

THE ADOPTION OF ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS DURING THE PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 epidemic has raised global awareness that the current way of life is unsustainable. There are numerous areas that require revolutionary improvements, one of which is the educational sector. Because of the rapid spread of COVID-19 in India, educational institutes/universities have been closed since mid-March 2020. Students, parents, and instructors' lives were turned upside down when an emergency lockdown was implemented as a preventative measure. To overcome this unavoidable dilemma, educational institutions began offering online programmes. The abrupt shift in teaching and learning methods has brought with it new difficulties and opportunities.

The current study focuses on the need for online education for students seeking higher education amid the Coronavirus pandemic in India, which has forced the shutdown of the education system. Educators and faculty have been embracing the e-learning strategy to educate remotely on digital platforms as a source to bring the classroom to home in order to continue imparting knowledge. It's also worth mentioning how students without internet access or access to technology have a hard time participating in digital learning. There are also a few recommendations for overcoming the problems of online education and ways to make it a success in India in the near future.

Keywords: Pandemic, online education, higher education system, digital platforms, poor student, unemployment, online learning, Government of India initiatives

INTRODUCTION

The global pandemic epidemic has caused havoc in today's world. Because of the threat of coronavirus, which has spread to 191 nations, the concerned areas have been placed under lockdown. The virus has gotten so widespread that the entire world has been placed on lockdown, causing serious disruption at schools, colleges, and universities. It is estimated that 90 percent of the world's students, or roughly 1.6 billion individuals, have been impacted by the epidemic. There are 320 million students in India alone. (2020, Lakshmanan)

The negative impact has been observed among students taking entrance exams for various colleges, as some of their exams for some papers are still pending. The Government of India, in collaboration with state governments, was adamant about avoiding having examinations for students seeking higher education at the graduate and postgraduate levels, and instead

mass promoting them to the next class. Some colleges have started the new academic year by providing education to their students via the internet.

The current financial crisis has prompted a global push for digital education. With the ongoing extension of the lockdown, numerous colleges, universities, and coaching institutes throughout the world are scrambling to deliver education to students so that they can continue their study. In India, however, several institutions with more advanced digital tools have assessed their ability to contribute to digital education. Parents have been asked by the universities to create a "study from home" environment and ensure that learning continues at home. Institutions can easily continue to educate their students from home through online education.

The pandemic has presented educational institutions with numerous problems and chances to improve their infrastructure (Pravat, 2020a). Faculty and students have been given a ray of hope by the lockdown, which allows them to continue their instructional activities through digital channels. As a result, professors have been assigning work to students through digital platforms such as ZOOM, Google Meet, and sharing YouTube e-learning films, among others. For successful communication, educational institutes use WhatsApp groups of faculty, students, and parents.

The greatest issue is in the hands of students who come from the poorer sections of society or who are part of a population whose parents are unemployed or have lost their employment, and who, in the majority of cases, lack access to well-equipped digital tools and are thus suffering.

Objectives

Following are the objectives of this research paper:

1. To familiarise participants with the various measures taken by the Indian government in the area of education during the pandemic.
2. To highlight the various effects of the pandemic on the education sector, as well as practical suggestions for continuing to deliver education via the internet.
3. To have an understanding of the many digital platforms that are utilised to teach learning methodology.

Methodologies

The study paper is exploratory and conceptual in nature. In order to achieve the goals, a supplementary method was used. The data and information offered in this study were gathered from several reports on pandemic prepared by reputable organisations. Information was gathered from a number of reliable websites. There have been several references to periodicals and e-contents about the impact of the epidemic on the educational sector.

Initiatives by Govt. of India on higher education:

The Indian government has created a number of free e-Learning portals for students in many fields. The goal of free e-Learning platforms is to keep the learning and teaching process running smoothly. The Government of India has taken many measures through the Ministry of Education and the University Grants Commission to address the current COVID 19 situation. The Government of India has built and deployed a number of free e-Learning portals in due time.

Students, teachers, professionals, and learners can use the free e-Learning portals provided by the Indian government to access a variety of courses. Audio, video, presentations, PDFs, tests, and other forms of content are available.

The E-Learning initiatives of MHRD for Higher Education Sector during Pandemic are as follows:

- **Swayam:** a government of India initiative aimed at bringing the best teaching and learning tools to all, even the most underprivileged. It aims to close the digital divide for students who have been left out of the digital revolution and are unable to participate fully in the knowledge economy. Swayam's official website is <https://swayam.gov.in/>.
- **Swayam Prabha:** a network of 34 DTH TV channels dedicated to broadcasting high-quality educational programming 24 hours a day, seven days a week via the GSAT-15 satellite. It provides fresh content every day for at least four hours, which is then replayed five times more during the day, allowing students to learn at their own pace. The web portal is maintained by the INFLIBNET Centre. Swayamprabha's website is <https://swayamprabha.gov.in/>.
- **e-PG Pathshala:** is a platform for postgraduate students to access e-books, online courses, and study materials. Students can use this platform's services without needing to use the internet for the entire day.

Overview of How Online Education System Works in India

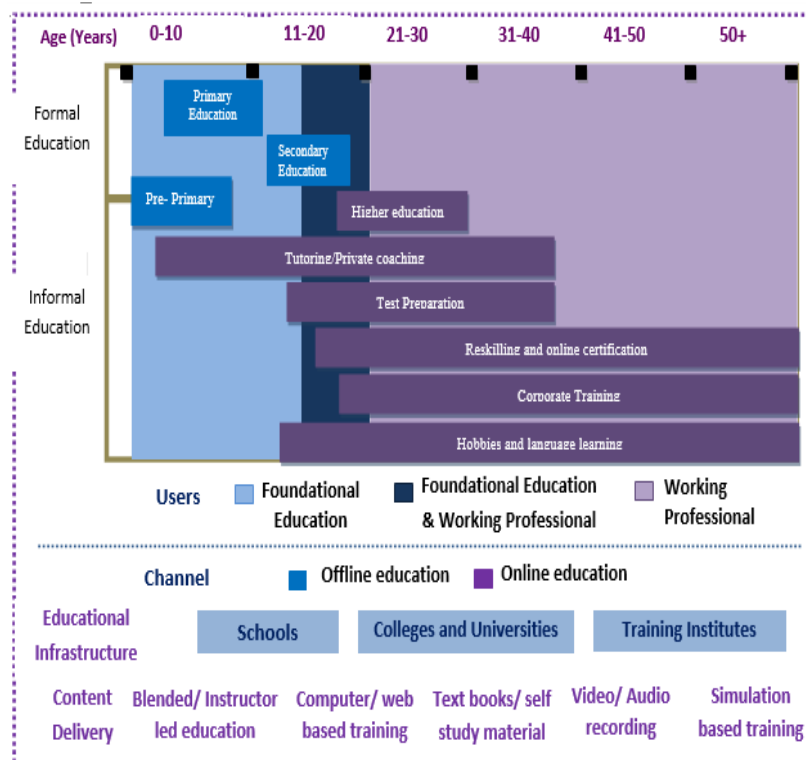


Figure1: The digital initiatives of private players for Higher Education Sector during Pandemic (Bhat, 2020), Source <https://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/> (23-10-2021-2.25pm)

- **Unacademy:-** The world's largest online learning app began in 2010 and evolved into a feature-rich educational technology platform in 2015, and the story continues; assistance with IIT-JEE, UPSE CSE GS, SSC, and NEET UG exams.
- **Upgrad:-** Upgrad is focused on facilitating quality education to the future workforce through UG and PG programmes, and continues to develop online learning as engaging as a classroom setup in order to upskill working professionals as they work.

Challenges faced by the students while attending online classes:



Figure 2: Factors affecting online education in India

- **Lack of computer or smartphone:** Tools such as PCs, laptops, and cellphones are essential for online education. Many students lack computers, laptops, smartphones, and internet connectivity, all of which are required for online learning. Their mobile phones may be outdated and incapable of running application software.
- **Low Internet connectivity:** Internet access is poor in several parts of India, particularly in rural regions. The majority of students do not have access to the internet at home, and colleges cannot deliver an equitable online education to all students because not everyone has equal access to the Internet.
- **Limited data access:** Online learning may use up more internet data. Furthermore, pupils in the weaker sections have limited data access.
- **Expensive:** Using technology in the classroom is proving to be highly costly. Many others argue, however, that technology in education is better for pupils since it is less burdensome than traditional schooling. For pupils with a poor background, however, it is not as fruitful.
- **Studying at home:** For students, studying at home can be difficult. For their children who are studying at home, parents must take a holistic approach.
- **Issues Faculties Confront:** Faculty members, particularly those with no prior experience teaching online, face numerous challenges because they are educated to teach in classrooms utilising the blackboard. They are having difficulty adjusting to

the new technologies. Teaching with a mobile phone is challenging since it is difficult to hold the phone while teaching, and it may cause them to lose focus on the subject they are attempting to teach. Punit and Itika (Punit and Itika, 2020)

Positive impact of pandemic on education sector

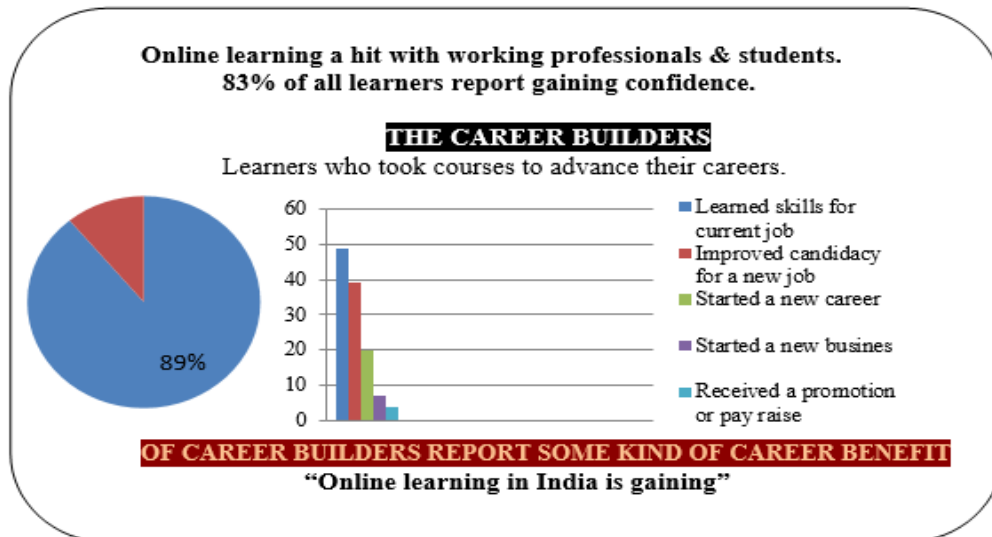


Figure 3: Online learning in India getting prominence

Despite the pandemic's losses, the Indian school system sees online education as more promising because it provides students with seamless support services. The following are some examples of favourable impacts (Pravat, 2020a):

- **Transition to Mixed Learning:** Educational institutions are adopting a blended learning approach. It has pushed all faculties and students to improve their technological skills. New techniques of delivering and assessing learning have created enormous opportunity for fundamental changes in curriculum creation and teaching.
- **Increased use of soft copy learning resources:** During lockdown, students' reliance on soft copy study materials for reference has grown.
- **Collaborative learning is improving** - There is a fresh chance for collaborative teaching and learning to take on new forms. Collaborations can also take place amongst faculties all over the world to benefit from each other's expertise (Misra, 2020).
 - **Increased Digital Literacy:** The pandemic prompted people to study and use digital technologies, resulting in a rise in digital literacy.
 - **Increased use of electronic media for information sharing:** Learning materials are easily shared among students, and related questions are answered via e-mail, SMS, phone calls, and various social media platforms such as WhatsApp or Facebook.
- **Time management:** Online education allows students to manage their time more effectively during pandemics.
 - **Demand for distant learning:** During a pandemic, most students choose distance education since it encourages self-learning and allows them to learn from a variety of resources while also tailoring their education to their specific needs.

Negative impacts of pandemic on education sector

- **Studies that have been impacted:** Offline Classes are being phased out in favour of online learning, and tests at various levels are being postponed. Annual examinations and entrance tests have already been postponed by various boards. The admissions procedure took longer than expected. Students lost approximately three months of the whole academic year of 2020-21 as well as 2021-22 due to the continuation of lockdown, significantly deteriorating the situation of educational continuity and making it impossible for students to return to college after such a long break.
- **Impact on job opportunities:** Student placements have suffered as a result of corporations delaying student onboarding. The unemployment rate is likely to rise as a result of the pandemic. Because of the current circumstances, there is no recruitment in the government sector in India, and recent graduates fear losing their job offers in the private sector. Jobless estimates from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy increased from 8.4 percent in mid-March to 23 percent in early April, with the urban unemployment rate rising to 30.9 percent (Educationasia.in). When unemployment rises, people battle for food rather than schooling, which leads to a decline in education.
- **Lack of spontaneity among faculty/students for online education:** This quick change from face-to-face learning to online learning is not spontaneous for all faculties/students. Most professors just provide lectures using video platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, and others, which may not constitute true online learning in the absence of a specific online learning platform. Punit and Itika (Punit and Itika, 2020)
- **Reduced global employment opportunities-** Many people lose their jobs in other countries, and graduates are unable to find work outside of India owing to pandemic-related restrictions. Many Indians may have returned home after losing their employment because to the pandemic in other countries. As a result, recent graduates who will be entering the labour market soon may have trouble finding acceptable jobs. Due to the lockout, many students who have already gotten employment through campus interviews may not be able to start working.
 - **Internet access:** A large percentage of students have limited or no internet connection at home, and many of them cannot afford a computer, laptop, or supporting cell phone. According to numerous sources, the lockout has disproportionately impacted impoverished students in India, with the majority of them unable to study online learning. As a result, during a pandemic, the online teaching-learning approach may exacerbate the divide between rich and poor, urban and rural. (Vicky and Nanjappa, 2020)

Findings

The effects of the epidemic can be seen in all aspects of life. This pandemic has had a particularly negative impact on education, which is the largest area that has been negatively impacted. The following are the findings:

1. Because India is such a diverse country, there are variances in student quality and quantity. Students can be recognised based on a range of factors, including geography, language, caste, and so on. Since March 2020, a significant percentage of the pandemic has reared its ugly head on a large number of out-station students who have been compelled to return home due to the announcement and execution of lock down at intervals.

2. In general, students do not carry all of their study materials, and as a result, they have difficulty completing their curriculum in the absence of study materials, and they begin to rely on locally procured study materials.
3. Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that all academic institutions in the country have made arrangements to run online classes, forcing students and faculty to interact via laptops and smartphones, which are reliant on the device's quality, battery life, and internet connectivity for content delivery.
4. University/Institutes such as Ranchi University in Ranchi, Ramchandra International Institute of Management in Pune, and Arihant Institute of Business Management in Pune have weathered the crisis relatively unscathed because they had made arrangements for delivery of course content via the online route well before the crisis began. The majority of colleges, institutes, and universities, on the other hand, did not have this foresight, and those that did are not in any danger during these trying times. The Indian government is leaving no stone unturned in its efforts to facilitate the delivery of education and course content through programmes such as e-PG, Pathshala, SWAYAM, and others.
5. It has been noticed that faculties encounter technical challenges, such as a lack of technical infrastructure, a lack of understanding of online teaching methodology, as well as a lack of technical competence, a negative attitude, course integration with technology, and a lack of enthusiasm.

Conclusion

The pandemic has had a significant influence on India's education sector. While it has presented many obstacles, it has also provided numerous opportunities. To deal with the current pandemic situation, the Indian government and several education players have utilised various digital technologies. India isn't yet ready to use digital platforms to bring education to every corner of the country. Students who aren't as fortunate as their peers would suffer as a result of the current digital platform selection. However, universities and the Indian government are working tirelessly to use digital technology to provide millions of young Indian students an advantage.

Even if the epidemic continues, there is a pressing need to maximise the use of online platforms so that students not only finish their degrees this academic year but also prepare for the future digitally oriented environment. India should devise innovative measures to ensure that all children have access to education on a long-term basis.

Suggestions

- During a pandemic, India should devise ways to ensure that all pupils have continuous access to learning. For efficient delivery, Indian policies must incorporate persons from varied backgrounds, including distant regions, marginalised and minority groups. To mitigate the effects of the pandemic on employment offers, internship programmes, and research initiatives, immediate action is essential.
- Many online learning platforms provide multiple courses on the same subject with varying levels of accreditation, methodology, and assessment criteria. In light of the fast rise of online learning platforms, the establishment should ensure quality for online learning programmes developed and given by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in India.
 - At the moment, having access to technology and the internet is a must. As a result, students must have access to digital skills and infrastructure in order to complete their

study during the epidemic. State governments and private organisations should devise solutions to the problem of digital education.

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