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Innovations in education amidst COVID 19 crisis: A review

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Abstract

United Nations in its policy briefings for Education during Covid-19 has rightly advocated that a collective participation is needed from all walks of life to prevent a learning crisis from becoming a disaster that could have a deep impact on the entire generation. Education has a direct impact on the realization of all other human rights. For the education system and the productive societies to thrive during difficult times, Covid-19 pandemic indeed revolutionized the way education is being imparted across the globe. The institutions of Higher learning have adopted technology driven programs for imparting online education. Innovations in teaching-learning curriculum to reconsider education in these new normal times are the need of the present times.

Keywords: United Nations, covid-19, pandemic, sustainable, new normal

Introduction

The Covid 19 pandemic has led to a huge pitfall of the education system in the timeline of human civilization. According to the United Nations data, the pandemic has affected more than a billion learner's community in about 190 countries. The shutting down of the educational institutions has affected 94 percent of the world's student population and upto 99 percent in the financially constrained institutions ^[1]. The situation has worsened the preexisting disparities in education by curtailing the options available for the vulnerable group with a special concern with the girl child education in the rural areas ^[1].

UNESCO is extending cooperation to countries in their efforts to improve the immediate impact of school closures, particularly for learners from not so privileged backgrounds and to ensure the continuity of education for every child via virtual platforms ^[2]. Researchers have published many works on the wide impacts of Covid-19 and how these changes shape the new normal ^[8].

There must be effective strategies of imparting education to learners across the affected countries. The data concerning the rapid spread of COVID-19 has led to unprecedented changes across all spheres of human activity. Teaching professionals have equipped themselves in containing the damaging repercussions of this pandemic by bringing in novel instructional approaches to ensure that students are well prepared to face the examinations ^[8, 9].

Covid-19 has compelled Universities across India, and worldwide, to suspend traditional classrooms and embrace a gradual shift to digital learning. Due to the financial constraints this move has been smooth for most private universities while the public ones are still adapting. A substantial number of surveys have been taken up by the stakeholders about the nature of classes and the future course of action for examination and evaluation.

It is quite inevitable that pandemic has offered unique challenges to all types of learning. The conventional mode of imparting education is often resistant to any change. The system tends to maintain status quo and usually change only in response to crisis ^[4]. Since the current situation is likely to continue and the stop-gap measures are not viable in the long run, therefore we should take re-think on modulation of the existing systems. The need of the hour is to explore the novel means of pedagogy learning and training approaches from any remote area of the world, an idea that is critical to imparting lifelong learning ^[3].

Transition from traditional to digital technologies

The teaching fraternity is stressed out to find innovative means of managing the sudden transition to remote learning. The outcome is that the students are continuously glued to digital gadgets and eventually the screen time has increased tremendously.

Highly distinguished faculty at the prestigious organizations are of the opinion that valued

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learning is lost when education is imparted by virtual mode. They have rightly advocated that education is not just about delivering lectures, it is more towards interactive sessions, critical thinking, open discussions and problem solving.

The former Vice-chancellor of Delhi University, Mr. Dinesh Singh, strongly advocates using various tools and software's of Information technology for the institutes of Higher education. He advised to streamline the pragmatic approach to enable digital learning using basic resources and technology. He briefed the idea that we truly need educators who can inspire students to think critically in such crucial times ^[4].

However, in India, basic access to technology is a herculean task particularly in rural areas where all the students cannot afford a computer or broad bandwidth internet at home. This severely affects the attendance and student participation in online sessions. An extensive survey conducted by IIT Kanpur revealed that about 9.3 percent of 2,789 students were unable to download the reading material sent by their respective institutes or study online. Data showed that only 34.1 percent of them had good connectivity for streaming real-time classes. In another survey conducted by Local Circles among 25,000 respondents similarly found that only 57 percent students were equipped with the requisite hardware, that is, computer, router and printer at home to attend online classes ^[4].

Students from disciplines like Law have highlighted that discussions and debates are significant components that structure their curriculum. The faculty engaged in these courses also looked forward to hands on training and were thus facing the brunt in the current situation.

Majority of the faculty are showing their concern over engaging the students online in the same manner as they would have in a classroom. They clearly state that debates and in-person discussions on polarizing topics require subtle perspectives, and these often lose their efficacy when they are conducted in an online mode.

Various other faculties also discourse that there is no comparison of casual conversations in traditional classrooms. Students are less interactive in online teaching. The greatest advantage of offline teaching is maintaining eye contact. It is easy to make out with the students if there are following the concepts. It would fail to ignite the actual excitement and fun as in the real classroom.

Rethinking Education

One of the leading experts on global education, Pasi Sahlberg, a Professor of Education Policy, in cooperation with HundrED Founder and Creative Director Saku Tuominen had presented their 10 Step Action Plan on how to provide quality education for all during crisis. The most significant among them include finding people who could lead the process, initiate a strategy for the communication plan, engage people and finally find appropriate solutions and to secure financial grants & resources ^[5].

While at the students end, they are overwhelmed at the present transformation and are valuing the hard work of the teachers for making online teaching come into the pipeline. It was stated that self-directed learning will make the students more proactive, independent, and adaptable learners ^[6].

It is the foremost responsibility of the Governments and the education providers to discuss and share innovative technologies in virtual training.

A rethinking of education in the new normal post-COVID-19 period, within the curriculum perspective is important. The approach not only highlights both the opportunities and challenges in the future of education but also fosters need based modifications in curriculum development ^[7].

As many of the University faculty are not well-versed to operate virtual education platforms, therefore the support from educational assistants is quite significant. It is indeed important that the faculty must communicate with the teaching assistants before the commencement of class to understand the rationale, knowledge framework and the scheduled teaching activities of the class ^[10].

The Higher education authorities have put forward instructional strategies that have been thoroughly researched for the current scenario of virtual teaching experiences for the University instructors who might face similar challenges ^[11].

They concluded that there are five high-impact principles for effective virtual education. These include -ensuring relevance between virtual instructional design and student learning; delivering content effectively in the virtual environment; providing adequate support to students from both faculty and teaching assistants, promoting student participation for conceptual learning; and lastly having a contingency plan to address unexpected technical issues with virtual education platforms.

Virtual learning approaches

There are different forms of online learning: Knowledge repositories, online support systems, asynchronous training, synchronous training and hybrid approaches ^[12].

- a) Knowledge repositories consist of well-planned lessons that are published on the website having systematic instructions that a student must adhere to, with no support available.
- b) Online support systems are a modified version of the knowledge repositories, where support is available. There is a web panel available to get support on some technical areas.
- c) In asynchronous training, classes do not take place in real-time. The students are provided with reading material and other resources on regular basis. The individual mentors are allocated, and they provide support through email or video conferencing.
- d) Synchronous training is carried out in real-time with a live mentor and an optional moderator. There is a dedicated slot in which students can log-in to the online platform to converse directly with the mentor and other members of the group.

Hybrid train mode includes both online and personalized interaction.

Due to global trends of the pandemic, higher education needs to prioritize the academic, career counselling, and the medical services and programs that should be accessible to the students in the university through online mode ^[13].

The access to virtual services particularly those not requiring any registration fees like medical counselling, remote mental health telemedicine, and other online wellness services from medical staff representatives and professional health counsellors including psychologists and therapists should be readily accessible to the students even outside the centres ^[15].

COVID-19 played a crucial role to value the digital

networking platforms, virtual interaction tools, collaborative media technologies and e-learning resources. The wealth of information from knowledgebase resources and literature mining has revealed that no paradigm shift in the educational settings can be successfully fostered without including educators as the intended stakeholders ^[14].

Conclusion

This paper reviews the instructional strategies adopted by institutes of higher education to cope up with the Covid-19 pandemic and how it can address future outcomes in the post-Covid-19 era. The major focus will be to optimize the learning process for the students and their engagement to have a smooth shift from traditional to virtual modes of learning.

The global pandemic has indeed opened opportunities in the Higher education to advance its Information enabled technologies for online learning and deep insights from mentors to all over the world to impart knowledge to children even from the remote destination.

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