

# IMPACT OF PANDEMIC COVID-19 ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA – AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

Dr.M SHIVARAJAPPA

## 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.

**Key Words:** Education, COVID-19, Impact, Govt. of India. s

The pandemic Covid-19 has spread over whole world and compelled the human society to maintain social distancing. It has significantly disrupted the education sector which is a critical determinant of a country's economic future. February 11, 2020, the World Health Organisation (proposed an official name of the virus as COVID acronym for Coronavirus disease 2019. It was first identified in Wuhan, China on December 31, 2019. First death by COVID 19 was the 61-year old man in Wuhan, China 2020. WHO declared COVID-19 as a pandemic on 2020. The first case of the COVID-19 pandemic reported on 30 January 2020 in the state of Kerala and the affected had a travel history from Wuhan, China (Wikipedia). The first death due to COVID-19 was reported in India on March 12, 2020. It has affected more than 4.5 million peoples worldwide (WHO). According to the UNESCO report, it had affected more than 90% of total world's student population during mid-April 2020 which is now reduced to nearly 67% during June 2020. Outbreak of COVI-19 has impacted more than 120 crores of students and youths across the planet. In India, more than 32 crores of students have been affected by the various restrictions and the nationwide lockdown for COVI-19. As per the UNESCO report, about 14 crores of primary and 13 crores of secondary students are affected which are two mostly affected levels in India.

After observing the corona virus pandemic situation the WHO advised to maintain social distancing as the first prevention step. So, every country started the action of lockdown to separate the contaminated people. The education sect including schools, colleges and universities became closed. Classes suspended and all examinations of schools, colleges and universities including entrance tests were postponed indefinitely. Thus, the lockdown destroyed the schedules of every student. Though it is an exceptional situation in the history of education, COVID opportunities to come out of the rigorous classroom teaching model to a new era of digital model.

The lockdown has compelled many educational institutions to cancel their classes, examinations, internships etc. and to choose the online modes. Initially, the educators and the students were quite confused and didn't understand how to cope up with the situation of this sudden crisis that compelled closure of the educational activities. But latter on all realized that the lockdown has taught so many lessons to manage with the emergence of such pandemics. Thus, COVID created many challenges and opportunities for the educational institutes to strengthen their infrastructure (Pravat, 2020a). The lockdown has given them a ray of hope for teachers and students to continue their educational activities through online. The teachers assigned work to students via internet, delivered lectures video conferencing using different Apps like Zoom, Google meet, Facebook, YouTube, and Skype etc. There are WhatsApp groups of guardians, teachers, students and parents for affective communication through which they are always in touch to share their difficulties through this e-medium. In a nation like China that practices a considerably more centralization system, a change to digital learning may be simpler. Even in a nation like the U.S.A, there are some low pay students who don't approach broad bands and unable to use computerized learning arrangement (Study Abroad Life). The same is the situation that happens with India where not every student is well equipped with the high-speed internet and digital gadgets and are along these lines of suffer. Numerous advanced educational institutions in India are not also equipped with digital facilities right now to cope up with sudden change from traditional education set up to the online education system.

## OBJECTIVES

The present research paper focused on the following objectives:

- To enlighten various measures taken by Govt. of India for education sector during this pandemic.
- To highlight various positive impact of COVID-19 on education.
- To enlist some negative impacts of COVID-19 and to put some effective suggestions for continuing education during the pandemic situation.

## METHODOLOGY

Data and information presented in current study are collected from various reports prepared by national and international agencies on COVID-19 pandemic. Information are collected from various authentic websites. Some journals and e-contents relating to impact of COVID-19 on educational system are referred. Initiatives of Govt. of India on education during Covid-19 To prevent spread of pandemic COVID-19, the Government of India has taken number of preventive measures. The union government declared a countrywide lock-down of all educational institutions on 16 March 2020. Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) postponed all examinations of secondary and higher secondary schools on March 18, 2020 throughout India. CBSE released revised guidelines for examination centres to conduct examinations by maintaining a distance of at least 1 meter between the students taking the exam with a class not having more than 24 students. If the rooms of the examination centres are small then the students should be divided into different rooms accordingly. The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) postponed the interview for the Civil Services Examination 2019 (Wikipedia). Similarly the most of the state Governments and other educational boards postponed examinations due to outbreak of COVID-19. Govt. of India has observed one day nationwide Janta-curfew on March 22 and implement lockdown from March 25, 2020 onwards in different phases. Govt. of India has been extending lockdown periods from time to time adopting different strategies to fight with the pandemic but educational institutions remained closed continuously. The lockdown 6.0 was declared on June 29, which is effective from 1st July to 31st July 2020 with some less restriction in other sectors except education. Almost all state government ministries have taken measures to ensure that the academic activities of schools and colleges do not hamper during the lockdown period. They have instructed the schools to hold all their classes online. The lockdown has accelerated adoption of digital technology. It has provided a chance to develop new and improved professional skills/knowledge through online learning in more efficient and productive way. Online learning is the best solution during this pandemic Covid-19 situation (Pravat, 2020b). So, the digital India vision of the government is emerging as a vital tool for solving the present crisis due to Covid-19. It is a fact that technology-based education is more transparent with all respect. Looking at this challenge of colleges and schools being shut, government of India, as well as state governments and private players have undertaken proper initiatives. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has made several arrangements, including online portals and educational channels through Direct to Home TV, Radios for students to continue learning. During lockdown, students are using popular social media tools like WhatsApp, Zoom, Google meet, Telegram, YouTube live, Facebook live etc. for online teaching learning system. ICT initiative of MHRD (eBroucher-<https://mhrd.gov.in/ict-initiatives>) is a unique platform which combines all digital resources for online education. The digital initiatives of MHRD for secondary as well as higher education during COVID-19 are listed as below:

## Secondary education

- **Diksha portal** contains e-Learning content for students, teachers, and parents aligned to the curriculum, including video lessons, worksheets, textbooks and assessments. Under the guidance of its national boards of education (CBSE) and NCERT, the content has been created by more than 250 teachers who teach in multiple languages. The app is available to use offline. It has more than 80,000 e-Books for classes 1 to 12 created by CBSE, NCERT in multiple languages. The contents can also be viewed through QR codes on textbooks. The app can be downloaded from IOS and Google Play Store. Website: <https://diksha.gov.in> or <https://seshaqun.gov.in/shaqun>

- **e-Pathshala** is an e-Learning app by NCERT for classes 1 to 12 in multiple languages. The app houses books, videos, audio, etc. aimed at students, educators and parents in multiple languages including Hindi, Urdu, and English. In this web portal NCERT has deployed 1886 audios, 2000 videos, 696 e-Books and 504 Flip Books for classes 1 to 12 in different languages. Mobile Apps is available. Website: <http://epathshala.nic.in> or <http://epathshala.gov.in>.

- **National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER) portal** provides a host of resources for students and teachers in multiple languages including books, interactive modules and videos including a host of STEM-based games. Content is mapped to the curriculum for classes 1-12, including aligned resources for teachers. It has a total of 14527 files including 401 collections, 2779 documents, 1345 interactive, 1664 audios, 2586 images and 6153 videos on different languages. Website: <http://nroer.gov.in/welcome>

## Higher Education

- **Swayam** is the national online education platform hosting 1900 courses covering both school (classes 9 to 12) and higher education (under graduate, post graduate programs) in all subjects including engineering, humanities and social sciences, law and management courses. The unique feature is that, it is integrated with the conventional education. Credit transfers are possible for SWAYAM courses (max. 20%). Website: <https://swayam.gov.in/>

- **Swayam Prabha** has 32 DTH TV channels transmitting educational contents on 24 x 7 basis. These channels are available for viewing all across the country using DD Free Dish Set Top Box and Antenna. The channel schedule and other details are available in the portal. The channels cover both school education (classes 9 to 12) and higher education (undergraduate, postgraduate, engineering Out-of-school children, vocational courses and teacher training) in arts, science, commerce, performing arts, social sciences and humanities subjects, engineering, technology, law, medicine, agriculture. Website: <https://swayamprabha.gov.in/>

- **e-PG Pathshala** is for postgraduate students. Postgraduate students can access this platform for ebooks, online courses and study materials during this lockdown period. The importance of this platform is that

students can access these facilities without having internet for the whole day. Website: <https://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/>

### Positive impact of COVID-19 on education

Though the outbreak of COVID-19 has created many negative impacts on education, educational institutions of India have accepted the challenges and trying their best to provide seamless support services to the students during the pandemic. Indian education system got the opportunity for transformation from traditional system to a new era. The following points may be considered as the positive impacts.

- **Move towards Blended Learning:** COVID-19 has accelerated adoption of digital technologies to deliver education. Educational institutions moved towards blended mode of learning. It encouraged all teachers and students to become more technology savvy. New ways of delivery and assessments of learning opened immense opportunities for a major transformation in the area of curriculum development and pedagogy. It also gives access to large pools of learners at a time.
- **Rise in use of Learning Management Systems:** Use of learning management systems by educational institutions became a great demand. It opened a great opportunity for the companies those have been developing and strengthening learning management systems for use educational institutions (Misra, 2020).
- **Enhance the use of soft copy of learning material:** In lockdown situation students were not able to collect the hard copies of study materials and hence most of the students used of soft copies materials for reference.
- **Improvement in collaborative work-** There is a new opportunity where collaborative teaching and learning can take on new forms. Collaborations can also happen among faculty/teachers across the world to benefit from each other (Misra, 2020).
- **Rise in online meetings-** The pandemic has created a massive rise in teleconferencing, virtual meetings, and webinars and e-conferencing opportunities
- **Enhanced Digital Literacy:** The pandemic situation induced people to learn and use digital technology and resulted in increasing the digital literacy.
- **Improved the use of electronic media for sharing information:** Learning materials are shared among the students easily and the related queries are resolved through e-mail, SMS, phone calls and using different social Medias like WhatsApp or Facebook.
- **World-wide exposure:** Educators and learners are getting opportunities to interact with peers from around the world. Learners adapted to an international community.
- **Better time management:** Students are able to manage their time more efficiently in online education during pandemics.

- **Demand for Open and Distance Learning (ODL):** During the pandemic situation most of the students preferred ODL mode as it encourages self-learning providing opportunities to learn from diverse resources and customized learning as per their needs.

### Negative impact of COVID-19 on education

Education sector has suffered a lot due to the outbreak of COVID-19. It has created many negative impacts on education and some of them are as pointed below:

- **Educational activity hampered:** Classes have been suspended and exams at different levels postponed. Different boards have already postponed the annual examinations and entrance tests. Admission process got delayed. Due to continuity in lockdown, student suffered a loss of nearly 3 months of the full academic year of 2020-21 which is going to further deteriorate the situation of continuity in education and the as students would face much difficulty in resuming schooling again after a huge gap.

- **Impact on employment:** Most of the recruitment got postponed due to COVID-19 Placements for students may also be affected with companies delaying the on board of students. Unemployment rate is expected to be increased due to this pandemic. In India, there is no recruitment in Govt. sector and fresh graduates fear withdrawal of their job offers from private sectors because of the current situation. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy's estimates on unemployment shot up from 8.4% in mid-March to 23% in early April and the urban unemployment rate to 30.9% (Educationasia.in). When the unemployment increases then the education gradually decreases as people struggle for food rather than education.

- **Unprepared teachers/students for online education:** Not all teachers/students are good at it or at least not all of them were ready for this sudden transition from face to face learning to online learning. Most of the teachers are just conducting lectures on video platforms such as Zoom, Google meet etc. which may not be real online learning without any dedicated online learning platform.

- **Reduced global employment opportunity-** Some may lose their jobs from other countries and the pass out students may not get their job outside India due to restrictions caused by COVID-19. Many Indians might have returned home after losing their jobs overseas due to COVID-19. Hence, the fresh students who are likely to enter the job market shortly may face difficulty in getting suitable employment. Many students who have already got jobs through campus interviews may not be able to join their jobs due to lockdown. The Indians who have been doing their jobs abroad may lose their jobs. Recent graduates in India are of also fearing for withdrawal of job offers from corporate sectors because of movement restriction in the current pandemic situation

- **Increased responsibility of parents to educate their wards:** Some educated parents are able to guide but some may not have the adequate level of education needed to teach children in the house.

- **Loss of nutrition due to school closure:** Mid-day meals is a school meal programme of the Government of India which is designed to provide better the nutritional food to school-age children nationwide. The

closure of schools has serious implications on the daily nutrition of students as the mid-day meal schemes have temporarily been shut. Various studies have pointed out that mid-day meals are also an important contributing factor for increased enrolment in the schools

- **Access to digital world:** As many students have limited or no internet access and many students may not be able to afford computer, laptop or supporting mobile phones in their homes, online teaching-learning may create a digital divide among students. The lockdown has hit the poor students very hard in India as most of them are unable to explore online learning according to various reports. Thus the online teaching-learning method during pandemic COVID-19 may enhance the gap between rich/poor and urban/rural.

- **Access to global education:** The pandemic has significantly disrupted the higher education sector. A large number of Indian students who are enrolled in many Universities abroad, especially in worst affected countries are now leaving those countries and if the situation persists, in the long run, a there will be a significant decline in the demand for international higher education.

- **Payment of Schools, Colleges fee got delayed:** During this lockdown most of the parents will be facing the unemployment situation so they may not be able to pay the fee for that particular time periods which may affect the private institutes.

## SUGGESTIONS

- India should develop creative strategies to ensure that all children must have sustainable access to learning during pandemic COVID-19. The Indian policies must include various individuals from diverse backgrounds including remote regions, marginalised and minority groups for effective delivery.

- Immediate measures are required to lessen the effects of the pandemic on job offers, internship programs, and research projects.

- Many online learning platforms offer multiple programmes on the same subjects with different levels of certifications, methodology and assessment parameters. So, the quality of programmes may differ across different online learning platforms. Therefore, establishment of quality assurance mechanisms and quality benchmark for online learning programmes must be developed and offered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in India keeping in view of rapid growth of the online learning platforms

- Across the globe, Indian traditional knowledge is well known for its scientific innovations, values and benefits to develop sustainable technologies and medicines and this knowledge systems in different fields should be integrated with a present-day mainstream higher education system.

- Govt and educational institutes should plan to continue the educational activities maintaining social distancing. 30-40% students and teachers may attend schools/colleges in two shifts per day to carry on educational activities by obeying guidelines for COVID-19.

- At current times, access to technology and internet is an urgent requirement. So, the digital capabilities and the required infrastructure must reach to the remotest and poorest communities to facilitate the students to continue their education during the pandemics. There is a need to deploy public funds to fix the internet gap and ensure that students continue to learn digitally. The state governments/private organisations should come up with ideas to address this issue of digital education.
- Some significant issues associated with distance learning strategies like the availability and access to digital devices with internet connectivity, the need for safe learning spaces, creating capabilities for teachers, families and students to operate and navigate digital devices, and engaging lesson plans for disabled students and other marginalised groups should be addressed by Govt. and the stakeholders.

## CONCLUSION

COVID-19 has impacted immensely to the education sector of India. Though it has created many challenges, various opportunities are also evolved. The Indian Govt. and different stakeholders of education have explored the possibility of Open and Distance learning (ODL) by adopting different digital technologies to cope up with the present crisis of COVID-19. India is not fully equipped to make education reach all corners of the nation via digital platforms. The students who aren't privileged like the others will suffer due to the present choice of digital platforms. But universities and the government of India are relentlessly trying to come up with a solution to resolve this problem. The priority should be to utilise digital technology to create an advantageous position for millions of young students in India. It is need of the hour for the educational institutions to strengthen their knowledge and Information Technology infrastructure to be ready for facing COVID-19 like situations.

Even if the COVID-19 crisis stretches longer, there is an urgent need to take efforts on maximum utilisation of online platforms so that students not only complete their degree in this academic year but also to get ready for the future digital oriented environment. The concept of "work from home" has greater relevance in such pandemic situation to reduce spread of COVID-19. India should develop creative strategies to ensure that all children must have sustainable access to learning during pandemic COVID-19. The Indian policies must include various individuals from diverse backgrounds including remote regions, marginalised and minority groups for effective delivery of education. As online practice is benefitting the students immensely, it should be continued after the lockdown. Further detailed statistical study may be undertaken to explore the impact of COVID-19 on education system of India.

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