

## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HIGHER EDUCATION – CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

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### Abstract

*The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many sectors to shift their bases online including education, where numerous schools and colleges have started teaching their students through online platforms all across the world. In India, however, the story in terms of online education tends to vary as compared to rest of the world. The different reasons contributing to how the Indian system differs from the other countries. Covid-19 has created an unprecedented test on education. In many educational institutions around the world, campuses are closed and teaching-learning has moved online. 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. This article highlights on major impacts of Covid-19 on HEIs in India and challenges and responses of academicians. Some measures taken by HEIs and educational authorities of India to provide seamless educational services during the crisis are discussed. Due to Covid-19 pandemic, many new modes of learning, new perspectives, new trends are emerged and the same may continue as we go ahead to a new tomorrow. So, some of the post Covid-19 trends which may allow imagining new ways of teaching learning of higher education in India are outlined. Some fruitful suggestions are also pointed to carry out educational activities during the pandemic situation.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19, problems, Impact, HEIs, Huddles, Challenges, Responses, Spring.

### INTRODUCTION :

On March 11, 2020 World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid-19 as a pandemic. Covid-19 has affected more than 4.5 million peoples worldwide (WHO). 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 (Wikipedia). In India, the first death was reported on March 12, 2020 and the nation observed Janta Curfew for a day on March 22, 2020. India again observed 14 hours Janta Curfew on March 24 to combat the Corona virus 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. Monitoring the effects of the virus, Indian Government has been extending 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 lockdown 1.0 to lockdown 5.0, the educational institutions throughout the nation have never got any relaxation to start their educational activities. Thus, pandemic Covid-19 impacted significantly on the education sector. According to the UNESCO report, Covid-19 has affected nearly 68% of total world's student population as per the data taken during 1<sup>st</sup> 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. This paper highlights the impact of Covid-19 on higher education sector and enlightens various challenges, responses and emerging approaches of India for higher education.

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## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Pandemic Covid-19 has severely affected the total educational system of India as well as the globe but some of the most impacted areas of higher education of India are as pointed below:

- 1. Destabilized all educational activities:** Outbreak of Covid-19 has compelled lockdown in every sector including education. The institutions got closed with cease of educational activities and created many challenges for the stake holders (Pravat, 2020a). So, the various activities like admission, examinations, entrance tests, competitive examinations conducted by various boards/schools/colleges/ universities are postponed. Many entrance tests for higher study got cancelled which created a great challenge in the life of a student of higher education. The primary challenge was to continue teaching learning process when students, faculties and staff could no longer be physically present on the campuses. The obvious solution for the institutions was to depend online teaching learning. However, within a relatively short time, HEIs have been able to provide support to the students through online modes. Covid-19 has accelerated adoption of digital technologies to deliver education. It encouraged all teachers and students to become more technology savvy. The HEIs have started conducting orientation programmes, induction meetings and counseling classes with the help of different e-conferencing tools like Google Meet, Skype, Youtube live, Facebook live, WebEx etc. to provide support services to the students. This initiative has taken to create an effective virtual environment of teaching learning and to create motivation among students for online activities. The teachers and students improved the use of electronic media for sharing information by making use of WhatsApp, Google drive, Telegram, Twitter etc.
- 2. Mixed impact on Academic research & Professional Development:** Covid-19 has both negative and positive impacts on research. If we take the negative side, it has made impossible for researchers to travel and work together with others nationally and internationally. Some joint research work or project work are made complicated to complete. Some scientific laboratory testing/research work could not be conducted. If we look at the positive side, academicians got much time to improve their theoretical research work. Academicians got acquainted with technological methods and improved their research. Webinars and e-conferences became normal methods for sharing expertise among students and academicians around the globe with similar issues. They could get much time to concentrate on professional development by doing research and to improve knowledge by sharing ideas through webinars and e-conferences.
- 3. Severely affected the 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 using different digital tools but the postponement of the external assessments, has a direct impact on the educational and occupational future of students' life. This uncertainty has created anxiety among students as they are stuck in the same grade/class without promotion. Similarly, many students who had appeared final/board examinations would suffer a lot as by the time they get their certificates, it might be too late for them to apply for the forthcoming academic year in other countries due to lockdown.
- 4. 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. With increase of unemployment situation, the interest for education may gradually decrease as people struggle for food rather than education.

### EMERGING APPROACHES OF INDIA FOR HIGHER EDUCATION DURING

#### COVID-19

Many challenges are created by Covid-19. The HEIs have responded positively and adopted various strategies to face the crisis during the pandemic. The Government of India has also taken number of preventive measures to prevent spread of pandemic Covid-19. The MHRD and University Grants Commission (UGC) have made several arrangements by launching of many virtual platforms with online depositories, e-books and other online teaching/learning materials, educational channels through Direct to Home TV, Radios for students to continue their learning. Some of the digital initiatives of UGC & MHRD for higher education during COVID-19 are pointed as below:

- **e-GyanKosh** (<http://egyankosh.ac.in/>) is a National Digital Repository to store and share the digital learning resources which is developed by the Open and Distance Learning Institutions of India. Items in eGyanKosh are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved by Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU).
- **Gyandarshan** (<http://www.ignouonline.ac.in/gyandarshan/>) 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 society.
- **Gyandhara** (<http://ignouonline.ac.in/Gyandhara/>) is an internet audio counseling service offered by IGNOU. It is a web radio where students can listen to the live discussions by the teachers and experts on the topic of the day and interact with them through telephone, email ([gyandhara@ignou.ac.in](mailto:gyandhara@ignou.ac.in)) and through chat mode.
- **Swayam** provides Massive Open Online Courses(MOOCs) with 140 universities approved credit transfer feature. Swayam Prabha provides high quality educational programs through 32 DTH channels transmitting educational contents. e-PG Pathshala (<https://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/>) is for postgraduate students. Postgraduate students can access this platform for e-books, online courses and study materials. The details of these three digital platforms are described by the author in the previous paper (Pravat, 2020b).
- **e-Adhyayan** (e-Books) is a platform that provides 700+ e-Books for the Post-Graduate courses. All the e-Books are derived from e-PG Pathshala courses. It also facilitates play-list of video content.
- **e-Pathya** (Offline Access) is one the verticals of e-PG Pathshala which is software driven course/content package that facilitates students pursuing higher education (PG level) in distance learning as well as campus learning mode. It also facilitates offline access.
- **FOSSEE** (<https://fossee.in/>) is short form for Free/Libre and Open Source Software for Education, which is developed to promote open source software for education as well as professional use.
- **Virtual Labs** (<http://www.vlab.co.in/>) has developed web-enabled curriculum based experiments designed for remote operation. It has over 100 Virtual Labs consisting of approximately 700+ web-enabled experiments which are designed for remote-operation. It provides remote-access to Labs in various disciplines of Science and Engineering. These Virtual Labs caters to students at the undergraduate level, post graduate level as well as to research scholars.
- **e-ShodhSindhu** (<https://ess.inflibnet.ac.in/>) is a collection of e-journals, e-journal archives and e-books on long-term access basis. It has 10,000+ e-journals, 31,35,000+ e-books. It provides access to qualitative electronic resources including full-text, bibliographic and factual databases to academic institutions at a lower rate of subscription.
- **National Educational Alliance for Technology (NEAT)** (<https://neat.aicte-india.org/>) is an initiative for skilling of learners in latest technologies through a Public-Private partnership model between the Government (through its implementing agency AICTE) and the Education Technology companies of India.

### MAIN CHALLENGES OF TEACHING

It has been a challenging period of time for all teachers, all around the world. We cannot deny that fact. All of a sudden, and because of something that is totally out of our control, students are learning remotely and both educators and administrators are in the permanent search of new tools and paths to face challenges they

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haven't faced before.

#### **(A) Isolation**

Learning from home can be lonely. Without the buzz of the classroom setting and the company of their peers, it's no surprise that some students can begin to feel a strong sense of isolation that slowly erodes their desire to learn.

Despite what they say, many students will find that they *miss* school when the alternative is to be desk-bound at home.

Isolation can also undermine many of the instructional strategies that we take for granted in our classrooms. Group work, class discussion and collaborative activity can disappear from the program entirely if we aren't careful, and with them go the associated levels of student engagement and rich learning that those experiences provide.

Thankfully, there are a few things you can do to maintain the classroom dynamic and keep things personable in a digital environment. Here's a few:

- **Coordinate virtual group activities** using chats, discussion boards or cloud tools for collaboration.
- **Show your face and let students hear your voice**, using video or audio recordings. Don't let yourself become a robot who only communicates via text.
- **Schedule regular check ins with students** via email or chat, if you have the capacity. Pay attention to those at risk of disengagement in particular.

#### **(B) Lack of motivation in online learners**

As hard as distance teaching might be for us, it's likely even harder for our students. They've gone from classrooms explicitly designed to support learning, to bedrooms and kitchen tables where distractions are plentiful and expert support isn't always on hand. It's no surprise that more than a few will be tempted to opt out.

**Clear, measurable goals are the best source of motivation.** Set them regularly so that students have something to focus on. Instead of setting an open-ended task and leaving them to it — as can be the temptation when you aren't in the same room — clearly specify:

- the time students should spend on the task
- a measurable or quantifiable outcome ('each person needs to find five facts on x')
- a means of accountability ('these need to be onto our share platform so that everyone else can see')
- a due date.

#### **(C) Technical difficulties with online teaching tools**

Developments in EdTech over the past decade have made the prospect of distance teaching a lot less daunting, but there are still issues that you need to be aware of.

**Assess whether your students have reliable access to technology** before you even start. Not every home will always have a reliable internet connection or readily available device for students to use. An initial email, message or text to parents will give them the opportunity to flag these issues so that you can prepare to accommodate such students ahead of time.

It's also important to remember that, for all the talk of our students being 'digital natives', many of them aren't that proficient when it comes to tackling unfamiliar software or using it in a responsible manner. An initial 'onboarding' session for students is therefore a good idea, and you should consider giving parents a brief orientation too via email.

#### **(D) Time-consuming resources**

When you can no longer just stand in front of your class and *teach*, you have to rely on resources to do the job for you. And those take time to create.

Even your verbal instructions will have to be translated into crystal clear written documents that all students can access and understand. It's a bit like planning a relief lesson for a day off; with all the time that goes into planning material for someone else to deliver, you end up thinking it would require less effort to just take the class yourself.

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### (E)Setting and forgetting online learning activities

Students aren't the only ones who might feel diminished accountability in a distance education setting. It can be a struggle for teachers too.

Stripped of the face time and classroom environments that inform so much of our job, it can be easy to revert to 'set and forget' mode, assigning some work online and just hoping for the best.

### CONCLUSION:

This study has outlined various impacts of Covid-19 on higher education in India. The recent pandemic created an opportunity for change in pedagogical approaches and introduction of virtual education in all levels of education. All service providers need to be mobilized to provide proper access to the educational service platforms to the disadvantaged groups of population also. 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.

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