Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on the Teaching Learning Process in Indian

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 outburst has caused a huge impact on the Indian education system. The sudden closure of schools for a social distancing measure and to prevent community transmission has transferred regular classes to online learning. Students are forced to utilise eLearning tools like mobile phones, laptops are used for the effective student engagement. These tools may have limitations of user-friendliness and affordability for many students. The pandemic has revealed the inadequacies of the current education system. The need for more training of educators in digital technology is required so as to adapt to the rapidly changing education climate of the world. The use of eLearning tools and virtual education may become an essential part of the Indian education system even after pandemic. To ensure students' learning outcomes and standards of educational quality, education institutions need to plan for compatible teaching and learning strategies.

Keywords: COVID-19, education, eLearning, pandemic, teaching-learning

Introduction

COVID-19 virus was reported originally from Wuhan, China in late December 2019 and quickly multiply throughout the world and was declared a pandemic by the WHO on 11th March 2020 (WHO, 2020). The COVID-19 outbreak had a shattering impact on human life and devastated economies around the world (Xiang et al., 2020) with a massive shake to the education systems both in developed and developing countries. The COVID-19 pandemic quickly led to the closure of universities and colleges around the world with government instructions to follow social distancing that could help to roll out the infection curve and reduce total fatalities from the disease. The most important pandemic preventative measure called "social distancing" or "physical distancing" has attempted to reduce interpersonal contact and thereby minimise the kind of community transmission that could develop quickly in impenetrable social networks like the university campus.

Advent of virtual learning- a boon to the world of education

Due to the pandemic lockdown, education institutions are pushed to adapt transformative and a new learning system that is "emergency eLearning" protocol. The shutdown of the campus leads sudden switch from live classroom learning to e-learning. It is just a baby step experiment in the long journey of online education. It requires effective technology which helps students' better learning like live classroom. The educational institutions are in the verge of adapting such tools for educating their children.

The educational institutions are facing a challenge to adapt to this change and trying to choose the right technologies and approaches for educating and engaging their students. It really requires proper guidance and training. The students are rapidly moving to face the transition of face-to-face classes to online learning. The educational institutions will need to pay serious attention to having educators trained and equipped with digital technology for a smooth teaching-learning process.

The government and educational institutions will have to plan for sustained programs for professional development to enrich educators' teaching abilities. The pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities and limitations of the current education systems. Relying on and adapting to eLearning during a pandemic may cause a shift in adopting more online elements in the teaching by the educators. There have many practical problems and limitations, in terms of availability of digital tools for education. There is a vast "digital inequality" that exists in society. All students would not have access to internet connectivity all time and anywhere.

The economically weaker sections are facing affordable problem of accessing virtual learning tools. It is a greater burden for economically weaker sections. The impact of accessibility and affordability can have serious implications on students in education system unless student-friendly government policies are in place which can ensure affordability and accessibility of the internet to students. This may provide insight to the educators and policymakers for the overall improvement of the education systems around the world.

The students face major hurdles with remote learning as they are feeling in face-to-face class. The regular class is more favourable to the learning process. It presents a better chance to sharing knowledge and more interactive (Miliszewska, 2007). The camaraderie and sense of belonging are limited in a virtual class. The students who have less ability to self-regulate or study autonomously struggle with no teacher providing in-person support. The online videos and digital content may not provide a holistic teaching-learning outcome.

 The sudden shift to adapt and implement online learning has led to over-work, stress among the teaching faculty. The educators need to re-imagine modes of curriculum planning, development of e-content, assessment, and reporting which may have been developed without proper planning and forethought. To achieve more focussed learning outcomes and develop effective eLearning methods, educators should be provided with professional independence and ensure clear and concerned communication with all the stakeholders of the education system

This article evaluates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning process across the world. Research highlights certain shortage such as the weakness of infrastructure of the online teaching, the minimal experience of teachers' online teaching, the information gap, the unfavourable learning environment at home. The challenges and opportunities of online and continuing education during the COVID-19 pandemic is discussed.

E-learning tools have played a crucial role during this pandemic, helping the educational institutions facilitate students' learning during the closure of universities and schools (Subedi et al., 2020). While adapting to the new changes, the readiness of staff and student needs to be tested 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 only one pedagogy for online learning. Needs and requires vary for every subject. Different approaches are required for handling different subjects and different age groups of students for online learning (Doucet et al., 2020).

As schools have been closed to cope with the global pandemic, students, parents and educators around the globe have felt the unexpected wave effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. While governments, frontline workers and health officials are doing their best slowing down the outbreak, education systems are trying to continue imparting quality education for all during these complicated situations. Virtual learning allows physically challenged students with more freedom to participate in learning in the On-line flatform, requiring limited movement (Basilaia&Kvavadze, 2020).

 Most of the students at home have undergone psychological and emotional distress and have been unable to engage productively. The best practices for online learning are yet to be explored (Petrie, 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 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.

The flipped classroom is a simple strategy for providing learning resources such as articles, pre-recorded videos and YouTube links before the class. The online classroom time is then used to deepen understanding through discussion with faculty and peers (Doucet et al., 2020). This is a very effective way of encouraging skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking and self-directed learning. The virtual classroom platforms like videoconferencing (Google Hangouts Meet, Zoom, Slack, Cisco, WebEx) and customizable cloud-based learning management platforms such as Elias, Moodle, BigBlueButton and Skype are increasingly being used.

Challenges in online platform Teaching and Learning

Broadly identified challenges with e-learning are accessibility, affordability, flexibility, learning pedagogy, life-long learning and educational policy (Murgatrotd, 2020). Many states in India have substantial issues with a reliable Internet connection and access to e-tools. In most of the regions, the economically backward children are unable to meet the expense of online learning devices. Lack of parental guidance, especially for young learners, is another challenge, as both parents are working. The increased screen exposure poses a risk of falling physical illness for the learner. Therefore, it has become essential for students to engage in offline activities and self-exploratory learning. There are practical issues around physical workspaces conducive to different ways of learning. The innately motivated learners need minimum supervision and guidance are relatively unaffected. Some academically competent learners from economically disadvantaged background are unable to access and afford online learning. The level of academic performance of the students is likely to drop for the classes held for both year-end examination and internal examination due to reduced contact hour for learners and lack of consultation with teachers when facing difficulties in learning/understanding (Sintema, 2020).

Student assessments are carried out online, with a lot of trial and error, uncertainty and confusion among the teachers, students and parents. The approach adopted to conduct online examination varies as per the convenience and expertise among the educators and the compatibility of the learners. Appropriate measures to check plagiarism is yet to be put in place in many schools and institutions mainly due to the large number of student population. The lockdown of schools and colleges has not only affected internal assessments and examinations.

In the case of online learning, majority of the learners are from rural villages where parents are mostly illiterate farmers. Students are engaged in assisting parents in farm activities such as agriculture, rearing cattle and assisting household chores. Some students even requested to postpone exam time towards the afternoon since they had to work on the fields during morning time Majority of students do not have access to smartphones or TV at home in addition to poor Internet connectivity. Online face-to-face classes can be monitorable. The teachers are in dilemma as to whom to listen to and

which tools to adopt. Some think pre-recorded videos could help; however, this would restrict interactions. It is difficult to design a proper system to fit the learning needs and convenience of all students.

Scope for online teaching learning during pandemic

There have been irresistible hurdles for educators, schools, institutes and the government regarding online education. It has increased a strong connection between teachers and parents than ever before. The homeschooling requires parents to support the students' learning academically. Children with disabilities need additional and special support during this ongoing process. The use of online platforms such as Google Classroom, virtual learning environment, Zoom and various forums like Telegram, Messenger, WeCha and WhatsApp are searched and implemented for teaching and learning.

Teachers are required to develop creative initiatives that help to triumph over the limitations of virtual teaching. Teachers are actively collaborating with one another at a local level to improve online teaching methods. There are unparalleled opportunities for cooperation, creative solutions and willingness to learn from others and try new tools as educators, parents and students share similar experiences (Doucet et al., 2020). Many educational organizations are offering their tools and solutions for free to help and support teaching and learning in a more interactive and engaging environment. Online learning has provided the opportunity to teach and learn in innovative ways unlike the teaching and learning experiences in the normal classroom setting.

Discussion

In order to satisfy the need of online platform, pedagogy used for face-to-face learning needs to be restructured and strengthened. Teachers must be professionally and technically qualified and they are given orientation for authentic assessment and evaluation. A very crucial part of online distance learning is the availability of helpful formative assessments and timely feedback to the online learners (Doucet et al., 2020). This is found to be challenging for the educators and the education system. It is more challenging for handling the larger class strength, lack of online teaching infrastructure and professional development, and non-participative nature of the students. Domestic violence and child abuse are on the rise as the perpetrators are many a time at home or in the neighbourhood, which is a mental distraction and threat to the learners (Ravichandran & Shah, 2020).

The affordability and accessibility to these online infrastructures for all the learners of varied economic backgrounds are still a challenge. Students with special needs having learning difficulties, such as hearing impairment, visual impairment and mobility disabilities, require additional training with support and guidance. Many caregivers and parents at home are not able to cater to such needs, hindering the learning of this group of learners. Therefore, there is a need for investing time and resources to explore and research the best alternatives for the special educational needs (SEN) of these learners. As all students' assignments and examinations are carried out from home, it is challenging for educators to find the authenticity of the work and the actual learning taking place. Moreover, many parents guide and support their children during their learning process and the extent and degree of support varies greatly.

Conclusion

The study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning across the world concludes that although various studies have been carried out, in the case of developing countries, suitable pedagogy and platform for different class levels of higher secondary, middle and primary education need to be explored further. Policy-level intervention is required to improve this situation. Further exploration and investigation on effective pedagogy for online teaching and learning is an area for research. Need for developing tools for authentic assessments and timely feedback is found to be another area of study. The affordability and accessibility for all the learners of varied economic background is identified as a challenge, for which the educational tools developer could focus on customization. The policy level intervention is also vital. Making online teaching creative, innovative and interactive through user-friendly tools is the other area of research and development. This would assist and prepare the education system for such uncertainties in the future. The lesson learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic is that teachers and students/ learners should be oriented on use of different online educational tools. After the COVID-19 pandemic when the normal classes resume, teachers and learners are encouraged to continue using such online tools to enhance teaching and learning. Students should be oriented to come out of the addiction of smartphones and digital platforms. The government and the educational authorities must give importance of protecting the mental as well as physical health of the future generation.

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