

## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HIGHER EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

**Dr. G M Hugar**

Assistant Professor of Economics,  
C.S.I. College of Commerce, Dharwad  
Karnatak University, Dharwad  
Mob: 8494906566  
dr.gmhugar@gmail.com

### Abstract

*Pandemic Covid-19 has severely affected the total educational system of India as well as the globe. It has created an unprecedented test on education. In many educational institutions around the world, campuses are closed and teaching-learning has moved online. Internationalization has slowed down considerably. In India, about 32 crore learners stopped to move schools/colleges and all educational activities brought to an end. Despite of all these challenges, the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have reacted positively and managed to ensure the continuity of teaching-learning, research and service to the society with some tools and techniques during the pandemic.*

*According to a report of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India conducted a survey on higher education and observed that there are 993 universities, 39931 Colleges and 10725 Stand Alone Institutions listed on their portal, which contribute to education. These institutions further reflect the student density of India as the total enrolments in higher education every year are nearly 37.4 million, reflecting the expanding horizons of the education industry. The sector was seen catching pace by the passing day until Corona virus impacted the country intensely.*

*The current pandemic is not only seen affecting the health of the citizens in the country but is also seen hindering various industries and shaking them to their roots. The national lockdown and the ascending health crisis were striking the education of the students as well, with their universities being shut and their syllabi stranded, until the industry decided to initiate a revolution instead. The educational reform in India in the COVID-19 era seems to be a live example of how need truly is the mother of invention or reinvention, in this scenario. Allowing educational institutions to adopt online learning and infuse a virtual study culture, the pandemic is already steering the sector forward with technological innovation and advancements.*

**Keywords:** Covid-19, higher education, impact, challenges, opportunities, online education

### INTRODUCTION

The spread of pandemic Covid-19 has drastically disrupted every aspects of human life including education. It has created an unprecedented test on education. In many educational institutions around the world, campuses are closed and teaching-learning has moved online. Internationalization has slowed down considerably. In India, about 32 crore learners stopped to move schools/colleges and all educational activities brought to an end. Despite of all these challenges, the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have reacted positively and managed to ensure the continuity of teaching-learning, research and service to the society with some tools and techniques during the pandemic.

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. A large number of Indian students who are enrolled in many Universities abroad, especially in worst affected countries are now leaving those countries and if the situation persists, in the long run, there will be a significant decline in the demand for international higher education also.

### OBJECTIVES

1. The present study is focused on the following objectives

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2. Highlight the impact of Covid-19 on higher education sector.
3. To enlighten the various challenges and opportunities
4. Giving few suggestions for continuing educational activities

### METHODOLOGY

Various reports of national and international agencies on Covid-19 pandemic are searched to collect data for current study. Information is being collected from different authentic websites, journals and e-contents relating to impact of Covid-19 on higher educational system.

### IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HIGHER EDUCATION:

Covid-19 pandemic-impacted higher education will be different mainly in the mode of teaching and evaluation. Nationally there was a call for a de facto switch to virtual teaching, learning and evaluation, pushing a huge number of teachers into an unfamiliar mode. Online mode, formerly allowed only in open universities and varsities graded 3.5 onwards, is now licensed for all universities to run their UG and PG programmes accordingly.

It appears that the contingent situation will predictably divide higher education institutions into two types: a) covering humanities and social sciences taught informally through virtual mode, less expensive and meant for liberal arts and social sciences and (b) covering pure sciences professional disciplines excluding law. Virtual higher education can never match the one imparted through campus-based real classroom that is distinct for various critical aspects of rigorous learning. Students of eminent universities enjoy the advantage of in-face interactive learning distinct for criticality and creativity of the campus.

### IMMEDIATE POST-PANDEMIC CHANGE

The immediate post-pandemic change in campus-based education will be behavioural, distinct for physical distancing, masking and sanitising; bringing about rearrangements in classroom, library, laboratory, common rooms and just about everywhere. In the given situation all this will be formally insisted upon, but as mere rhetoric implying the real to be inevitably dubious. A likely development is the operation of the new time schedule, enabling the execution of the 'Earn While You Learn Scheme.' Several interdisciplinary programmes in emerging areas, hoping better employability will be in vogue as offered in blended mode.

### CONSEQUENCES

Online teaching and evaluation, pushed as a new normal under the pretext of the pandemic crisis, upset objectives of access, equity and excellence in the higher education sector. About 30 per cent of students at home under lockdown are not able to access online lessons due to lack of internet connectivity. Further, a massive shift to online mode will be tantamount to making one-third of the teaching faculty redundant, a strategy likely to be adopted for public expenditure cut under the crony-capitalist setup.

Quality of the post-Covid higher education will slump further both on the campus under a behavioral shambles and in online devoid of professionalism. What teachers now practice by way of online is carrying drudgery of real to the virtual. It is not smart classroom teaching rendered as podcast. Virtual teaching is not a substitute for the Real that has all the exclusive advantages of being real. The Covid induced virtual mode will bring about several transformations in the concept of higher education institutions, their clientele and practices. Competence in teaching, learning and evaluation will be e-competence. Likewise, learning outcome will be computational, teaching ICT-linked, evaluation online, quality e-competency related, access technology dependent and equity a mere rhetoric.

### PROFESSIONAL ONLINE

Differences between online and classroom teaching are not merely confined to the medium and environment. There are differences in the art or science of teaching, designing learning outcomes, techniques of communication, ways of facilitating learning and methods of evaluation. It is important for teachers to be formally accustomed to the art, science and methods of ICT-based pedagogy to become effective in virtual teaching.

## EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

Most of the external examinations have been postponed and almost all the internal assessments have been cancelled. The cancellation of assessments has negative impact on students' learning. Many institutions have been managing the internal assessments through online mode

## REDUCED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Many entrance tests job recruitments got cancelled which created negative impact with a great challenge in the life of a student of higher education. The Indians who have been doing their jobs abroad became upset of their job withdrawal also. In India, there is no recruitment in Govt. sector and fresh graduates are in pressure of fearing withdrawal of job offers from corporate sectors because of the pandemic situation. Many students may lose their jobs from India and overseas. The pass out students may not get their job outside India due to various restrictions caused by Covid-19. All these facts imply towards increase of unemployment rate due to this pandemic.

## ONLINE AS THE NEW NORMAL:

Hailed as a more effective, quick and less expensive mode, online teaching/learning is being given precedence over the campus mode as the new normal. It has been suggested that a single podcast at the national level hosting the entire course material for smart teaching can ensure quality. Now, there is the UGC platform called SWAYAM offering several open online courses.

## LONG-TERM IMPACT:

As for the long-term impact, interdisciplinary academic programmes will rank the foremost. Disciplines will increasingly draw closer to one another in the wake of the emergence of more and more cross-disciplinary areas of knowledge. Blurring of disciplinary borders in higher education will demand cross-disciplinary literacy among teachers and adaptability among students. Growth of sciences through narrow specialisations, in their turn becoming sub-disciplines of added rigidity, will force the break of disciplinary silos and allow flexibility of choice in specialisation across disciplines. Higher education will become more and more personal and self-directed -- rather than general -- and institutionally administered through fixed requirements and procedures.

## CHALLENGES:

The spread of the novel corona virus has rapidly upended the higher education system. Students have vacated their dorms, classes are moving online, and graduation ceremonies have gone virtual. Yet beyond the public health considerations, colleges and universities face myriad challenges that could fundamentally alter the nation's higher education landscape. As the economic fallout of COVID-19 unfolds, policymakers should carefully consider how federal policy can best address these challenges.

## QUALITY CONCERNS FOR LEARNING:

Movement toward remote learning has raised questions about the value of online education. Media outlets have reported on the fundamental challenges facing students, many of whom do not have access to the technology or a high-speed internet connection needed to complete their coursework. Just over 15% students were enrolled in fully online programs.  
Inefficiencies Surrounding Credit Transfers

## PASSIVE LEARNING BY STUDENTS:

The sudden shift to online learning without any planning, especially in countries like India the backbone for online learning was not ready and the curriculum was not designed for such format. Most of our students becoming passive learners and they seem to be losing interest due to low levels of attention span. Added to this is that we may be leaving a large proportion of the student population untouched due to the digital divide that is part of many developing nations including India. We are now beginning to realize that online learning could be dull as it is creating a new set of passive learners which can pose new challenges.

## UNPREPARED TEACHERS FOR ONLINE EDUCATION:

Online learning is a special kind of methodology and not all teachers are good at it or at least not all of them were ready for this sudden transition from face to face learning to online learning. Thus, most of the teachers are just conducting lectures on video platforms such as Zoom which may not be real online learning in the absence of a dedicated online platform specifically designed for the purpose.

## CHANGING FORMAT OF STUDENT RECRUITMENT:

Universities and colleges worldwide are facing a major risk in the area of student recruitment and retention. The risk of losing students is so high that they will need to re-look at their admission practices, admission criteria and the overall recruitment process itself which will include, new methods of outreach and application process itself.

### **Declining Institutional Revenues:**

COVID-19 has placed enormous pressure on institutions' balance sheets, Colleges and universities are highly dependent on tuition revenues to fund their operating budgets, but surveys suggest that college students are unlikely to enroll this fall. These enrollment declines would leave the system with an estimated \$23 billion shortfall for the coming academic year.

### **Deteriorating Financial Circumstances among the Students:**

Around half of high school seniors and current college students report that the virus has impacted their family's financial situation, which means many students will likely need more aid than originally anticipated. This will put further pressure on institutional resources.

### **Administrative challenges.**

Large-scale implementation would pose an administrative burden, not to mention significant action and advocacy on the part of students who must initiate this review them self.

### **Opportunities**

Any change that is so disruptive is also likely to bring with it some new opportunities that will transform the higher education system worldwide and especially in a country like India which is planning to bring about a planned reform in this sector.

### **Rise in Blended Learning:**

Universities and colleges will shift to a model of blended learning where both face to face deliveries along with an online model will become a norm. This will require all teachers to become more technology savvy and go through some training to bring them self to the level that would be required.

### **Learning management systems to be the new norm:**

A great opportunity will open up for those companies that have been developing and strengthening learning management systems for use by universities and colleges.

This has the potential to grow at a very fast pace but will have to be priced appropriately for use by all institutions.

### **Improvement in learning material:**

There is a great opportunity for universities and colleges to start improving the quality of the learning material that is used in the teaching and learning process. Since blended learning will be the new format of learning there will be a push to find new ways to design and deliver quality content especially due to the fact that the use of learning management systems will bring about more openness and transparency in academics.

### **Rise in collaborative work:**

The teaching community to a large extent has been much insulated and more so in a country like India. There is a new opportunity where collaborative teaching and learning can take on new forms and can even be monetized.

### **Massive rise in teleconferencing opportunities:**

It is expected that there will be a massive rise in teleconferencing opportunities which can also have a negative impact on the travel. A large number of academic meetings, seminars and conferences will move online and there is a possibility that some new form of an online conferencing platform will emerge as a business model.

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## SUGGESTIONS

1. Policy should be adopted by Government/educational institutions to provide free internet and free digital gadgets to all learners in order to encourage online learning as a result of which people would get engaged and remain safe during pandemic.
2. Immediate measures are required to lessen the effects of the pandemic on job offers, internship programs, and research projects.
3. Many online learning platforms offer multiple programmes on the same subjects with different levels of certifications, methodology and assessment parameters. So, the quality of programmes may differ across different online learning platforms. Therefore,
4. Establishment of quality assurance mechanisms and quality benchmark for online learning programmes must be developed
5. Educators and learners should be trained to utilise online teaching learning process using technology.

## CONCLUSION

Although the long-term impact of COVID-19 on higher education remains to be seen, it is clear that we are entering a new reality characterized by increased reliance on technology and elevated financial pressures on both students and institutions. Policymakers should examine these critical issues and work in a bipartisan manner to ensure that the system has adequate resources and provides quality outcomes for students.

The spread of the novel corona virus has rapidly upended the higher education system. Students have vacated their dorms, classes are moving online, and graduation ceremonies have gone virtual. Yet beyond the public health considerations, colleges and universities face myriad challenges that could fundamentally alter the nation's higher education landscape. As the economic fallout of COVID-19 unfolds, policymakers should carefully consider about how federal policy can best address these challenges

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