

**IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in temporary physical closures of schools and higher education institutions around the world. In higher education, approximately 220 million students globally have been affected due to the disruption caused by COVID-19, leaving policymakers and educational institutions with unprecedented challenges such as how to mitigate learning losses, how to deploy remote learning, how to safely reopen educational institutions and how to ensure that underrepresented, vulnerable and disadvantaged learners are not left behind. The COVID-19 pandemic has already had an unprecedented impact on higher education worldwide in virtually all aspects of its functioning. In the academic year 2019/2020, the pandemic transformed the way teaching took place, accelerating transformation that was already taking place in the form of online learning and teaching. This article highlights on major impacts of Covid-19 on higher education in India. Some measures taken by HEIs and educational authorities of India to provide seamless educational services during the crisis are discussed. This paper also focused on higher education in NEP 2020

**KEYWORDS:** COVID-19, Higher Education, NEP 2020, Online Teaching

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The impact of COVID-19 can be seen in every sphere of life. Especially when it comes to education, this is the biggest sector that has been adversely affected by this pandemic. It forced many great nations to enforce lockdown thereby bringing everything to an abrupt halt for a certain period of time. Right from the big businesses to educational institutions this Pandemic has literally altered and devastated the traditional ways of carrying out these things. The educational sector has been fighting to survive the crises. The teaching learning and evaluation methodologies have been completely altered by this pandemic. The digitalisation of education became a necessity in order to provide seamless education. In India, more than 32 crores of students have been affected by the various restrictions and the nationwide lockdown for Covid-19. 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. 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.

An immediate and effective response to the crisis was to go digital. Developing robust online platforms has become necessary to offer continuity in learning. Yet in a developing country like India with vast disparity in socio-economic backgrounds of students and the quality of educational institutions, the shift has not been easy. The digital divide has been further widening the gap, and needs urgent attention from both public and private sector players as the crisis continues. Good teachers, refreshed curricula and effective tools will ensure students stay involved and active in the learning process.

**2. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON GLOBAL EDUCATION**

Lockdown and social distancing measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic have led to closures of schools, training institutions and higher education facilities in most countries. Education systems and educators have been forced to adopt "Emergency Education", transitioning from traditional face-to-face learning pedagogies to remote virtual platforms, despite the challenges posed to both educators

and the learners. This forced remote teaching and learning, viewed by Dhawan(2020) as paving the way for introducing digital learning, represents a paradigm shift in the way educators deliver quality education.

Research by Sintema(2020) reported that reduced contact hours for learners and a lack of consultation with teachers when facing difficulties in learning/understanding, resulted in lowered performance on year-end examinations and internal assessment outcomes. Online student assessments were documented as requiring a lot of trial and error, with uncertainty and confusion occurring among the teachers, parents, and students. It was found that appropriate measures to check plagiarism was yet to be put in place in many schools and institutions, mainly due to the large student populations involved. The lockdown of schools and universities has not only affected internal assessments and examinations for the main public qualifications like General Certificate of Secondary Educations (GCSE), but A levels have also been cancelled for the entire cohort in the United Kingdom. The United Nations (2020) anticipated that a postponement or complete cancellation of the entire examination system was possible, depending on the duration of the Covid-19 lockdowns, globally. For example, due to the Covid-19 outbreak and national lockdown in India, various entrance-level examinations (such as BITSAT 2020, NATA 2020, CLAT 2020, MAT 2020, ATMA 2020) were postponed / rescheduled.

From a positive perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced governments and educational policy makers, at all levels of education, to take immediate action to optimize implementing e-learning systems during the Covid-19 global pandemic. This urgency has forged a strong connection between educators and their communities, especially with parents who have, without any training, become educators *in situ*. The use of online platforms such as Google Classroom, Zoom, virtual learning environment and social media and various group forums are being explored and tried for teaching and learning, to continue education through digital platforms. The impacts of Covid-19 on HE teaching and learning in 2020 precipitated educators (locally and globally) to develop creative initiatives to overcome the limitations of virtual teaching.

### **3. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA**

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 given below.

**1. Reduced employment opportunities:** Many entrance tests and 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.

**2. 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. 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 counselling 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.

**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.

**4. 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.

#### **4. DIGITAL INITIATIVES OF UGC & MHRD FOR HIGHER EDUCATION DURING COVID-19**

Though COVID-19 created many negative impacts on education, at the same time it has brought new dimension to the teaching learning process in India. Though there are many drawbacks of online learning, it became survivor during the worst situation in the country. It enhanced the digital literacy. People started learning and using digital technology. Electronic media was used for sharing information worldwide. Students and teacher got good opportunities to interact with different people around the globe improving the communication. Students preferred Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode of learning as it encourages self-learning. The HEIs also gave their positive response by adopting different strategies during this crisis situation. UGC, MHRD also have made available teaching and learning materials for students to motivate learning. Some of the digital initiatives have proved to be very effective during the COVID crisis. Some of them are listed below:

**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.

**Virtual Labs** 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.

**National Educational Alliance for Technology (NEAT)** 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. It brings the best technological products in education pedagogy on a single platform for the convenience of learners.

**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** 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, and through chat mode.

**e-GyanKosh** 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 e-GyanKosh are

protected by copyright, with all rights reserved by Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU).

### **5. HIGHER EDUCATION IN NEW EDUCATION POLICY 2020**

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), launched on 29 July 2020, outlines the vision of India's new education system. NEP 2020 focuses on five pillars: Affordability, Accessibility, Quality, Equity, and Accountability – to ensure continual learning. It has been crafted consistent with the needs of the citizens as a demand for knowledge in society and economy called for a need to acquire new skills on a regular basis. Thus, providing quality education and creating lifelong learning opportunities for all, leading to full and productive employment and decent work as enlisted in United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030, forms the thrust of NEP 2020. The new policy replaces the previous National Policy on Education, 1986 and forms a comprehensive framework to transform both elementary and higher education in India by 2040. The NEP 2020 calls for key reforms in both school and higher education that prepare the next generation to thrive and compete in the new digital age. Thus, there is much emphasis upon multidisciplinary, digital literacy, written communication, problem-solving, logical reasoning, and vocational exposure in the document.

The NEP 2020 was conceived to raise the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) from the current 26 percent to 50 percent by 2030 in the higher education space. It aims at building the overall personality of students by strengthening infrastructure for open and distance learning, online education and increasing the use of technology in education.

Moreover, the National Research Foundation (NRF) will be set up to boost research work in the country. A National Accreditation Council (NAC) envisaged as a single regulator for higher education institutions across the country will be established. The Higher Education Council of India (HECI) will have multiple verticals to fulfill various roles. Efforts will be undertaken to set up a National Recruitment Agency for all government recruitment exams, and a Common Eligibility Test (CET) for various recruitment exams of the same level.

Moreover, the courses and programmes in subjects, such as Indology, Indian languages, AYUSH systems of medicine, yoga, arts, music, history, culture, and modern India, internationally relevant curricula in the sciences, social sciences, and beyond, meaningful opportunities for social engagement, quality residential facilities and on-campus support, etc. will be fostered to attain this goal of global quality standards.

### **6. CONCLUSION**

In order to limit the accelerated spread of the corona virus disease, almost all educational institutions worldwide physically closed down in line with decisions taken by national governments. Due to the wholesale cancellation of face-to-face teaching, a transition to online emergency remote teaching was accelerated across all levels of the education sector. At this point, it became inevitable for policymakers and educational administrators to rapidly develop more functional plans, and to implement these plans urgently in order to address the potential for the victimization of disadvantaged students in higher education due to online education fast having become the only viable working solution on offer through which to realize their ongoing education.

University administrators, academicians, and other related professionals are undoubtedly aware of the profound effect that the COVID-19 pandemic has imposed on higher education. As such, academic administrators and practitioners, through paying close attention to the role of online learning in higher education, need to anticipate the potential effect of certain negativities within the online teaching-learning process, and must therefore develop and implement measures necessary to limit the negative impact and to contribute to alleviating the concerns held by both students and academicians with regards to this issue.

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