and motivation to teachers for imparting online education. The second constituent is "teacher". It is imperative to consider that online teaching cannot be successful without the support of teachers, as they are the frontline workers of any educational institution. They are responsible to educate children. The lockdown demanded them to quickly adopt technology and put in their best effort. The third key element is "students"; they also need to psychologically accept the online mode of teaching and learning. Under the given circumstances it is evident that higher education institutions (HEIs) have to change their pedagogy following the simple philosophy of progress or perish. In order to progress in the present situation, HEIs have shifted to emergency remote teaching. "Emergency remote teaching is a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery model due to crisis circumstances. It involves the use of fully remote teaching solutions for instruction or education that would otherwise be delivered face-to-face or as blended or hybrid courses and that will return to that format once the crisis or emergency has abated" (Hodges et al., 2020). HEIs instructed teachers to teach online through various online



platforms. This decision of adhering to emergency remote online teaching created confusion and apprehensions among the teachers. Neither HEIs nor teachers got sufficient time to prepare themselves to conduct online classes. In a short span of time, without much planning teachers commenced teaching online using different platforms. They faced many issues because few teachers had the experience of online teaching. Though HEIs' decision to conduct online classes is the need of the hour but it needs to be analyzed for future planning, to create social justice and address teachers' problems while conducting online classes. This article discusses the approaches of HEIs to impart education and enumerates the challenges faced by the teachers during online teaching under the influence of COVID-19 pandemic with reference to the Indian context. The study is descriptive and analytical in nature and data has been collected from secondary sources like reports, news articles, blogs, interview videos, magazines, social media, and journals to achieve the objective of the paper. Based on the secondary sources' information, the article also advocates the learning curve for the future to deal with any such crisis impact on the education system of India.

Education amidst COVID19: 'Approach'

The Indian government announced the lockdown and closure of educational institutions as a logical solution to control the spread of coronavirus. Considering the depth of the situation, the Government along with educational institutes began to look for solutions so as not to disrupt the academics. Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, along with other education regulatory body unanimously agreed to deliver education through the online system. The approach to education during the pandemic has relied on short-term and strategic initiatives. University grant commission (UGC) issued guidelines pertaining to academics on April 29, 2020, and suggested delaying the session. It advised higher education institutions to conduct classes through online platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, video conferencing, mobile apps, emails, learning management systems, etc. Renowned Higher Education Institution such as the Institute of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), ICFAI University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Symbiosis International University Netaji Subhas University of Technology, IGNOU, Jamia Millia Islamia, and Delhi University, etc. started offering online classes to its students. A week-long campaign 'bharatpadhe online' was launched by the government of India on April 10, 2020, to improve the online transfer of knowledge (Bozkurt et al., 2020). Many initiatives have been taken to kick-start the education covering all the aspects, some of them are SWAYAM online courses for teachers to increase their knowledge and efficiency; e-PG Pathshala covering social science and arts subjects, MOOCs for technical and non-technical courses; Vidwan database to provide information to peers and potential collaborators, etc. SWAYAM PRABHA DTH added 12 channels to air the educational video on television to reach areas where internet connectivity is a concern. It also had the provision of live interactive sessions with experts through Skype. DIKSHA supports education by offering e-content and Quick Response (QR) coded textbooks for all students (Chaubey, 2020). 'PM e-VIDYA' program promotes e-learning and technology-driven education with equity to make social justice under the Aatma Nirbhar Apna Bharat program. This aim is to make extensive use of radio, community radio, podcasts; special e-content for visually and hearing challenged learners to provide education by top universities. The government has initiated the YUKTI web portal, the Aarogya Setu app has been made available for free and the National Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Mission aims to boost literacy (Erpula, 2020). The government is using a national knowledge network to provide technology-enhanced learning, through information and communication technology. The whole scenario has created a unified approach and projects that lockdown was not able to restrict the academics in India.

Education amidst COVID19: Challenges faced HEIs and Teachers

Considering the present situation, though Emergency remote teaching through online mode is the only appropriate stop-gap procedure in India. COVID-19 has converted teaching from a conventional model to educational technology (EdTech) Model, where both teachers and students are exposed to new innovative educational technology. HEIs and Teachers are facing many challenges during emergency

remote online teaching (Alvarez, 2020). Mishra (2020) raised concern for the digital divide and infrastructural dimensions for teaching through online education platforms. A survey conducted by QS I•GAUGE found that the technological infrastructure has not achieved a state of quality to ensure the sound delivery of online classes to students across the country (QS-ERA, 2020). Only a few HEIs are using Moodle, Blackboard (teaching app), Microsoft Teams and Google meet for teaching but most of the HEIs are dependent on open-source platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Skype, Google hangout, Zoom, etc. for online teaching. The lockdown transformed the teaching environment settings. Verma and Campbell (2020) pointed out that many institutions don't have trained teachers who can work remotely through online platforms and facing a struggle to accept the transition. The higher education institutions directed their teachers to conduct the classes from their homes by using different online learning platforms. Online classes amid lockdown have been an awful experience for teachers (Punit & Qz.com, 2020). Many teachers reported issues related to their institutions, technology, students which affected the execution of the online classes in their home setting environment. It is important to note that teachers are accustomed to the conventional method of teaching which is a blackboard, marker, and PowerPoint presentation. It will be an injustice for teachers to become technocrats within a short span of time. Joshi et al., (2020a) has identified several barriers that affect online teaching in-home environment settings such as technical difficulties, lack of training, lack institutional support, lack of technical support, lack of clarity & direction, difficulty in course integration with technology, lack of basic facilities, external distraction, and family interruption and personal problems faced by teachers in online teaching and assessments. Many institutions even did not provide clear instructions and directions about the implementation and execution of online classes. They expected old aged teachers who are not technically sound to do online teaching (Sharma, 2020). Arora and Srinivasan (2020) reported that there were several challenges faced by teachers during the online teaching-learning process such as network issues, lack of training, lack of awareness, lack of interest, less attendance, lack of personal touch, and lack of interaction. Teachers were teaching online without any proper training. Due to a lack of training, teachers faced many problems in using technology for teaching (Sudevan, 2020; Almaiah et al., 2020). Kaup et al., (2020) reported challenges related to technology, training, and student engagement in sustaining academics during COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers are not having sufficient infrastructure like configured laptops, internet, microphones, etc. to efficiently impart education. Many teachers face connectivity issues, system failure, and bandwidth issues while conducting online sessions and due to lack of technical assistance, they are unable to resolve problems. Teachers also found it difficult to manage the students when they teach online. Most often students deliberately create indiscipline by playing music, making noise, posting bad comments through fake users, eating, playing games in different windows (Punit & Qz.com, 2020).

Teachers reported online teaching as exhausting and demotivating experience. A conventional classroom consists of chairs, tables, board, marker, and projector. None of these facilities are present at the home environment settings as a result teachers were not very efficient. The continuous external distractions due to noise from the neighborhood or interruption by family members during the lecture also make an adverse effect on the continuity of sessions (Press Trust of India, 2020). Teachers were forcefully put into online teaching which generated negative attitudes among teachers towards online teaching and institution. Shenoy, et al., (2020) reported that teachers are not happy to adopt technology and virtual classrooms. Teachers were not comfortable to teach some courses which involve numerical, experiments, and personal interaction. During face-to-face teaching, language factors are mitigated as teachers use bilingual communication to address students' doubts and queries (Mahajan, 2020). They also found it difficult to assess the student's body language on a small screen and emotional connect is missing. There is a huge digital divide and HEIs are expected to do social justice towards education through online teaching and learning (Sahni, 2020). The importance of classroom learning is undeniable and this pandemic proves that HEIs and teachers are not yet ready to handle online teaching (Mahesh, 2020; Azevedo et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The HEIs have taken effective measures to curb the negative implications of the COVID19 pandemic on the education system. The government is also supporting HEIs to help all the students who don't have access to internet facilities. COVID19 pandemic has led the education system into a tech-savvy path (Govindarajan and Srivastava, 2020; Abdulrahim & Mabrouk, 2020). Though it is evident that online classes and assessments cannot substitute conventional mode of teaching but the role of technology and its extensive use in imparting education cannot be neglected. The higher education institution has done its best for the smooth flow of education with the help of teachers by conducting classes through different online platforms. Many initiatives were taken by the Ministry of Human Resource Development like e-PG Pathshala (e-content), SWAYAM (online courses for teachers), and NEAT (enhancing employability). Though the methods being adopted are based on trial and error, but it is to be noted that continuous efforts are being implemented (Olcott, 2020). Teachers also facing challenges like lack of technical facilities, family interruption, lack of training, lack of clarity & direction, lack of technical knowledge but they are trying to contribute from their end by changing their traditional teaching approach to the EdTech teaching approach to make teaching and learning execute effectively. Government, institutes, teachers are regularly coming up with guidelines, pedagogy, and methods to implement efficient online teaching. It may seem that classes are being run smoothly and the academics will not be disturbed, but the problem is deep-rooted. The education system stands tall on two pillars, teacher and student. The online teaching is just a procedure supported by the government and institutes. The responsibility of effective implementation rests on learners and teachers, both of them are not trained and lack resources. The challenges need to be addressed from both perspectives. All may feel good about it as students are happy thinking that it will be easy for them to progress to next semester class without attending formal classes and teachers are not going to complain as they have to secure their job and institutes will always claim that they are one in the league, but somewhere effectiveness and quality education may be compromised. Online teaching and learning cannot be successful without addressing the challenges faced by HEIs and teachers. They need to be understood and considered while designing a future roadmap for online teaching and learning. Higher education institution needs to reconsider the exiting curriculum and design a new curriculum that can also be taught online (Zhao, 2020; Daniel, 2020). This will help the institutes to face such a crisis. UGC has made the regulations for minimum standards for quality teaching by making it compulsory for teachers to teach 25% syllabus online using flipped classroom and blended learning (Mishra, 2020; Rapanta et al., 2020). Every university and college should have a dedicated technical department that can support and train teachers to resolve technical issues.

Practical Implications

Though the pandemic had created a cascading effect but has also provided an intriguing aspect for the education sector to ponder. The article indicates that HEI has an option to start a new curriculum by integrating traditional and online learning. All higher education institutes now are aware of the importance of technology and should take serious measures to conduct technology-driven education through the learning management system. The article can pave a path to guide and direct the regulatory authorities to identify the barriers and come up with an amicable solution. The study will also guide teachers to equip themselves well enough before conducting online sessions. The ministry of Human resource in its press release on April 29, 2020, issued guidelines of the University Grant Commission in view of the lockdown about the academic calendar (MHRD, 2020b). The government can develop the infrastructure to enhance technology in teaching and learning.

Suggestions

The present crisis has exposed the institutes that they are not completely digitally developed. The lockdown has disturbed the education sector. It is suggested that HEI should develop their infrastructure keeping in mind the importance of technology in education. The curriculum should be aligned with technology. Still, most of the rural areas are not connected with internet; many students don't have access to smartphones. The government of India should adopt measures to enhance the digital infrastructure of the country and maintain socio-economic equity. Financial support to teachers like

interest-free loans to buy updated laptops, cameras, microphones, etc. will make the teachers well equipped to take sessions, even at home. Government collaboration with technology companies and Higher education institutes in the mode of PPHP (Public, Private Companies, Higher Education Institutes Partnership) can resolve the problem of technical infrastructure. Developing the digital infrastructure in rural and remote areas of India will remove the digital divide and bring social justice. Effective online teaching will create digital literacy and with less cost on facilities and will make higher education affordable, thus generating a pathway for new India.

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