IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

Dr. Rakesh Kumar Sharma*

ABSTRACT

Higher education is assuming an upward significance for developing countries like India, which is experiencing service-led growth. But from the last two years, we are facing an unprecedented health emergency due to covid-19 pandemic and it has radically disrupted all the sectors including higher education in India. Indian Government has declared lockdown and all the educational institutions have been closed to break the spread chain of the disease all over the country. The lockdown destroyed the schedules of every student. Though it is an exceptional situation in the history of education, Covid-19 created an opportunity to come out of the rigorous classroom teaching model to a new rea of digital model. In order to maintain continuity, higher education institutions have managed positively all the teaching-learning activities, examination assessment activities through online mode. Delivery of classes through online medium has been a recent modification brought out by the education system in India. Attitude of teachers and students have been completely changed towards information and communication technology and it has been made to invent various innovative mode of teaching learning process in higher education. This research paper will assess and analysis the impact of covid-19 on higher education in India. Furthermore, it would also highlight the strategic measures taken by higher educational institutions to ensure seamless teaching-learning activities and academic services during this crisis.

Keywords: Assessment, AISHE, Covid-19, MHRD, MOOC, UGC, Service-Led Growth.

Introduction

On March 11, 2020 World Health Organisation declared Covid-19 as a pandemic. In India, the first affected case of Covid-19 was detected on 30 January 2020 in Kerala and the first death was reported on March 12, 2020. The Indian Government has announced several defensive measures to reduce the entry and spread of the corona virus in the country. To combat the corona virus pandemic, Indian Government has been announcing the first phase of lockdown on March 25, 2020. Due to fight of second wave of corona virus, various Indian States have declared lockdown from 17th April 2021.

It has drastically disrupted every aspect of human life including education; this is the biggest sector that has been adversely affected by this pandemic. The closure of schools, colleges and universities by the respective State Governments was an urgent need of the current situation which prevailed in all over India. Teaching learning activities brought to an end or moved online for the uncertain period of time. Covid-19 has created many challenges and opportunities for the educational institutes to strengthen their technological knowledge and infrastructure.

* Assistant Professor (Economics), Government College, Bansur, Alwar, Rajasthan, India.

India's higher education system is the third largest in the world post after the United States of America and China. There are 993 universities, 39931 Colleges and 10725 Autonomous institutions which offer higher education under various streams (DNS Kumar). As per the report released by AISHE 2018-19, there were 37.4 million students enrolled in the higher education under various programmes. Moreover, along with students, teacher would also play an important role in higher education. In India there are more than 14 lacks teachers working in higher education while shaping career of thousands of students.

Impact of Covid-19 on Higher Education in India

The outbreak of covid-19 pandemic affected the entire educational system of India as well as the globe, especially the higher education, which is most advance and crucial for the students in order to settle and shape their carriers. Some of the most impacted areas of higher education of India are as pointed below.

- **Quit all Educational Activities:** The sudden outbreak of Covid-19 has compelled lockdown in every sector including education. The educational institutions got closed and various educational, academic, administrative and research activities are postponed. Many entrance tests for higher study got cancelled. The main challenge was to continue teaching learning process when students, faculties and staff could no longer be physically present on the campuses (Pravat, 2020a).

- **Severely Affected Evaluation and Assessment System:** Almost all the internal assessments have been cancelled and external examinations have been postponed because of sudden outbreak of pandemic in between the peak of educational assessment and evaluation process. Due to this, continuity of entire education system got broken and has negative impact on students' learning. This uncertainty has created anxiety among students (Akash & Mala, 2020).

- **Impact on Professional Growth and Development:** The outbreak greatly affected the professional career of the professions, faculties and teachers who are working in different higher educational institutions. This pandemic has both negative and positive impacts on research. On the negative side, it has made impossible for researchers to work together with others. Promotions, bonuses, evaluations and faculty developmental programmes got postponed and cancelled. Look at the positive side, researchers got much more time to improve their research work. Webinars and e-conferences became normal methods for sharing expertise among students and academicians around the globe (Pravat, 2020b).

- **Reduced Employment Opportunities:** Unfortunately, due to covid-19 entrance exams, recruitments and various other competitive exams have been postponed or cancelled. Fresh students are in pressure of fearing withdrawal of job offers. Furthermore, Employees got fired from the job even who were working for many years. All these facts imply towards increase of unemployment rate due to this pandemic (Pravat, 2020a).

- **Limitations to Access the Digital World:** As 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. Thus, the online teaching-learning methods during pandemic may enhance the gap between poor/rich and urban/rural (Pravat, 2020b).

Strategies to Deal with Covid-19 for Higher Education in India

In order to minimize and mitigate the impact of covid-19, higher educational institutions have responded positively and adopted various strategies by lunching of many virtual platforms to maintain the continuity in teaching-learning, academic-administrative work and other educational activities. Some of the digital initiatives for higher education during COVID-19 are pointed as below:

- **FOSSEE:** It is short form for Free and Open-Source Software for E-education, which is developed to create and promote open source software for education as well as professional use. It is used in teaching-learning, educational activities, research and development, placement related, administrative work and for other professional work.

- **Gyan Darshan:** It is a web-based TV channel devoted to educational and developmental needs for Open and Distance Learner. A web-based TV channel devoted to educational and developmental needs of the learners.

- **National Digital Library of India (NDLI):** It is a repository of e-content on multiple disciplines for students, teachers, researchers, librarians, library users, professionals and all other lifelong learners. It is being developed at Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur. It is designed to help students to prepare for examinations and to facilitate researchers to perform inter-linked exploration from multiple sources. It is a virtual repository of learning resources with a single-window search facility. Here one can find all kind of study materials related to multiple disciplines. It is also available to access through mobile apps.

- **National Educational Alliance for Technology (NEAT):** It is the new initiative taken by AICTE and the Education Technology companies of India towards skilling students about online learning and classes. It brings whole a lot of changes in education pedagogy and learning and teaching habits on a single platform for the convenience of learners. Now students and teachers feel comfortable and convenient while taking attending online classes, learning and conducting online examinations.

- **SAKSHAT:** This is one the important online platform to address the needs, wants and problems of students and teachers, which they would face while taking classes and doing studies. This is also known as world of online learning as it addresses all the education and learning related needs of students, scholars, teachers and lifelong learners. The portal provides the latest news, press releases, achievements etc. related to MHRD. Anyone can visit this portal to know the world of online learning.

- **Shodh Ganga:** It is a platform for research students to deposit their Ph.D. theses and make it available to the entire scholarly community in open access.

- **Shodh Sindhu:** It is a collection of e-journals, e-journal archives and e-books on long-term access basis. It provides access to qualitative e-resources to academic institutions at a lower rate of subscription.

- **Swayam:** It provides Massive Open Online Courses with credit transfer feature. It is the national online education platform hosting 1900 courses covering both school and higher education in all subjects including Engineering, Humanities and Social Sciences, Law and Management courses. The unique feature is that, it is integrated with the conventional education. It also provides educational programmes through 32 DTH channels transmitting educational contents.

- **Miscellaneous:** There were various initiatives taken by higher educational institutions, universities, colleges, MHRD, UGC, State Governments and other bodies which are related to higher education system in India. These steps were: promoting for online classes through Google meet, Zoom, Face book live, YouTube live and What's App. Along with online classes it has also be ensured that teachers and students would get updated and could assesses enough information and materials through Virtual platform.

Conclusion

This study has analysed and outlined various impacts of Covid-19 on higher education in India. It has worked as a catalyst for the educational institutions to grow and opt for platforms with technologies, which have not been used before. The recent pandemic created an opportunity for change in pedagogical approaches and introduction of virtual education in all levels of education. UGC and MHRD have lunched many virtual platforms with online depositories, e-books and other online teaching-learning materials. This would involve upgrading the service platform to enable it to meet the required volume of educational demands of students. Virtual education is the most preferred mode of education at this time of crisis due to the outbreak of Covid-19. The post Covid-19 education seems to be an education with widely accepted online/virtual education which may perhaps be a parallel system of education. As we do not know how long the pandemic situation will continue, a gradual move towards the online/virtual education is the demand of the current crisis. It is need of the hour for the educational institutions to strengthen their knowledge and Information Technology Infrastructure. Teachers show a little concern about their students and provide them online lectures to keep them in touch with the syllabus. Also, students need to actively participate in those online lectures and practice the same in their spare time. And last but not least, everyone must follow the rules and regulations provided by the government to prevent from the spread of the pandemic disease.

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