Higher Education in India under the Shadow of Covid-19

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ABSTRACT

The impact assessment need to take care of direct impact in various sector as well as its indirect repercussion to get the exactness which seems to be an impossible task for the researchers of the globe. To talk about education; this is the biggest sector that has been adversely affected by this pandemic and at the same time this sector is vital to shape the future.The existing broader framework of educational ecosystem has to embrace certain corrections and updating to meet the new normal. The prevailing system for internship, research programs etc. has to be modified to suit the current situation. In order to ensure transparency Methodology, certification, assessment parameters have to be revised and shall be modified according to the requirements of the current situation keeping in mind the quality benchmark.

Keywords: Education, Learning, Assessment, Academic, Pandemic

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an unprecedented loss of human life worldwide and presents an exceptional challenge to public health, education food systems and the world of work. We are facing a global health worst crisis in the history of the globe, one that is taking life of people, propagating human suffering, and upsetting people's lives. This is not only a health crisis but a blending of human, economic and social crisis. It has caused a stern and very deep rooted influence on the social, economic and also psychological life of peopleall over the world. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which has been characterized as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020 is attacking societies at their core. According to the UNESCO report more than 90% of total student population in the world was affected due to the pandemic during the initial phase of its outbreak. Assessment of COVID-19 is very much essential in every sector as it has influenced every sphere of life almost in every possible way. The impact assessment need to take care of direct impact in various sector as well as its indirect repercussion to get the exactness which seems to be an impossible task for the researchers of the globe. To talk about education; this is the biggest sector that has been adversely affected by this pandemic and at the same time this sector is vital to shape the future.

General Covid scenario in India

The story of Covid-19 started Wuhan, China and then it gradually started spreading in other parts of the world. In India, the first affected case of Covid-19 was detected on 30 January 2020 in the state of Kerala and the affected had a travel history from Wuhan, China. In India, the first death was reported on March 12, 2020 .The guidelines that were issued by the WHO which were ratified by the most of the countries across the world compelled the governments to shut down the institutions of mass gatherings. So along with the educational institutions the academic year end exams and also competitive exams were postponed indefinitely. This step was taken in order to slow down and contain the spread of Corona virus in India by segregating the people who were infected with COVID-19.(TariSiddesh 2021). On dated 20thJanuary 2021 the total no of person infected by the virus is 339,666,049 and no of death recorded is 5,584,394. (Worldometer). This figure may not be exact though officially recorded presents the magnitude of the health crisis.The world is struggling with the new variant OMICRON and more alarming is nobody knows where the chain is going to get terminated and which will be the exact timeline for that

In India the Government experimented with *Janta* Curfew for a day on March 22, 2020 to combat the Coronavirus pandemic and assess the country's ability to fight the virus. Then, the 1st phase of lockdown was announced by the Prime Minister on March 25, 2020 for 21 days to break the chain to stop the spreading. Monitoring the effects of the virus, Indian Government had extended the lockdown period in different phases and the lockdown 5.0 was declared on April 30 which is effective from 1st June to 30th June 2020. In all the phases of lockdown starting from lockdown1.0 to lockdown 5.0, the educational institutions throughout the nation have never got any relaxation to start their

educational activities (Jena Pravat Kumar 2020). Thus, pandemic Covid-19 impacted significantly on the education sector.The complete face of global education has been changed. It led to unexpected shift of education from classroom teaching to the online mode that has affected the complete teaching and learning process in Universities, colleges and schools and thus it has meaningfully unsettled the higher education segment in India. This swing in education has brought a great change in the design of learning with a degree of definite positive and negative effects. So ultimately in this process all the educational institutions experienced a huge setback in India. All the educational institutions in India had to be close down that is rom the primary schools to the universities. The regular classes were suspended to ensure zero threat to the lives of the learners and the teachers. It also affected the lives of the aspirants who were preparing for competitive & entrance exams.

Impact of Covid: A global educational perspective

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 32 crores of students have been affected by the various restrictions and the nationwide lockdown for Covid-19 (Wikipedia). Most Governments around the world have temporarily closed educational institutions in an attempt to control the spread of the pandemic Covid-19. This worldwide closure has impacted drastically the world's student population. 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. A large number of Indian students who are enrolled in many Universities abroad, particularly in worst affected countries are now leaving those countries and if the situation continues, in the long run, there will be a significant decline in the demand for international higher education also. Governments around the world are making efforts to reduce the immediate impact of closure of educational institutions particularly for more susceptible and disadvantaged communities and trying to facilitate the continuity of education for all using different digital modes of learning.

Impact of Covid: In Indian Educational Context

According to a survey report of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India, conducted on higher education it was observed that there are 993 universities, 39931 Colleges and 10725 stand- alone institutions listed on their portal, which contribute to education (KumarDNS, 2020). Even though the country has been adapting to the new-age learning, but there still lies an obstacle in achieving entire success as only 45 crore people of our total population of the country have access to the internet/e-learning. The people residing in rural areas are still very much deprived of the technologies and therefore hampering the cause of online education.

The Covid-19 pandemic taught the entire society on how necessity is the mother of invention by allowing educational institutions to adopt online learning and introduce a virtual learning culture. The pandemic has been steering the education sector forward with technological innovation and advancements. The pandemic has significantly disrupted the higher education sector. Due to Covid-19 both students and teachers are impacted. The students have been affected by losing face-to-face learning at higher educational organizations. Theteachers have been suffered meaningfully by losing their continuity in conventional teaching activity and they have been forced to adopt virtual modality (UNESCO, 2020). Students who are waiting to start their higher education are also getting difficult in choosing the dream institutions. 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 (Jain. K,2020). 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 (Sahu.P,2019). The response from Higher Educational Institutions' is also progressive in its approach and directions to keep the momentum despite all odds created by the pandemic. In India, around 1000 universities and around 40,000 colleges are moving to conduct classes through online (Ramaswamy N. 2020). The MHRD and University Grants Commission have come up with various arrangements by lunching number of virtual platforms with online depositories, e-books and other online teaching/learning materials, educational channels through Direct to Home TV, Radios for both students and teachers to continue the complete teaching - learning process dynamic. Social media platform likeWhatsApp, Zoom, Google meet, Telegram, Youtube live, Facebook live etc. are basically at the forefront for online teaching learning system.ICT initiative of MHRD (e-Boucher- https://mhrd.gov.in/ict- initiatives) is also a unique platform which combines all digital resources for online education (Pravat,2020a). Though there are many problems with online learning, it became survivor during the covid situation in the country. It boosted the digital literacy. Student and teacher across globe started learning and using digital technology. Electronic media becomes the new means used for sharing information worldwide. Students and teacher got good opportunities to interact with different people around the globe improving thecommunication. Students preferred Open and Distance Learning mode of learning as it encourages self-learning. The Higher Educational Institutions' also gave their positive response by adopting different strategies during this crisis situation. The globe comes closer with reference to availability of resources in the education sector. The virtual interaction paves the way for many new experimentation in the field of education challenging the existing practices. Now what next in education sector is the biggest challenge for the policy makers?

However, with the motive of delivering quality education and with the aim of maintaining the standard of higher education, the department of higher education (DHE) India has decided to reopen institutions from 15th October 2020 for the researchers and graduate students to do

laboratory experiments (MyGov.) with the recommendation of online learning. In the process of online learning and teaching, some of the faculty members owing to their age, orientation and scope of exposure 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 Cumulative grade point averages (CGPAs).

The residential institutions particularly suffer a lot. A sample study reflects the drop in the hostel enrolment which causes various kind of problem in the campuses. This leads to shift in overall campus culture, academic ambience, financial loss and loss of job /pay cut for many employees. Along with these impacts it also had its negative repercussion on local vendors as supply chain is broken.

Examination and Covid compulsion

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 (Josh.J,2020) 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. (Savitha,2020). Some other universities like Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University Hyderabad (All JNTU World 2020) 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 March2020 (ITV,2020). So, across the country almost all young graduates are waiting to enter a better care

The Online examinations differ in their modalities leading to non-standardize result across India .In some cases the examinations are technologies driven ensuring greater degree of transparency with Procter system while in some cases it conducted through Email .The examination through Email and greater autonomy to institutions is not expected to be a very standard practice as these institutions are not having the right framework to deal with that. The publication of final results are also based on some theoretical models based on previous performance, internal assessment or some other mechanism. Though in the existing circumstances probably these are the best possible modalities as we don't have any other choice. But all such measures may keep things moving from an administrative perspective but the spirit gets defeated. Certain qualitative sample analysis of performance of students of various wings during this Covid time with the reference to offline mode result of previous years reveals a sharp rise in scoring pattern which is inconsistent with their level of learning.

Conclusion

Development and change is one of the most inevitable aspect of human life .However during the pandemic people had to accept certain instant change as it became necessary for the survival. It encouraged personalized learning which in long run will be beneficial for qualitative teaching and learning process. It also facilitate improvement in collaborative work. The idea of Collaboration is getting prominence in various forms to make teaching-learning more effective giving rise to better outcome.

The existing broader framework of educational ecosystem has to embrace certain corrections and updating to meet the new normal. The prevailing system for internship, research programs etc has to be modified to suit the current situation .In order to ensure transparency Methodology , certification, assessment parameters have to be revised and shall be modified according to the requirements of the current situation keeping in mind the quality benchmark. In order to strengthen the backbone of e-learning the government should come up with the necessary infrastructure at remote places where people don't have access to internet; thereby fixing the internet gap which would facilitate students to learn digitally.

Every state government in India should come up with creative strategies to make the education accessible to each and every student especially for those who come from marginalised, underprivileged and remote sections of the society.

The purpose of education is to enable oneself to better the society and living conditions in which they live. The growing domination of technology today has become need ofan hour and the pandemic push the society to such a zone where use of technology is inevitable.   .It is difficult to visualise colleges and university education without the use of digital resources which has provided different educational and academic information. However it is also necessary to understand that it should not create digital divide between rich and poor to widen the breadth of inequality. In the Indian socio-economic context equitable resource distribution may be far from reality but still then Online mode of learning can be the best mode of teaching if it can be accessed by all the sections of the society however it can pose threat if certain section of society cannot avail this facility and thus exclusion. It is therefore important to take cognizance of online education and plan for interventions that will prioritize greater inclusivity, connectivity and equitability. It is important that colleges and University understands the experience and issues of the students and prepare according the further and design the study pattern in such a way that all students benefits.

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