



COVID -19 PANDEMIC: HIGHER EDUCATION CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of the study is to know the alteration required in the field of higher education to cope up with the present situation of SARS Covid -19 pandemic.

Approach: Since it is the theoretical research paper, researcher reviewed and analyzed the authentic articles published related to SAAR covid-19 virus to study its nature and behavior in order to contribute theoretical foundation of this study and also to summarize the result.

Finding and Conclusion:

1)Though SARS covid-19 has made hard hit to the education sector, but it will definitely call for change in system which in longer run turn into boon or will benefit the system as a whole.

2.Higher education system need to be more of practical oriented then the theoretical to make younger generation self- reliant, which will also help in bridging the gap between education system and community need.

Key Word - Higher education,

INTRODUCTION

Growth of any country mainly depends on the kind of human resources it has. The qualitative human resources are produced through qualitative education.Hence, the education system forms the backbone of any nation. Indian education system finds its roots from the Vedic system of education, wherein residential concept of teaching was in practice under the guidance of Guru. Over the years due to the subsequent invasions in India,Vedic system of education gradually got obscured.

Major change in education system,especially in the area of higher education was brought by European rulers. The British established a formal system of higher education with an intention to generate working class of English speaking people for British administrative services, armed forces and trade. Thus the British model of university education began to expand across India, leading to rising number of learning centers.At present,India has more than 935 universities with 50 central universities, 409 state universities,127 deemed to be universities and

349 private universities thus making India as the world's third largest higher education system next to the US and China.

Since from last few months the whole world is suffering from the outbreak of Novel "Corona virus". It is one of the deadliest and infectious microorganisms. The virus got its name from the presence of crown-like projections on the surface of its body. The presence of Coronavirus was first identified in birds in the year 1937. Later in 1965, it was found in the noses of humans having common cold. In the year 2019, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) monitored the outbreak of a novel Coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2, which causes disease COVID-19. The first outbreak of this disease was identified in December 2019 at Wuhan, China. In India, the first patient of COVID-19 was reported on 30th January 2020 in the state of Kerala. As the disease spread quickly around the world, it was declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11th March 2020 and said it was "deeply concerned by the alarming levels of spread and severity" of the outbreak. This called for worldwide lock down which resulted in the closure of all sectors including Education.

IMPACT of COVID-19 ON HIGHER EDUCATION.

According to UNESCO, on 1st April 2020, schools and higher education institutions (HEIs) were closed in 185 countries, affecting 1,542,412,000 learners, which constitutes 89.4% of total enrolled learner's worldwide. A survey report of International Association of University (IAU May 2020) illustrates that the higher educational institutions around the world are affected in one way or other by the COVID-19 crisis and are experiencing stress and constraints. Results showed that the present crises might result negatively on the quality of their instructional activities and on the other hand increase inequality of learning opportunities. The report also highlighted that, due to the present situation, classroom teaching has been replaced by distance teaching and learning. The shift from "face-to-face" to "distance teaching" has to meet many challenges such as limitations in technical infrastructure, competences and pedagogies. HEIs reported that research has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic by the cancellation or postponement of scientific conferences and scientific projects.

Indian education system has also been affected by current COVID-19 pandemic situation. During the 2nd week of March, state governments across the country temporarily closed down all the colleges and universities with uncertainty of reopening date with an intention to contain the spread of virus among the large community. According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development, every year in India 37.4 million students enroll for higher education. The present crises of COVID-19 have affected the future of these students which also has developed anxiety and uncertainty about their future educational plans.

Temporarily shutting down the centers of higher education has made following impact on Indian higher education sector:

1. COVID-19 has given birth to a long-overdue revolution in the field of education. Also we can expect all together anew model of education to emerge once COVID-19 has passed.
2. It has impacted the Structure of teaching, learning and assessment methodologies of education system.
3. The entrance exams of several universities for courses like Engineering, medical, law, agriculture, fashion designing etc. are on hold or deferred.
4. It has generated uncertainty over the University Exam cycle
5. Most universities and higher institution centers face impact in terms of slowdown in student internships and placements.
6. Lower fee collection in colleges has created hurdles in managing the working capital.
7. Some faculties and employees of these institutions face reduction in salary, bonuses and increments.
8. Many higher institutions have paused faculty hiring plans for their existing vacancies which may in turn affect quality and excellence.
9. Many of the Indian students studying overseas have returned back and if this pandemic situation persists for longer period there are chances of decline in the demand for international higher education.
10. A thought of digital convocation might have to be planned as well by higher educational institutions as it would be technically concluding academic sessions via digital method which will deprive the witnessing of very proud moment of honor to the fulfilling student which otherwise would done in person during graduation ceremony.

CHALLENGES FOR INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Indians are very close to 160 days of living with Covid-19, but still number new infections per day are increasing at a rapid rate. In this context we cannot predict the start of academic sessions of higher education. Parallely it has following challenges

1. During pandemic situation most of the universities have dis-enrolled their educational programmes such as research projects and internships, placement and admission programmes etc. so immediate measures are required to mitigate its effect.
2. Many Indian students enrolled at abroad universities have returned back to India due to the crisis of Covid-19. This may result in increase of enrolment rate in Indian universities for higher education which will pose a

challenge in meeting the demand supply ratio of number of students versus availability of seats for higher education.

3. Increase in demand for enrolment by aspiring students returned from foreign universities will call for increase in choices of programmes to be offered similar to the ones offered by foreign countries. So HEI have to offer wide range of selection system depending upon the learner's aptitude and interest. Hence open elective system has to be strengthened in higher education centers.
4. India's economic crises will impact on cash flow of higher institution. There are the full possibilities of delay in payment of fees, hence higher institutions need to give certain concessions or options of paying fees in installments for the students.
5. During post COVID-19 era, some sectors like Medicine, IT, Communication etc. will see dominancy. So the skill required by these sectors has to be supplied by higher institutions. Hence batches passing out in the next 2-3 years should have certain specialization in their curriculum to meet industry demand of employability.
6. So far in higher education, importance was given to employability. But present pandemic situation has taught us to prepare the younger generation not only for employability but also for their future life by making them self-reliant. Hence Indian traditional knowledge system in the fields of Indian medicine, yoga, ethnobotany & agriculture and character building education should be integrated in curricula of higher education.
7. Post pandemic era will demand for new skills. Industries will create new positions, which will have a positive impact on placement scenarios. Hence higher institution should come up with new updated curricula and teaching methodologies. Curriculum of higher education needs to be revisited or changed every semester instead of once in 4-5 years.
8. Life skill based education and value based education needs to be given more emphasis. Hence organization sector of higher education has to be changed. New department should be established to make the necessary changes depending upon requirements of society.
9. In India, use of ICT in higher education is less compared to other developing countries. However, during the pandemic situation, 25% of teaching was done online. So HEI has to increase the budget on ICT to support infrastructure required for online teaching platforms.
10. Present crises have transformed the conventional chalk-talk method of teaching to technology oriented online teaching. In the remotest parts of the country due to poor connectivity learners are unable to have ubiquitous internet access and they suffer. Hence strategies are required to prepare by the higher education sector in this regard for the evolving demand-supply trends across the country.

CONCLUSION

Pandemic situation is not new to Indian education system. 1958 outbreak of Influenza virus had also impacted on Indian education system. But during those periods higher education system was neither developed nor opted by large number of learners in comparison as of present day's scenario. Present crisis of COVID-19, has made severe impact on Indian higher education system by shutting all the colleges and universities nationwide with uncertainty of reopening date. Perhaps Digital education appears to be the only solution at this moment to mitigate the risk of any delay or lapses in continuing the academic session which also intern to minimize the chances of infection to students until physical classes resume. India being a developing country having poor economic condition due to which all students might not personally afford broadband, laptops or any other related infrastructure for digital learning. Even though ICT being introduced in Indian education system long back, but still many of the higher educational institutes are not fully equipped with ICT gadgets. This adds difficulty of the students. Hence higher education need to work in this area to strength and stabilize infrastructure required for digital based learning to cope up with current and as well to handle any future such learning crises.

Lastly, it is not a time to panic, but a moment to stay strong and stay safe. Although SARS covid-19 has made hard hit like a lightning bolt to the education sector, but it will definitely call for change in system which in longer run turn into boon and will benefit the system as a whole. Higher education system needs to be more of practical oriented then the theoretical to make younger generation self-reliant, which will also help in bridging the gap between education system and community need.

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