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## Impact of Covid 19 on Higher Education in India and Government steps to Meet the Challenges

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### ABSTRACT

History is the witness that several natural calamities have been engulfing this world from time to time and covid-19 pandemic has been one of them. During this dark period of history, there has been lot of tragic events including loss of large number of human lives. No one has been able to foresee the occurrence of this tragedy and take suitable precautionary measures to thwart its impact on the human lives. It was such a disastrous disease that there was no proper healthcare remedy available to prevent from this disease and all types of medical researches were carried only different countries to discover the vaccines. This pandemic had forced majority of the countries to impose lockdowns and stop all government and business activities and life all over the world had become totally stand still. Equal adverse impact of this tragedy was felt on the field of education world over and all educational institutions including higher educational Institutions had been closed forcibly to save the students from the fear of death. However, the government had resorted to online education system in case of exigencies by making limited use of digital devices but this facility was available only to the students coming from metros and large cities. Therefore, education was one of the worst hit sectors by this natural calamity.

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**Introduction:** - 2019 Pandemic had reportedly started from Wohan in China and there after it had spread over to different countries soon after the visits of affected Chinese people to those countries. Ultimately China managed to control the virus but other countries miserably failed to control the spread of this virus



and they suffered from huge loss of life. Even the most advanced countries like, USA, UK, France, Germany, Canada and others had witnessed lakhs of people dying daily from this virus to cause financial loss to the economics of western countries. China had used it as a deadly weapon to fail them by this invisible and undeclared war.<sup>i</sup> The education system throughout the world including India had suffered to a large extent and student community paid the price for it without any fault and their education was hit for many years due to this pandemic. It was a period when there were total lockdowns in every country and all activities had come to halt.

Before the spread of corona, the students used to go to library, read books, journals, magazines, newspapers, research papers etc. But after covid-19, the students consulted text files, graphics files, vector waste files, data files, spread sheet files, video-audio files on computers. Covid-19 pandemic had very badly affected daily lives of the people worldwide and they were forced to perform all activities from home. This policy was aimed to minimize interaction among the people and to reduce the spread of the virus. Education was a hardest hit sector when students and teachers were forced to do online teaching with inadequate facilities. Even the industrial activity, transport activity, business activity and food industry, all were closed and people were forced to remain behind closed doors. Study was being carried on through online modes and that too on a very limited scale where facilities for it were available. The government had imposed strict restrictions on the movement and gathering of the people so that this airborne disease may not spread to them. All educational institutions in India were closed, starting from pre-primary schools to the university level institutions so that lives of the students and teachers may not be affected by the disease.<sup>ii</sup>

**Impact of covid-19 on higher education:** - When the deadly disease of covid-19 had spread in China, their government kept the development as secret for considerable time so that it may not be leaked to other countries because they had decided to harm other countries by it. They even kept it as secret from W.H.O so that Western countries do not get alarmed of it. Indian government had started taking a note of it when it had spread to large part of world. It was around March 2020 when schools and colleges were advised to be shut down due to the spread of Covid-19. Annual examinations are mostly conducted for several classes from February to May each year and outbreak of covid at such a crucial time had forced the educational institutions to close without holding their annual examinations. Their future was hanging in doledrums and they were forced to shift from traditional method to online mode of education without any pre preparation and faced many difficulties.<sup>iii</sup> When covid was spreading from one country to the other country, the Indian government was of the view that it will not have any impact in India or it will enter India at very later stage. But, with the entry of several foreigners in India, they brought the



virus to India and very soon this disease spread in India as a wild fire. It put the Indian government on tenter-hooks to take pre-emptive steps to stop from spreading further. Isolation camps were started for positive found people in the hospitals and other places. India's scientists had also started doing research work to develop proper vaccine for treatment of this virus. Annual examinations of the students were conducted on the online mode so that their results are formally declared and their life is not spoiled. For the next academic year, the classes were started from home on the online method. But for students from rural and remote areas, it was not possible to conduct online classes due to non availability of the required facilities of internet, TVs, laptop, Android phones etc. As a result of it, large part of student community had to remain without education for a long time.

At that time, their precious lifetime was wasted and it caused lot of discomfort and frustration to such of the students. On the other hand, students from the cities were studying through online methods and attending virtual meeting platforms like, zoom and Google etc. There were several teachers who were not able to teach online classes but they were doing it as they were asked to do so and marking the attendance of the students only. During those days there were entrance tests and recruitment was cancelled and no jobs could be filled.<sup>iv</sup>

Some of the digital methods of learning were used during those days which were based on digital learning and some of those methods were as under:- E-GyanGhosh, Gyandhara and Swayam during the period of covid, no traditional methods of teaching were adopted but only online method was used on a very large scale.<sup>v</sup> Some of the educational experts felt happy that India had shifted to online method to carry on the teaching activities and pandemic proved as blessing in disguise for education sector when many teachers were trained for online education NEP-2020 also makes a mention of this method.<sup>vi</sup> Slowly and steadily this mode of education has become a regular part of our education system and learning can now be done online and knowledge can be transferred virtually using multiple media. Online method is also considered suitable for lakhs of students because of flexible time of classes. Moreover, students and teachers use technology for student community through email, whatsapp, video conference, instant messaging or other tools in this method. Online method is also comparatively cheaper than traditional method and significant results are achieved in this method. There is use of the methods of presentation, Quiz/test, Material simulation, social, Networking tool, tutorials workshops and training material. large number of schools, colleges and Universities are now using their e-learning infrastructure, where in e-learning has become a part of their, "new normal" after experiencing the benefits. The e-learning method is helpful for educational institution to upgrade education to globalization level and remove the boundaries of physical and social culture infrastructure distance large number of University



students are adopting e-learning and application of information, communication technology into traditional education system.<sup>vii</sup>

Online method has negative aspects also because there is no direct live contact of teachers and students. The students can only watch and listen. They cannot do not ask any question to the teachers in between, nor the teacher is able to personally interact with any student in the class. Moreover online study is possible when the required infrastructure is available and light is on. Similarly e-learning method has many challenges and limitations and barriers which are likely to come in the way of expansion of e-learning in higher education institutions in India. There is also commercialisation of e-learning method by the private educations and companies now-a-day's which is not beneficial for poor students. Traditional method of classroom teaching was found best suited during the pre covid time when presence of teachers was useful for the learners to remove their doubts and grievances then and there. Online method is also not teacher student friendly because there is no personal touch between the teacher and the taught in this method.<sup>viii</sup> It is totally mechanical relationship and does not suit to the human beings who have feelings of love and affection and respect. Imposing online classes on the students during lockdown period and thereafter had worsened the living conditions of them, particularly those belonging to poor strata of society. There was fast adaptation of online teaching methods under the extremely unaffordable study conditions and very poor infrastructure. There was wide-spread use of digital technology during pandemic crisis which had drastically disrupted the education system. The government had introduced the damaging policy during that time which had increased the texture and structure of inequality in India. The second wave of the pandemic was widespread and that resulted in the loss of huge number of human lives due to lack of proper healthcare provisions.<sup>ix</sup>

The Indian education system had badly suffered during corona period and long after. These unfavorable conditions with pre existing difference had magnified the problems that arose due to the type, means and mode of education being enforced upon students. The private education system had increased unequal opportunities for the poor and education had become a market commodity. The teaching quality was found as very poor and only formality was being completed. Even regional disparities were not taken into consideration when online teaching becomes mandatory across India. The government applied hasty solutions to remove the problems of structural implementation which had further led to adverse living conditions of the poor and brought social inequalities.

The impact of the massive closedown of schools, effectiveness of remote learning, provision of equal opportunities in online classes, strategies to mitigate the loss of learning and reopening of schools



had become topics of debate in the public sphere. UNESCO had declared covid pandemic as a major educational crisis in the world which had widened the socio-economic disparities and affected educational institutions by bringing inequalities among students. Online classes had disrupted learning intimacy and human relations among teachers and students and there was lack of face to face instructions. There was lot of pressure from the government side to conduct online classes and conduct examinations which spoiled the system of education for a long period. The students belonging to rural areas found difficult to follow online system because they were confronted with multiple crises. The government wanted to show that covid-19 had no impact on the education system and majority of the students were attending online classes regularly or casually and they were promoted to the next class without assessing their preparation. It resulted into their study crisis after covid was over and it still continues to surface. On the other hand many hard working students had felt disgusting over the state of affairs at the time and more than 12500 such students had committed suicide during the period.

Among them were a 14 year old dalit girl from Kerala and 17 year old girl of Mansa district of Punjab.<sup>x</sup> At that time, there was lack of reach to education, and high rate of dropouts, great loss of learning and large gap for the new generation of students. There was also unavailability of teachers and the low quality of education. On the part of government authorities, there was uneven distribution of basic infrastructure which was reflected in the study material due to which only learning system failed very badly. There was no electric supply in the rural area schools and also in the North eastern states and there was shortage of computer gadgets and laptops and the mobile phones. Large number of students could not make use of e-Learning platform. It was proved that the schooling system cannot be replaced by the online mode although the government deliberately remained unattended about this shift during the pandemic. There was trust deficient between the government and teaching community at large.<sup>xi</sup> During the corona period the process of education from primary stage to the university level had suffered badly diametrically and drastically.

Covid had forced the managements to close down normal face to face education in all Institutions and it was not easy for teachers and the students to keep the cycle of education going on. Therefore, under the pressing situation, the education system was forced to depend upon online system which was not ready at that time. It was given sufficient trials for upgrading at that time. India was already struggling to reduce 'digital divide' between rural and urban areas and between rich and poor throughout the country. The pandemic affected human life by sudden closure of physical communication among different parts of the world, stoppage of production houses and social progression.



In order to meet the challenges of digital learning, the government had taken several steps so that the students may not feel disturbed in their study. Several steps like SWAYAM, PRABHA, National digital learning of India, E-G Pathshala, Shodhganga were started to facilitate the students. According to the World bank (2020) and pandemic had crucial impact on Indian economy with a down fall in projected growth rate. The pandemic also reversely affected placement for jobs and employment activities. Online system offers easy lead to students of far-flung and rural areas. Virtual classes were allowed educators to offer multiple classes simultaneously; reducing travel time between locations of classes. Conferences can be conducted in online mode and these can be easily recorded and saved on a web server database for future references. Online examinations can be easily conducted using specialised software. It provides handy tool for learner who want to learn from home especially women and physically disabled persons. Online system is very fast and it saves valuable time of students but there is need for parents and teachers to be more vigilant so that students will only adopt positive side of the internet. The experience shows that majority of the students had shown positive attitude towards online classes during corona period and held interactive sessions with the teachers.<sup>xii</sup>

### **Impact of the steps taken by the government during corona period after the pandemic was over**

In respect of higher education, during the lockdown period, all educational activity in schools, colleges and universities had come to stand still and only online system of education was carried on in the major towns and cities where the necessary infrastructure was available for the same. So far as the remote rural areas were concerned, online classes could not be held at all places because the facilities of internet, computer and laptops were not available at all the places. The students from far-off places had remained without education and their study had suffered great a setback. Moreover, the transport facilities were also not available during those days and those students could not come to the cities to get online education. When first phase of lockdown was over, shortly thereafter it was again clamped when large number of corona cases had again cropped up. The after-effects of the steps are seen today very much because the practices adopted during pandemic period have by and large become a permanent feature now. The system of online classes which was started during locked down as a stop gap arrangement has now become a permanent feature of our education system.<sup>xiii</sup>

Now large numbers of educational institutions are imparting education through online system not only in the cities but also in the rural and remote areas. The necessary infrastructure which was not available at that time in the villages is now available in plenty. Moreover the rural students have become quite used to in that system and many of them have developed proficiency. Although system is now will



accepted by every student, it is comparatively cheaper also than the classroom system. It can cover large number of students sitting at different places and only one teacher is sufficient to teach to a very large number of students at one time by use of connectivity. So, this system is now being adopted by majority of the institutions and the students. India, as a growing nation is continuously seeking to make improvements which are progressing within the education sector. Just as there are many challenges to the education system of India, the situation also provides an equal opportunity to overcome those challenges and to form good education system for better education for the digital learning of the 21<sup>st</sup> first century digital technologies which include the Internet mobile apps, sensors and others. It is a type of learning combination of the context and methods by electronic elements and it has modified teaching and learning methods. Teachers and students are able to learn something new and innovative ideas through online education. Digital education is able to cover maximum number of students to grapple with new trends in education. Online system of education is cost effective and there is flexibility of learning. There is better employability and improved skill knowledge. It gives global exposure to the students in the field of big data and software testing Hospitality, Nursing, Coding and decoding. It has better impact on health because there is no personal physical interaction. It helps to develop high quality digital learning.<sup>xiv</sup> The development of online education system has motivated the research scholars to show large scale internet in the engagement of students study and they are now able to develop and target research questions and teach better in online classes. On the other hand, the students have also experienced the novelty of participating in the online classes. For example, first year university students have showed stronger motivation and engagement in the new teaching methods due to their eagerness and anticipation. They have shown much willingness to adapt to the new international methods introduced by universities in the online learning environment it has been observed that modern online digital technologies have affected some student's perception and learning experiences. These technologies have changed how students interact with peers and teachers. If education can increase emotional, investment in online education students may also be more willing to participate in the lessons. Teacher emotional influencer students have sense of belonging, self efficiency and autonomy.<sup>xv</sup>

The findings have indicated that changes in student behavior in the online education were significant and work related to cognition and emotion. In the post pandemic era, learners need to save the downloaded materials and reuse them in future. The different types of reuses are As-is-reuse, Technical adaptations for reuse, Linguistic adaptations for reuse, Cultural adaptations for reuse, Pedagogical adaptations for reuse, Annotations as adaptation for reuse, access to source code, facilitating reuse and sustainability. In the post pandemic period, the students in higher education are supposed to show their



academic progress from different dimensions like, excess, quality and equality. Data from the various sources have shown that we need to strengthen our educational resources management in the post pandemic era. Teachers need to guide their students in management procedure of the digital educational resource simultaneously supporting future of learning as a result of the steps taken by the government during corona period. Now there is more and more adoption of educational technology such as use of video conferencing tools and other hi-tech instruments in the schools and colleges. Now the teachers are well trained and more capable to teach through online system. <sup>xvi</sup>

Even the socio emotional teaching methods and new flexible learning modes are being used in the online classes by the teachers. Online learning can improve the level of attendance of the students because they can attend the class from anywhere. In the real sense, corona has opened many new opportunities for students, teachers and schools in India and the world. The number of internet user has considerably increased after the pandemic because the students are very much encouraged to learn it's working. The Digital India was launched in 2015 .PM-E-vidya scheme was launched during pandemic period when Bharat net and NEAT were also launched. There is increasing use of Smartphone and the internet by students. It can be said that an important role was played by covid-19 in changing the educational landscape bringing a shift from traditional classroom setting to online platforms. According to study made by the Azim Premji University in 2020, "The Covid-19 pandemic has led to disruption in all over the world of life. Schools, colleges and all other academic institutions have been forced to look for alternatives to ensure continuity in learning.

Online education allows the students to study unlimited topics and works of experts on various subjects which is not otherwise possible. Online programs allow students of different streams to learn at their own places, without any inhibitions and without compromising on their particular interests. Students with disabilities are benefitted better than other students from online education. To make online education more effective, accessible and useful various online resources such as training programs and schemes have been developed by the government of India for students, teachers and educational institutions. Cutting-edge technology like artificial intelligence (AI) is able to bring more possibilities for innovative and personalised approaches. <sup>xvii</sup>

### **Role of online education in NEP-2020**

There is special focus on the system of online education in NEP-2020. Universities and other higher education institutions in India along with NITs (National institution of technology) and IGNOU ( Indira Gandhi National Open University) will perform as pilot of digital learning. It has



prescribed the system of DIKSHA and SWAYAM under the NEP-2020 to be adopted by the students. This policy provides for improvement of virtual labs where students will be able to practice their theoretical knowledge and convert course content in different languages. It will focus on online learning which is the need of both the schools and higher education. Now, the role of online technology in providing the education to the students is important due to flexible nature of education technology. Online system is cost effective and there is flexibility of learning. Facilitated by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the UGC regulations and Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIS), the online mode of higher education is fast emerging as an attractive to the traditional campus mode of college education in India and the process is likely to attend greater scope and chances in future. The online education market is likely to grow from more than 23% in the next 5 year to reach about 4.2 billion dollars. The online program offered by higher education institutions have grown from 345 in 2021-22 to 756 in 2025-26.

More and more householders are being connected with DTH connections and higher percentage uses of computers and internet facilities are taking place now as a result of awakening among the masses. Girls are being more proficient in computer technology and more than 85% of teachers in government schools are now digitally and professionally qualified but percentage of untrained teachers in the case of private by added schools is high as 27.43%. The data of schools having electricity connections, functional computers and internet connections have comparatively increased to a large extent within last 2-3 years including in the rural and urban areas. The Saubhagya scheme or Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Biji Har Ghar Yojana launched by Prime Minister will help electricity reach our remaining schools. The number of Smartphone owners has also gone up significantly from 30% in 2018 to 60% in 2020. The government has put lot of efforts to investing more in bettering the digital infrastructure for improving the life and learning of students, “said Vineet Nayer chairman of sampark foundation and former chief executive HCL Technology limited.<sup>xviii</sup>

### **Position of online study in different countries**

**United States America:** - It has been reported by the press that there has been fast growth of online admissions in America in spite of an expanding or shrinking economy in 2016. There were over 6 million students in the USA who enrolled in at least one online course. This number was increased by 30% in 2018; over the students that took at least one online class also took a course on campus.

**India:** - Developing countries like India are in a better position to ignore the faculty modes adopted in advanced countries. According to study made by KPMG India and Google, the online



education system in India currently stands at US \$ 2.47 million with an average of 1.6 million users. The online students in India for various technical and non technical classes and courses are increasing day by day and government initiatives go a long way in reaping benefits of online education.

**Asia and Middle East:** - Online system of education is also very much popular in China and large numbers of students are enrolled in online education on pedagogical, psychological, social and Technology perspectives. The critics have pointed out that in the Middle East there is low interest penetration, low public esteem for online learning and lack of online education facilities in Arabic language. In South Arabia, the government is making joint collaboration for e-Learning with the higher education institutions to improve the quality and standards of e-Learning.

**Australia and New Zealand:** - These countries have also seen fast growth in the area of online education including Asia specific region. In Swinburne University of Technology in Australia online territorial education sector has reflected much growth in the online education scenario. There is a partnership with Open University in Australia for online higher education also lack of infrastructure in the matter of bandwidth connectivity in the remote area. Similarly, the Government of New Zealand also recognised that e-learning is a potent tool for Peer and collaborative learning in a technology rich context.<sup>xix</sup>

**Africa:** - South Africa has developed digital infrastructure with e-learning faculty. However there are gaps in the policy comprehension by intermediaries like district and province officials creating problems in implementation of education policy. Ghana is among the most progressive country in Africa with much better access to internet. Majority of Africa students have access to internet and related education content on their mobiles but there is also addiction to smart phones.<sup>xx</sup>

**Conclusion:** - History has seen many catastrophic Taking place in the world and covid-19 was equally damaging and killing lakhs of people all over the world including India. Even the most advanced countries of the world had left serious Impact of the pandemic which had adversely affected all the facets of like including social political and economic. Education had also several suffered during 2019 and thereafter because no regular classes in the schools, colleges and universities could be conducted due to danger of being impacted from the people who had been caught by the virus. Traditional teaching and learning practices were totally halted and only online classes were ranged during lockdown wherever it was possible to do so by availability of the necessary Infrastructure several countries including India were engaged to discover the vaccine for cure from the deadly virus but it took long time to find the medicine. There for the lockdown period was extended for long time. Online classes could be conducted



in the metros and big cities but the students in the semi urban areas and rural areas were the worst affected because no such arrangements were available with then to attend online classes. In most of the areas of India the classes had been suspended to prevent the spread of pandemic. The intensity of the infection was wide spread and even would World Health Organisation have failed to find the cure for it immediately. All such circumstances had forced various governments to resort to holding of online study methods as there was no other alternative.

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