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COVID 19 opportunities and challenges

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic posed an unprecedented disruption to the higher education system in India and worldwide. This study explores both the challenges and emerging opportunities created by the crisis, particularly with respect to the transition to digital education. The main objective of the study is to evaluate the impact of the pandemic on higher education institutions (HEIs), students, faculty, and policy, and to identify adaptive measures and future implications.

The methodology involves a comprehensive review of national and international reports, including surveys conducted by the International Association of Universities (IAU) and data from the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE). The study further examines government policies, especially those from the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and the University Grants Commission (UGC), along with anecdotal evidence from educational institutions.

The findings reveal that while digital transformation in education has gained momentum, numerous challenges persist. These include inadequate digital infrastructure, poor internet connectivity, irregular power supply, limitations in delivering practical and technical education, and issues related to language diversity, examinations, admissions, and placements. Financial constraints and decreased government funding further complicate the situation. Despite these hurdles, the pandemic catalyzed the use of online tools, webinars, and digital platforms, promoting innovation and skill development among faculty and students alike.

The study concludes that the pandemic, while disruptive, has accelerated digitalization in Indian higher education. If harnessed effectively, this shift could lead to long-term improvements in educational quality, inclusivity, and global competitiveness. Strategic investments, infrastructure development, and policy support are essential to sustain this transformation.

Keywords: COVID-19, higher education, digital learning, online teaching, educational challenges, India, NEP 2020, infrastructure, policy reforms

Introduction

Many international and national agencies including International Association of Universities is closely monitoring the impacts of COVID-19 on higher education. IAU is an independent global NGO created in 1950 and associated with UNESCO conducted a survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education. The main aim is to identify the major challenges universities and other higher education institutions face in short-medium and long term and help them to develop solution.

According to the AISHE Report of 2018-19, total 993 universities and 39931 Colleges along with 10725 stand alone institutions contribute higher education in the country. These institutions were providing higher education to more than 4 crore students. Total enrolments in higher education every year is nearly 37.4 million. It reflects the expanding horizons of the education industry. This sector also intensely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in the country as well as whole planet (AISHE, 2019) ^[1].

This pandemic is not only affecting the health of the people but is also deterring various industries in our country. The national lockdown and ascending economic and health crisis were striking the whole education industry including students, universities and colleges being shut, syllabi were stranded and loss of the academic year. Classroom are becoming virtual and admission for the upcoming academic session is in full of confusion (DNS Kumar, 2020) ^[2].

As per the guidelines of the MHRD and UGC, universities adopted digitalisation in the sector.

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Educational reforms through enforcing digitalisation is the example of how need truly is the mother of invention. All the educational institutions adopted online teaching learning process. Online technology was used to complete syllabus of the previous session. Even during this lockdown period, all the stake holders of the industry make them ready by organising various Webinars, FDPs, Refresher Courses, Workshops, Online talks, online Quiz etc. Many teachers have developed themselves to learn many tools which are used for the teaching and learning Like google classroom, Moodle, Edmodo, google meet, Zosom, Jio, Webex, etc. This overvaluing response shows that it may be very difficult to get a single faculty who do not have attend any singly webinar or online lecture during this pandemic situation. Adopting online learning and virtual study culture indicate advancement and technological innovation in education sector.

This is not that first time we are adopting online culture in education

It was adopted in many areas. Recent education policies were advocating for the use of ICT and digital platform in education. Online platform was used for teaching and learning process by the private and government institutes also. Many tests of the competitive exam are conducted online, government has started many educational online channels, NET, SET are conducted through online mode, even MHRD has started online courses and refresher courses through various platforms. Students and teachers are giving massive response to this transformation.

India has different types of diversities i.e. geographic, economic, social or natural. We have technical limitations also. This should be considered while choosing any online or virtual mode of teaching. Virtual classroom may be good opportunity to students specially from the remote areas. Last couple of years we have already started the use of the online or virtual classroom with the help of various digital platforms. Presently we are using various platforms like online ratio channels, television channels, National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER), SWAYAM, SWAYAM Prabha, DIKSHA, You Tube channels etc. We are also using many conference apps for the online teaching purpose such as JIO Meet, Google Meet, Zoom, Webex, YouTube live, Facebook live and many more. While using this apps biggest challenges is of high bandwidth connectivity. There should be smooth and regular internet connectivity. This is one of the biggest obstacles in virtual classroom.

Challenges of Higher Education

Challenge can be a new opportunity. Higher education is going to be a sudden change which are adopted by all the colleges and universities. This is going to be a new normal situation of the higher education during post pandemic. Due to disparities in many ways it is not easy to adopt online teaching all over the country. Some of them are discussed here.

Well-equipped facilities and faculties

Many higher education institutions are providing facilities in rural area. One of the biggest challenges in the rural area is ask of good internet connectivity with all the facilities for online teaching. In urban areas also we are facing the problem of connectivity and without connectivity online

teaching will not be possible. Apart from these, faculties should also have intellectual capabilities to do online teaching.

Smooth Power Supply

One of the important requirements of the online teaching is regular power supply. At present we are unable to provide 24x7 power supply in many rural areas. In-fact in some villages are not fully electrified. This is also a biggest challenge of online teaching in India.

Diversity in teaching language

India is full of diversity in many ways. One of the problems encountered by the higher education is that disciplines of higher education (Humanities, Social Science, Science, Commerce etc.), Languages, Mode of communications, Reading Material and Methods of classroom teaching, These are of different nature in different areas. This will be very difficult to overcome this problem. Recently government of India has adopted New Education Policy 2020. But this will take some time for proper implementation.

Practical and Technical Courses

Another challenge of online teaching is limitation of practical and technical courses. Some subjects specially from sciences required practical in laboratory. Practical classes are necessary for these subjects and without practical, online education system would fail. On the other hand, in technical courses as requirement of the subjects, students must have to complete internships. But during lockdown this will not be possible for the students.

Many Students will Stay Home

As per the report, India is second largest source of International students in the world. This is going to be change at least in the coming few years due to travel restrictions and health risks at all over the globe. Government and students have spent crores of rupees and resources on foreign education. After completion of education, students start working in foreign countries and transfer remittances in our country. This is going to affect badly in the coming years.

Issues related to exam, admission and placements

Due to sudden lockdown all academic activities have been stopped, Regular teaching was stopped and moved to online mode. After 5 months, we are unable to overcome this situation all the regular academic activities are held up. All the students except final year were promoted to next semester, but still their result is not declared and students are waiting for the admission. Government is also unable to take concrete decision on the final year exams. Authorities also unable to take decision on other exam, related activities like, practical exam, internal assessment, Open Viva Voce examination, evaluation of answer scripts, announcement of results and other important submission related to exam. Many issues are unsolved related to placements of students who have to report their duty after completion of the academic year (Jayaramu P. S., 2020) ^[3].

Apart from these government has decreased the funding on higher education and transferred to other health related emergencies. Now COVID pandemic of health is becoming an economic pandemic. This will be delayed government

promisesto spend 6 percent of GDP on Higher Education.

Lack of Fiscal Resources

Lack of fiscal resources is also a major obstacle in the transformation towards digital platform. Many colleges and universities in rural areas are not ready with required online platform and infrastructure. It is also difficult to set up by all the institutions at a time it will require huge investment.

Online Education as an Opportunity Opportunity to enhanced the Quality of Higher Education

This pandemic is going to be an opportunity to India by enhancing the quality of higher education. Due to travel ban and health risk all the countries have restrict entry of the foreigners. As a result many students and working people returned in India. These student'swill have to be enrolled in the India universities. This is going to be an opportunity for the Indian educational institutions to become world class institutions and compete with foreign universities. New Education Policy 2020 may be a mile stone for this transformation. But there is a need to give special attention to pandemic as an opportunity.

New trends in Teaching and Learning

Transformation of higher education after pandemic is going to be an opportunity to the higher education institutions in our country. This may be a right time to transfer traditional teaching method in to digital platform. Digital learning can be a best alternative where limitation of the resources are there. This can be a good opportunity for the students specially from the rural and remote areas where lack of quality teaching with latest technology. There are many options in digital platforms like blended e-learning we can reach all over the country. Face to face teaching also helps us to overcome the problems of individual students.

Global Collaboration

This is going to be an opportunity to the higher education institution to offer various programmes in collaboration with top level institution. Many universities and colleges will get exposure through collaboration and exchange programme. This is going to be an opportunity for the students and research scholars also by attending conferences, workshops, FDPs and internships programmes also. Through this platform various teaching learning activities can be conducted at global level. This will help the students and faculty member to acquire innovative ideas in teaching, learning and research activities.

Conclusion

During this difficult time strong measures should be undertaken for the education sector. Innovative and new techniques must have to be taken by the educational institutions. As per the theory of the survival of the fittest, education sector must have to change as per the time. This is the need of the time to digitalise sector by overcoming the limitations and technical obstacles. Lack of fiscal resources is a major obstacle to set up digital platform.

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