

## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE LEARNING OF THE STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT

*The worldwide Covid-19 pandemic due to corona virus was playing a very crucial role in the functioning of Higher Education system. The consequences of the pandemic were disturbing the completion of the syllabus, completion of terminal exams, starting of the new academic year and losing the jobs in industries. Various issues were raised due to Covid-19 especially in education sector. It impacted on education institutions, students and stakeholders and made challenges for economies globally. This research paper focuses on the challenges of higher education in the era of Covid-19 pandemic as well as solutions particularly online Teaching-Learning for smooth continuation of higher education system. This article specifically seeks to illustrate how Covid-19 has affected higher education in India and offers several suggestions for how to get there. For this purpose, it is suggested that citizens may be given access to inexpensive internet service in order to maintain India's efficient educational system. Additionally, by educating and preparing professors and students to use online resources for learning and teaching, we can continue to develop a top-notch educational system after COVID-19.*

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**Keywords:** Higher Education, COVID-19, Online Education, Internet, Social Media, Students.

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### Introduction

No one would have been predicted that a virus-like Covid-19 would have come and without differentiating any one, it will alter the lifestyle of people. Many changes to our way of life occurred during the Covid-19 era, and it took some time for everyone to adjust to the new standard. The Covid-19 impact was felt worldwide and led to in the closure of colleges and other educational institutions.

Initially, in efforts to lessen the effects of COVID-19 on teachers and students, the government has decided to temporarily close the colleges. After some time, it was briefly reactivated for a few grades, which raised the infection rates, before being shut down once more.

Though educational institution were closed, students were attending their classes through various modes like online classes, YouTube classes, live classes and through many other online modes. Though it was a good thing on the other side, there were lots of students who didn't own the resources to attend the online classes suffer a lot. Many students are struggling to obtain the gadgets like-Smartphone, Laptops, Computer which are essential for online classes.

Teachers who were all experts in Blackboard, Chalk, books, and classroom teaching were really new to this digital teaching, but they are adopting the new methods for handling it. During Covid-19, there was always a delay or cancellation of exams, which led to confusions for many students and there was no room for curriculum. Most of the children were involved in child labour to support their families. There is a lot of chance that the education of female children and transgender children will affect, as their parents may see, the financial and opportunity costs of doing so. in close-down the same. The low-cost

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schools and universities have also been impacted by this pandemic. There were both positive and negative matters happening around us amid the Covid-19. Through online classrooms, webinars, digital tests, and other means, technology has led the way for education and made it possible for students and professors to interact remotely. Unfortunately, many students around the country were not able to access it. Everything was being done for the pupils' welfare so that they could remain safe at home and avoid contracting the deadly illness. Due to Covid-19 both students and teachers were affected. The loss of face-to-face instruction in higher educational organisations (HEOs) has an impact on the pupils. It was becoming more difficult for students to choose their ideal universities as they waited to begin their higher education. The teachers were affected significantly by losing their continuity in conventional teaching activity and they have been forced to adopt virtual modality. Especially, in underdeveloped economies, young institutions were 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 cut in the fees.

COVID-19 may possibly create a severe blow on the professions of coming academic years' graduates. Also, Due to the global crisis, young graduates will face significant obstacles in the job market. Senior students are already suffering the largest interruptions in their learning and evaluation in the latter stages of their college educations. In the end of March 2020, the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India had asked all higher education organizations and universities to extend the date of final semester examinations as well as intermediate semester examinations. Anna University Chennai has conducted the final semester examination by online during the end of September 2020. Madras university had allowed students to select either online or offline mode for the end semester examinations which was held in September 2020. Some other universities like Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University Hyderabad (JNTUH) have conducted offline examinations with necessary precautions. In other states of the country also, all kind of University examinations and other recruitment examinations had postponed during March 2020. Delhi University conducted several examinations from September 2020 to November 2020. So, across the country almost all young graduates were waiting to enter a better career.

In the journey of online learning and teaching, some of the faculty members have faced problems in using social media to provide the lessons clearly to their students. They also must adopt new procedures for evaluating the outcome of online education. Due to unavailability of proper internet connections especially in villages, some students also have affected on their dream learning and this will also affect their grade point averages (GPAs). Covid-19 also has affected the worldwide transportation. This also will affect the international admissions in higher educations. So, the effect of Covid-19 will create a difficult situation for entering a dream career and it will create anxiety and uncertainty among young students and graduates.

### **Objectives**

The study focuses on:

- To study the various initiatives taken by Govt. of India for education sector during this pandemic.
- To study the various positive impacts of COVID-19 on education sector.
- To discover the adverse impacts of COVID-19 and to put some effective suggestions for continuing education during the pandemic situation.

### **Research Methodology**

This research is based on Secondary data. Information is collected from various national and international agencies, authentic websites, journals and e-contents related to impact of COVID-19 on educational system.

### **Covid-19 Impacts on Students**

With only 50% of the population having access to the Internet and 67% of the population living in rural areas, online learning in India was almost impossible. Availability of electricity is a significant challenge to taking advantage of online education. According to a poll conducted in 2017–18 by the Ministry of Rural Development, just 47% of Indian homes have access to more than 12 hours of power each day, and more than 36% of universities are run without electricity. Some colleges have even shut down due to insufficient funds and resources. The changes brought on by COVID-19 created an evident distinction between the rich and the poor and while the students who are privileged to have access to better facilities can still have the opportunity to avail of study material, online lectures and information on the other hand, those belonging to harder luck are still struggling to achieve the bare minimum. In rural

areas students have limited to or no internet access and numerous students may not be able to afford computer, laptop or smart mobile phones in their homes. Online learning has divided the students. The lockdown had led to extreme distress for students in India that come from an economically deprived background spatially from rural areas. Various reports show that majority of the students is not able to access online learning. Immediate remedies for delivering the educational supply make easier for required one.

### **Impact of the Pandemic on Higher Education**

The pillars of higher education are networks, resources, public health, and social policies as well as multidisciplinary research. The effects of Covid-19 on these pillars will be observed for a long time in future. Providing protection and strength for higher education and research during the pandemic Covid-19 will need efforts by various academic communities, funding agencies and Governments. This pandemic left several adverse impacts on higher education such as reducing the opportunities for global education, passive learning, unprepared teachers for virtual classes and structure of students' enrolment. At the same time, the Covid-19 had also created some positive impacts on higher education such as blended learning which is providing new and strengthening the learning management systems, improving the quality of study materials, and collaborative teaching.

### **Initiatives by the Government to Ensure Education Delivery**

The Union Government had started several new and existing remote learning measures to ensure that students can continue their education during the pandemic. The PM e-Vidya initiative, launched in May 2020, brings together disparate services to offer equitable and multi-model access to education. Government data indicates that the use of these services has witnessed an uptick since the implementation of lockdown. SWAYAM is the flagship national online education platform offering courses for college students (Grades IX-XII) as well as higher education.

### **E-Learning Challenges and Solutions**

The e-learning method has several limitations such as lack of knowledge of tutors on using e-learning tools and limited bandwidth. Importantly many students, without having internet facility were struggling for attending online classes. E-learning depends on the accessibility and convenience of machinery, but slightly or no accessibility of electrical energy is a substantial challenge to getting benefits of learning online. Only 38 % of Indian citizens use internet facility and only 31 % of Indians utilize social media respectively according to Pew research as on 2nd April 2020. Based on the recent survey conducted by Ministry of Rural Development (MRD) India in 2017-18, is identified that just 47% of households in India obtain over 12-hours of electrical energy and over 36% of educational institutions in India function without electrical energy. Another survey performed by national sample survey office (NSSO) during 2017-18 indicates that only 15% of Indian rural households could access internet but it is 42% in urban India. There is a huge regional imbalance in the usage of computers and internet facilities between the rural and urban India. Students with disabilities are highly disturbed as they need specialized assistance and education which are non-always accessible. Fresh graduates were struggling to join in the desired corporate because of the fear about the Covid-19 pandemic. The same situation was also there in choosing universities or colleges for further higher education. Also, passed out students were struggling to continue their career due to the delay in completing regular examinations as well as a delay in getting degree certificates. So, due to this pandemic situation, there may be an increase in the unemployment in the country.

### **Positive Impacts of COVID-19 on Education**

Despite the fact that the COVID-19 outbreak had a variety of negative effects on education, educational institutions in India have accepted the challenges and are making every effort to provide students with smooth support services during the pandemic. The Indian educational system now has the chance to transition from a traditional system to a modern one. Some important positive impacts are discussed as below:

- **Move towards Blended Learning:** Without a doubt, COVID-19 has sped up the implementation of digital technology in education. Educational institutions moved towards blended mode of learning. It inspired all educators and learners to advance their technological literacy. Numerous chances for a significant shift in curriculum design and pedagogy were created by new modes of learning assessment and delivery. It also gives access to large pools of learners at a time.

- **Rise in Use of Learning Management Systems:** Use of learning management systems by educational institutions became a great demand. For businesses that have been enhancing and improving learning management systems, it created a huge potential for educational institutions (Misra, 2020).
- **Enhance the use of Soft Copy of Learning Material:** The majority of pupils used soft copies of the materials for reference because they were unable to retrieve the hard copies of their study materials during a lockdown.
- **Improvement in Collaborative Work:** There is a new opportunity where collaborative teaching and learning can take on new forms. Collaborations can also happen among faculty/teachers across the world to benefit from each other (Misra, 2020).
- **Rise in Online Meetings:** The epidemic has led to a sharp increase in opportunities for teleconferencing, virtual meetings, webinars, and e-conferencing.
- **Enhanced Digital Literacy:** The spread of the epidemic encouraged people to learn about and use digital technology, which raised the level of digital literacy.
- **Improved the use of Electronic Media for sharing Information:** Learning materials are shared among the students easily and the related queries are resolved through e-mail, SMS, phone calls and using different social Medias like WhatsApp or Facebook.
- **World Wide Exposure:** Both educators and students have the chance to communicate with people from other countries. Students acclimated to a global community.
- **Better time Management:** Online education helps students manage their time more effectively during pandemics. The majority of students choose open and distance learning (ODL) during the epidemic because it promotes self-learning and offers possibilities for studying from a variety of materials and customised learning based on their needs.

#### COVID-19 Negative Impacts on Education

The COVID-19 outbreak has had a significant negative impact on the education sector. A few of the negative effects it has had on education are listed below:

- **Educational Activity Hampered:** Exams at various levels have been postponed and classes suspended. The entrance exams and yearly exams have already been postponed by various boards. Admissions took longer than expected. Students lost almost three months of the entire academic year of 2020–21 because of the lockdown, which would further aggravate the situation of educational continuity and make it impossible for students to return to college after such a long break.
- **Impact on Employment:** Almost all of the hiring was delayed because of COVID-19. Companies delaying the on boarding of students may have an impact on placements for students. The epidemic is predicted to raise the unemployment rate. In India, there is no recruitment in Govt. sector and fresh graduates fear withdrawal of their job offers from private sectors because of the current situation. The unemployment rate was estimated by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy to have increased from 8.4% in mid-March to 23% in early April, and from 30.9% in urban areas (Educationasia.in). schooling steadily declines as a result of rising unemployment as people struggle more for food than for schooling.
- **Unprepared Teachers/Students for Online Education:** Not all instructors or students are adept at it, or at the very least, not all of them were prepared for this abrupt shift from in-person instruction to online instruction. Most of the teachers are just conducting lectures on video platforms such as Zoom, Google meet, Webex etc. which may not be real online learning without any dedicated online learning platform.
- **Reduced Global Employment Opportunity:** Due to restrictions brought on by COVID-19, some individuals may lose their jobs from other nations and recent graduates may not be able to get employment outside of India. Many Indians may have returned home after COVID-19 caused them to lose their jobs abroad. As a result, finding suitable employment may prove challenging for recent graduates who will soon enter the labour market. The pandemic may prevent many students who have already secured jobs through university interviews from starting their positions. It's possible that the Indians who have been working abroad would lose their jobs. Because of the restrictions on migration brought on by the present pandemic crises, recent graduates in India are also concerned that job offers from corporate sectors may be withdrawn.

- **Increased Responsibility of Parents to Educate their Wards:** While some educated parents are capable of guiding their children, others might not have the necessary education to teach them at home.
- **Access to Digital World:** Online teaching and learning may cause a digital divide among students since many students have poor or no access to the internet and may not be able to purchase a home computer, laptop, or supporting mobile phone. Poor Indian pupils were particularly hard-hit by the lockout. According to several reports, the majority of them are unable to investigate online learning. As a result, the urban-rural divide may widen as a result of the online teaching-learning approach used during the COVID-19 epidemic.
- **Access to Global Education:** The pandemic has significantly disrupted the higher education sector. A large number of Indian students who are enrolled in many Universities abroad, especially in worst affected countries have left those countries and in the long run, there will be a significant decline in the demand for International higher education.
- **Payment of Colleges, Colleges Fee got Delayed:** During the lockdown most of the parents have faced the unemployment situation, so they did not able to pay the fee of their wards for that particular time periods which affected the private institutes.

### Conclusion

India needs to come up with imaginative and inventive ways to guarantee that all students can continue to attend education after the outbreak. COVID-19. To be effective, Indian policies must be implemented by a variety of people from various backgrounds, including those from distant areas, underrepresented groups, and minority groups. To mitigate the pandemic's effects on job offers, internship opportunities, and research initiatives, quick action is needed on many online learning platforms, the same subjects are offered in several programmes with varying degrees of accreditation, methodology, and assessment criteria. As a result, course quality may vary among various online learning platforms. Therefore, establishment of quality assurance mechanisms and quality benchmark for online learning programmes must be developed and offered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in India keeping in view of rapid growth of the online learning platforms.

Indian traditional knowledge is renowned around the world for its scientific advancements, values, and advantages in the development of sustainable technologies and medications and this knowledge systems in different fields should be integrated with a present-day mainstream higher education system.

Government and higher educational institutes should plan to continue the educational activities maintaining social distancing. 30-40% students and teachers may attend Colleges/colleges in two shifts per day to carry on educational activities by obeying guidelines for COVID-19.

At current times, access to technology and internet is an urgent requirement. So, the digital capabilities and the required infrastructure must reach to the remotest and deprived communities to facilitate the students to continue their education during and after the pandemics. There is a need to deploy public funds to fix the internet gap and ensure that students continue to learn digitally. The State Governments/private organisations should come up with ideas to address this issue of digital education.

Some significant issues associated with distance learning strategies like the availability and access to digital devices with internet connectivity, the need for safe learning spaces, creating capabilities for teachers, families and students to operate and navigate digital devices, and engaging lesson plans for disabled students and other marginalised groups should be addressed by the Government and the stakeholders.

The Indian education industry has been greatly impacted by COVID-19. Even while it has brought about a lot of difficulties, different opportunities have also arisen. To address the current COVID-19 dilemma, the Indian Government and several educational stakeholders have investigated the potential of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) by implementing various digital technologies. India is not entirely prepared to use digital platforms to spread education to every part of the country. Due to the current selection of digital platforms, kids who are less fortunate than other students will suffer. Universities and the Indian government, however, are steadfastly working to find a solution to this issue. The top objective should be to use digital technology to provide India's numerous young students a competitive advantage. The necessity for educational institutions to improve their knowledge and IT infrastructure in order to be prepared for COVID-19-like scenarios is urgent.

If the COVID-19 crisis may stretch longer, there is an urgent need to take efforts on maximum utilisation of online platforms, so that students not only complete their degree but also get ready for their future. Some companies have followed the concept of “Work from Home” in such pandemic situation to reduce spread of COVID-19. For efficient delivery of education, Indian policy must incorporate a variety of people from diverse backgrounds, including distant locations and marginalised communities. As online practice is benefitting the students immensely, it should be continued. Further detailed statistical study may be undertaken to explore the impact of COVID-19 on education system of India.

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