



Impact of Pandemic COVID-19 on Education- In India

DR.RISHI JERATH*

DR.ISHADHIMAN**

(*& ASSTT PROFF GOVERNMENT COLLEGE NALAGARH)**

Abstract

The impact of pandemic COVID-19 is observed in every sector around the world. The education sectors of India as well as world are badly affected by this. It has enforced the world wide lock down creating very bad effect on the students' life. Around 32 crore learners stopped to move schools/colleges and all educational activities halted in India. The outbreak of COVID-19 has taught us that change is inevitable. It has worked as a catalyst for the educational institutions to grow and opt for platforms with technologies, which have not been used before. The education sector has been fighting to survive the crises with a different approach and digitising the challenges to wash away the threat of the pandemic. This paper highlights some measures taken by Govt. of India to provide seamless education in the country. Both the positive and negative impacts of COVID-19 on education are discussed and some fruitful suggestions are also pointed to carry out educational activities during the pandemic situation.

Keywords: Education, COVID-19, impact, Suggestions

Introduction

COVID-19 infection was reported originally from Wuhan, China in late December 2019 and quickly spread throughout the world and was declared a pandemic by the WHO on 11th March 2020 . The COVID-19 outbreak had a devastating impact on human life and shattered economies around the world with a massive jolt to the education systems both in developed and developing countries. The COVID-19 pandemic quickly led to the closure of universities and colleges around the world with government instructions to follow social distancing that could help to flatten the infection curve and reduce total fatalities from the disease. The most important pandemic precaution called “social distancing” or “physical distancing” has attempted to reduce interpersonal contact and thereby minimize the kind of community transmission that could develop quickly in dense social networks like the university campus.

Digital Technology for eLearning and Virtual Education

The impact on higher education has been dramatic and transformative and a common trend in education systems around the world has been to respond to the pandemic with “emergency eLearning” protocols, marking the rapid transition from face-to-face classes to online learning systems. The educational institutions are facing a challenge to adapt to this change and trying to choose the right technologies and approaches for educating and engaging their students. The campus closure and sudden switch from in-person face to face education to remote instructions is just a baby step experiment in the long journey to offering online education which including effective student engagement tools and teacher training. This may pave for stronger bonds between universities, online education companies, and technology providers post-pandemic. The universities will need to pay serious attention to having educators trained and equipped with digital technology for a smooth teaching-learning process. The government will have to step up and commit to sustained programs for professional development to boost educators teaching capabilities. The pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities and shortcomings of the current education systems and has also emphasised the need for digital literacy development, particularly in times like these, for both developed and developing countries. The greater digitalisation of educational services and communication may become a norm post-pandemic. The current situation has challenged deep-rooted notions about the role of higher education institutions in providing quality education, mode of delivery, accessibility, the importance of lifelong learning, and educator’s perceptions about the type of learners. This may provide insight to the educators and policymakers for the overall improvement of the education systems around the world.

Relying on and adapting to eLearning during a pandemic may cause a shift in adopting more online elements in the teaching by the educators. This, however, has many practical problems and limitations, in terms of availability of digital technologies for education. There is a vast “digital inequality” that exists in society. One cannot assume that all students, as well as educators, would have access to internet connectivity and associated powerful devices outside of their university, to be able to communicate.

Affordability is another factor to limit the access to eLearning with students from economically weaker sections facing a greater burden. The impact of accessibility and affordability can have

serious implications on students in higher education system unless student-friendly government policies are in place which can ensure affordability and accessibility of the internet to students.

The students face major hurdles with remote learning as face-to-face communication is more conducive to the learning process, presenting a better opportunity to sharing knowledge and asking for help, “easier” and more interactive .The camaraderie and sense of belonging are limited in a virtual class. The students who have less ability to self-regulate or study autonomously struggle with no teacher providing in-person support. The online videos, digital content, and discussion forums may not provide a holistic teaching-learning outcome.

Many civil liberties groups and activists have increasingly raised apprehensions over the privacy and surveillance implications of hundreds of millions of students being forced onto commercial software that has not been properly tested and vetted for educational uses.

The sudden shift to adapt and implement online learning has led to over-work, stress among the teaching faculty. The educators need to re-imagine modes of curriculum planning, development of e-content, assessment, and reporting which may have been developed without proper planning and forethought. To achieve more focussed learning outcomes and develop effective eLearning methods, educators should be provided with professional autonomy and trusted with their judgment; and ensure clear and compassionate communication with all the stakeholders of the higher education.

One might argue that remote learning may offer an advantage for individuals who are unable to attend a traditional full-time face-to-face university due to personal or financial circumstances. Also, the flexibility of asynchronous remote learning may provide wider access. And even within traditional higher education institutions, hybrid or blended forms may help improve the quality of face-to-face teaching by moving content delivery online and focusing in-person sessions on active learning .

These diverse reactions highlight that there are always wider connotations and unintended consequences of any adoption of technology in education. So, COVID-19 post-pandemic, all universities and higher education institutions need to introspect about the implications of their choices and decisions on the lifelong learning of students, which will ultimately shape the future of this generation.

Post-Pandemic Focus on Specific Research Areas and Their Implications

The COVID-19 pandemic forced higher education institutions and universities to adapt to the rapidly changing situation in a way that was unimaginable a few months ago. Research institutions are facing huge challenges in managing research operations. The mandatory social distancing requirements are difficult to meet in a research setting particularly in the areas requiring bench work and human subjects, as well as fieldwork, are causing significant losses to research studies. Most of this has affected scientists, faculty, research scholars, and graduate students. The career plans of many research students and postdoctoral researchers are at risk due to this sudden interruption in their research plan by the pandemic. The universities and funding bodies will be under financial strain in the coming months and the non-COVID projects may lose importance and focus from these agencies. The recruitment of international staff and the exchange of skilled researchers is a huge challenge which may continue to exist for the coming months due to travel restrictions.

The research institutions and universities need to carefully design and implement the research management guidelines that adhere to social distancing protocols and ensure low student density on campuses while steering the research activity towards normalcy. The research areas that require physical laboratories may need to re-think their working models and carefully plan and prioritise their experiments. The universities will have to invest more in health and safety measures and infrastructure on their campuses to ensure the safety of students and staff which may add to the financial strain on the university. The government may support and partly fund the safety initiations of the educational institutions to prevent the comprise of the educational and research needs of the students.

As the COVID-19 pandemic is progressing rapidly, particularly now in the developing economies, the research laboratories and corporate houses around the world are racing against each other to find a treatment modality for the virus. This has led researchers to focus on certain key issues associated with the COVID-19 virus infection that could help in the understanding of the disease and assessing the psychological implications of this pandemic. Some of the major areas of research which may see a surge in funding post-pandemic include vaccine development, antiviral therapies, development of health care equipment, mHealth devices, remote learning tools, Artificial

intelligence (AI) based technologies, use of AR, VR, and Holography for training, and capacity building and public health policy). Also, research areas that do not require the physical presence of the researcher may see more growth as students may prefer these programs to enhance their skills for post-study job placements.

Discussion

As of July 2020, 98.6% of learners worldwide were affected by the pandemic, representing 1.725 billion children and youth, from pre-primary to higher education, in 200 countries (United Nations, 2020). Therefore, making learning possible and available from homeschooling has been the need of the hour.

Pedagogy available and used for face-to-face learning is not feasible for online learning. Though a range of pedagogy has been devised for online and distance learning, teachers who are technologically backward require proper professional development and training in order to orient themselves towards their students

Authentic assessments and timely feedback are essential components of learning. A very crucial part of online distance learning is the availability of helpful formative assessments and timely feedback to the online learners. This is found to be challenging for the educators and the education system. It is more challenging in the Bhutanese context due to larger class strength, lack of online teaching infrastructure and professional development, and non-participative nature of the students.

Maslow before Bloom is the common phrase used in education circles. This must be the mission for online learning for the continuation of education during the present pandemic. The phrase is typically used to ensure that our students are safe and have their basic needs met before online learning commences. Domestic violence and child abuse are on the rise as the perpetrators are many a time at home or in the neighbourhood, which is a mental distraction and threat to the learners . With students now experiencing homeschooling during this COVID-19 pandemic, conducive environment at home for all standards and socio-economic conditions is not uniform. Studies should be carried out to support the hardest hit economically disadvantaged groups. In Bhutan, there are reports of students dropping out or opting to discontinue schooling. This has occurred due to the long break enforced by the school closure during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although no studies are carried out to evaluate the direct impact of the pandemic on dropout rate, a research in this area would bring out the factual details.

There are varieties of online infrastructure that have been prepared by many educational firms and made free for learning during this pandemic. The affordability and accessibility to these online infrastructures for all the learners of varied economic backgrounds are still a challenge.

Students with special needs having learning difficulties, such as hearing impairment, visual impairment and mobility disabilities, require additional training with support and guidance. Many caregivers and parents at home are not able to cater to such needs, hindering the learning of this group of learners. Therefore, there is a need for investing time and resources to explore and research the best alternatives for the special educational needs (SEN) of these learners.

As all students' assignments and examinations are carried out from home, it is challenging for educators to find the authenticity of the work and the actual learning taking place. Moreover, many parents guide and support their children during their learning process, and the extent and degree of support varies greatly. Grading of students is another area of study as no proper criteria are developed and effectively used

Conclusion

There are no best practices for universities and higher educational institutions to mimic and no known models to follow. Post-pandemic educational institutions may need to identify the issues that they may face and prepare to take tough decisions in the coming months. The university communities will need to reflect on their educational vision and mission to ensure student learning outcomes and standards of educational quality are not compromised. The universities will have to engage and consult all their stakeholders in the nuanced balancing of financial costs and public health that are intertwined with missions of education, knowledge creation, and service to society. The higher educational institutions must be ready for a tough road ahead post-pandemic where their decisions will shape and steer the future of their students. Policy-level intervention is required to improve this situation. Further exploration and investigation on effective pedagogy for online teaching and learning is an area for research. Need for developing tools for authentic assessments and timely feedback is found to be another area of study. The affordability and accessibility for all the learners of varied economic background is identified as a challenge, for which the educational

tools developer could focus on customization. The policy level intervention is also vital. Education system across the world including Bhutan needs to invest on the professional development of teachers, especially on ICT and effective pedagogy, considering the present scenario. Making online teaching creative, innovative and interactive through user-friendly tools is the other area of research and development. This would assist and prepare the education system for such uncertainties in the future.

The lesson learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic is that teachers and students/learners should be oriented on use of different online educational tools. After the COVID-19 pandemic when the normal classes resume, teachers and learners should be encouraged to continue using such online tools to enhance teaching and learning.