ONLINE LEARNING AND ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT IN INDIA

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Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of our life such as economic, social, educational etc. To combat with the COVID-19 pandemic and to keep running economic growth, all corona affected countries throughout the glove are adopting alternative ways of doing things in every sector. The closure of educational institution throughout the world has stopped the natural educational process. To deal with teaching learning process the focus is drawn to online learning platform. Government of India is introducing and promoting many learning processes in many alternative platform like Online and other platform such as Radio and Television to continue the teaching learning process aiming to reduce the gap between learner and education. In such situation conducting evaluation in traditional classroom is very difficult task and therefore, there is the need to adopt the alternative assessment mechanism of student's achievement. Meanwhile Government of India has also encouraged schools, colleges and universities to adopt alternative assessment techniques for evaluation of student's performance. The focus of this paper is to highlight the different available online learning platform, various challenges to online learning in India and the possible alternative assessment during this crisis with their merits and demerits. It seeks to create a forum that can be referred to all the stakeholders of education sectors i.e. the policy makers, administrators, teachers, students as well as the government.

Key words: Online Learning, Digital Divide, Alternative Assessment, COVID-19.

Introduction:

Due to COVID-19 pandemic students are far away from their all academic activities as well as active participatory experiencing learning. UGC, NCERT, MHRD and State Education Ministry have issued guideline for conducting online classes through various video conferencing App such as Google classroom, Google Hangout, Cisco Webex Meeting and other Govt. owned Web and App Learning platform like SWAYAM, SWAYAMPRAVA etc. Government of India is encouraging and motivating students for self- learning by taking different academic initiatives. It is a time of starting new academic session but till now previous session evaluation process is pending due to COVID-19 pandemic. Government has issued guidelines to conduct final year or semester examination so as to maintain the international validity of the course but on the other hand there is growing discontent among stakeholder of education to conduct examination looking at the situation of crisis. It will affect the national growth of a country as well as mental health of the young mass.

Online Learning Platform:

Online learning is only the solution for making bridge between learners and education during the pandemic scenario. It provides more flexibility than the traditional classroom. One learner can learn at any time from any place through online platforms.Online platforms provide a numbers of courses by both synchronous and asynchronous mode. There is the facility where students can interact with their educators and clear their doubts in live classes. Online learning is the only alternative to keep continuing the teaching-learning process. MHRD is taking and strengthening OERs to assist students, scholars, teachers, and life-long learners in their studies in collaboration with different agencies like UGC, NCERT, AICTE etc. These initiatives cover all level of education from school to post graduation. The different platforms available as an alternative to traditional classroom teaching and learning promoted and developed by Govt. of India for online learning and distance learning as well as for the purpose of research are as follows:

DIKSHA:

It is a portal which consists of e-Learning content for students, teachers and parents with aligned to the curriculum, including video lessons, worksheets, textbooks and assessments under the guidance and supervision of CBSE and NCERT. The content has been made by more than 250 teachers who teach in multiple languages.This portal is also available in offline mode.

E-GYANKOSH:

It is a National Digital Repository to store and share the digital learning materials and its content developed by the Open and Distance Learning Institutions in the country.

E-PATHSALA:

It is an initiative of MHRD under CIET and NCERT launched this portal in November 2015. It provides free access of NCERT e-book from class I to XII through the website and app in English,Hindi and Urdu language.

E-PG PATHSHALA:

It is an initiative of MHRD under its NMEICT and UGC. It is a gateway for e-book up to PG which provides high quality, curriculum based and interactive content in different 68 subjects across all disciplines of arts, social sciences, fine arts and humanities, natural and mathematical sciences etc.

E- SHODHSINDHU:

MHRD has formed it by merging three consortia initiatives, namely UGC-INFONET Digital Library Consortium, NLIST and INDEST-AICTE Consortium. It provides access to qualitative electronic resources including full text, bibliographic and factual databases to academic institutions at a lower rate of subscription.It has 10,000+ e-journals and 31,35,000+ e- books.

E-YANTRA:

It is an initiative by IIT Bombay,provides hands on experience on embedded systems and help to provide practical solutions to some real world problems. It has 380 Labs and 2300+ colleges got benefited.

FOSSEE:

Free and Open Source Software for Education project promotes the use of FLOSS tools in academia and research for improving quality in education and research. This project is part of the National Mission on Education through ICT, MHRD, Government of India.

GYAN DARSHAN:

It is a web based TV channel devoted to educational and developmental needs for Open and Distance Learner, free of cost and telecasting from Doordarshan, Kendra, IGNOU. GyanDarshan is an initiative related to education of MHRD with collaboration of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB), Prasar Bharti and ISRO with IGNOU as the nodal agency.

GYAN VANI, GYAN DHARA:

GyanDhara is an internet audio counseling service where students can listen to the live discussions by the educators and expert on the topic of the day and students can also interact with them through telephone, e-mail. GyanDhara synchronous is a mode when it will be asynchronous then it is called GyanVani.

NEAT:

National Educational Alliance for Technology is an Artificial Intelligence adaptive learning portal for skilling of learners in latest technologies through a Public- Private Partnership model for better outcome in higher education. Implementing agency of NEAT is All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE).

NATIONAL DIGITAL LIBRARY:

It is a project under MHRD, repository of e-content on multiple disciplines from primary to PG levels with containing textbooks, articles, videos, audio books, lectures, simulations, fiction and all other kinds of learning media. It provides free of cost access to many books in English and other Indian languages.

NPTEL:

National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) was initiated in 2003 by seven IITs (Bombay, Delhi, Kanpur, Kharagpur, Madras, Guwahati and Roorkee) and Indian Institute of Science. It is funded by MHRD, Government of India. Main idea of this initiative is to put recorded lectures taught by its member institutes online for open access. It provides online courses covering engineering, basic sciences, and some humanities and social sciences subjects along with certificates to those who successfully completed the courses since March 2014.

SWAYAM:

SWAYAM stands for Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds. This platform is developed by MHRD, NPTEL,IIT Madras with the help of Google Inc. and Persistent Systems Ltd. It covers school education, under-graduation, post-graduation, engineering, law and other professional courses with free of cost to the target learners.

SWAYAMPRABHA:

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has launched SWAYAM Prabha (32 DTH channels) to enhance the learning of students by edutainment. It telecasts educational programme 24X7 for students through GSAT-15 and students can access everyday fresh content of 4 hours in these channels which will further be repeated 5 more times in a day. It providescourses for school education (9-12), higher education (UG,PG) as well as for out of school children, vocational and teacher training.

SAKSHAT:

Formally this programme was launched by the president APJ Abdul Kalam on 30th Oct,2006. UGC also accepted the proposal of this programme. It is one stop Education portal for addressing all the education and learning related needs of teachers, students, scholars and life -long learners by providing e-content, latest news, press releases, achievements etc related to MHRD. With the help this portal one can be able to know the world of online learning free of cost.

VIRTUAL LAB:

It is a project initiated by the MHRD, Government of India, under the National Mission on Education through ICT to provide remote access to Laboratories in various discipline of science and engineering for students at all levels from UG to research. In India seven IITs(Delhi, Bombay, Kanpur, Kharagpur, Madras, Roorkee and Guwahati),IIIT Hyderabad, Amrit University, Dayalbagh University, NIT Karnataka, and College of Engineering, Pune are the institutions participating in the project.

VIDWAN:

It is an Expert Database and National Research Network to create information exchanges and networking opportunities among eminent scientists, researchers and other faculty members working at leading academic institution.

SHODHGANGA:

It is a digital repository of Indian Electronic Theses and Dissertations set-up by INFLIBNET Centre by using DSpace software (developed by Massachusetts Institute of Technology). It helps researchers to make their research more reliable and unique.

SHODH SUDDHI:

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has launched the Plagiarism Detection Software (PDS) i.e.ShodhSuddhi, which helps to improve the quality of research outcome by ensuring the originality of ideas and publication of the research scholars. This service is implemented by INFLIBNET, an Inter University Centre (IUC) of UGC.These are the Government of India's online platform. Some private online platforms are available to save time, money and energy of students and also they can attend classes at their own time from their home.

Following are the some private online platforms:

UNACADEMY:

It was founded by Gaurav Munjal, Dr.Roman Saini, Hamesh Singh and Sachin Gupta. It provides content for major competitive examinations such as UPSC, SSC, CGL, CAT, GRE, UGC-NET, GATE, JEE, Pre-medical, Railways examinations and so on. It also provides content free learners along with Paid learners by the help of some top educators.

BYJU'S:

Byju's learning app was founded by Byju Raveendran in 2011. It provides learning programs in mathematics and science between the classes of 4th to $12^{th}$and also provides test preparatory courses for competitive exams such as CAT, NEET,JEE,IAS, GRE and GMAT.Byju Raveendran CEO of this platform himself takes classes along with other eminent teachers. This learning app organizes platform for interacting session with IAS toppers for IAS aspirants.

VEDANTU:

It was co-founded by Vamsi Krishna, Pulkit Jain, Saurabh Saxena and Anand Prakash in 2011. It helps the students those are following NCERT curriculum.Vedantu learning app provides guidance to students from class-1 to onwards and also helps them with preparations for board exams, medical and engineering entrance. Turbo maths, Rocket Pro, Photography, Coding are also co-curricular courses covered in this app.

STUDY IQ:

Study IQ was founded by DR. Gourav Garg in 2014. This app helps learners by polishing their general knowledge for different competitive exams like Banking, Civil Services UGC-NET etc. It also provides smart courses for foundation level studies in different competitive examinations.

WIFI STUDY:

It was founded by Dinesh Godara in 2014. This is one of the best online portal with motto "No Need To Go Anywhere." It helps learners by providing different competitive exam preparation materials and sample tests. It covers SSC, Banking, State police or Railway exams etc.

Many people are unaware about Government/public initiatives regarding online mode learning but Private platforms are very popular in public due to huge advertisement. Private platform provides need based courses like many competitive courses, whereas Government initiatives do not give much focus on that. In public platform learners wait for the certain courses to start; it follows certain formal rules but in private any one can access the platform in any time. There is a need to give focus on these areas for the public sector.

Challenges of Online Learning:

Online learning has become one of the new era of learning platform as all of a sudden the whole has shifted all education to online mode. Though online learning provides more scope in recent times, it still faces some challenges in developing and under-developed countries. In India, the online system of learning is facing a lot of issues and problems due to disparity in accessibility to education through online platform because of network issue, accessibility to internet, personal computer and other devices in India (Mohanta & Behara, 2020).

Digital Divide:

Some students have accessibility to online learning platform and some have not which create new kind of digital inequality in accessing education. In India, only 24% households have internet facility. Over 15% and 42% of rural and urban population have access to internet services respectively, while only 8% of all households with members aged between 5 to 24 have a computer and internet connection according to the National Sample Survey Report on Education 2017-18. In 2019, Internet and Mobile Association of India reports 67% and33% of men and women have access to internet respectively and in rural area 72% of men and 28% of women have access to internet. Prominently, it shows the gender disparity in internet access. It is a big challenge of online learning and also equal educational opportunity of male and female students through online mode. Further, in India 68.84% people live in villages (Census of India, 2011).Here people face problems related to electricity. It leads to network issue in rural areas. Due to network issue students of rural areas do not attend live online classes. In some cases, they watch recorded video class but they are unable to clear their doubts regarding certain class. Most of teachers also face the problem of network, while they take the classes on online mode. Network issue is the major obstacle of interactive online learning.

No Socialization:

School is a miniature society. It is the second important place for socializing, after family. It provides scope for socializing, but in online mode there is no scope for socialization. There is lack of human connection.

Lack of ICT knowledge:

India is a developing country with second largest population in the World where maximum numbers of students belong to poor rural family who do not have access to internet facility and they learn in offline classes.They are not familiar with ICT based technologies. Poor meritorious students feel inferior because they do not have technical tools like computer, smartphone etc.. Even also many teachers do not have knowledge of ICT based technologies.

Monotonous:

In most of cases, teaching through online mode becomes dull after some time for students.Because there is lack of human connection, there is no eye contact between teacher and students. Online learning is more flexible than traditional learning. Students have options to leave the online class.

Language problem:

The country India celebrates unity in diversity in religion,castes, creed, culture, language etc. India has 122 major languages and 1599 other languages (Census of India,2001). The Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution lists 22 languages as official language. In online mode, it is impossible to provide materials in regional languages. Due to unavailability of materials in regional languages many of students are deprived of learning.

Pressure on parents:

Due to the pandemic educational institutions still remain close. So children are at home. There is necessity for parents to oversee their child whether he/she is learning or not. It becomes difficult to maintain balance with their work.

Alternative Assessment in Education:

Under the present situation, all the stakeholders of education i.e. the teachers, administrators of education, policy makers and the Government are rethinking about the alternative assessment strategies. According to UNESCO's recent rapid global analysis, 58 out of 84 surveyed countries had postponed or rescheduled exams, 23 countries introduced alternative methods like online or home-based testing, 22 countries maintained exams and 11 countries cancelled their exams altogether. To complete the evaluation process and to maintain the quality and standard of education the alternative assessment can only be a viable solution. Alternative assessment techniques can assess student's performance during the pandemic without losing the quality of education. It is a type of assessment where students perform as tasks rather than select answers from a test (Maclellan, 2004). It also encourages students to participate actively in their own learning and moves them from a passive to an active mode. It helps to develop critical thinking and effective problem solving skills. According to Simonson and others, there are three approaches in alternative assessment such as Authentic assessment, Performance-based assessment and Constructivist assessment, but educators and researchers use these interchangeably. Alternative assessment includes open-ended

questions, exhibits, demonstrations, hands-on execution of experiments, portfolios etc. Due to the Covid-19 crisis students are far away from their schools, colleges and universities so there is a need of online based alternative assessment of student's performance. Followings are the some assessment techniques of alternative assessment which can be used to assess the students.

Open Book Examination:

Basically in examination students are not allowed to write answers by taking the help of notes, texts or resource materials into an exam situation. But open book exam is opposite of that and it allows students to write answers by taking the help of notes, texts or resource materials into an exam situation. In this type of assessment, students can give their examination from their home. There are also some pros and cons of this type of examination system. These are

PROS	CONS
It saves paper. Saving papers means saving tree.	Cannot keep a check on students: one cannot be sure if the students have got somebody's back.
Time saviour: Auto-grade helps in filling the MCQ easily. The online examination can be completely automated and hassle free.	Open Text Question: The teacher can ask open text questions but they will not auto-grade. Also, teachers have to give time to check them.
Money saver: The money of buying and printing paper is saved. Also, one can save on logistics or assembling and conducting exams.	Can be a Victim of fraud: Online scams/ fraud is pretty common these days. Use question bank to solve the issue of fraud.
Secure: Each student will get a random set of questions from them. So, students cannot cheat from others. Also, they will not be able to share questions.	The students would stop studying and simply copy from the open book provided at the examination hall.

(Source- Times of India, 1st Jun,2020)

Crib Sheets:

It also allows students to bring some notes provides the same advantages like an open book examination. Here,Students write answers by their own words and instructor can provide appropriate parameter and guidance. Students can appear examination from their home. There is no need to go their respective educational institutions.

Take home exams:

It allows instructors to give problems to students which will take more time (more than a class period) to solve with variety of references. Students can solve their problems by staying at home. If students received help in answering the questions, instructors cannot know about that. This is the major limitation of Take home exams.

Collaborative testing:

There are various ways to use collaborative testing. Firstly ,some instructors allow their students to discuss the test with their group members, but instruct to each students to turn in his/her own answer sheet; group members do not need to agree on answers. On the basis of answer each member will be assigned grade or mark. Secondly, each group hands in one answer sheet and each group member gets the same grade. Thirdly, the instructors take test individually and hand in their answers to receive an individual grade. Then they take the same test as a group and individuals receive bonus points based on the group's performance (for group test of 95% or better = 3 bonus points, 89-95%= 2 bonus point etc). In this type of collaborative test, test items should be based on high level of taxonomy.This test can be administered with the help of Google classroom, Google Hangout, Cisco Webex Meeting by looking safety of the students during this situation.

Performance tests:

In this test, students are required to perform a complex skill or create a product to demonstrate that they can apply their skills and knowledge and the instructor observes and evaluate the process. Here, students can use Virtual lab initiative provided by Government of India. These tests are time consuming and difficult to assign grade to the students, but much more appropriate than the paper-pencil test. The instructors should have a scoring guide that specifies the criteria for each grade.

Student portfolio:

Student portfolio provides more accurate picture of a student's achievement than a single test or project. It shows the cumulative efforts of students. Here, the instructors ask students to prepare a collection of class assignments. Students are allowed to include computer programs, drawings, video tapes etc. and share with teacher through online medias like mail, what's app etc. On the basis of assignment the instructor give grade to the students.

Advantages of Alternative Assessments:

➢ Students are provided an opportunity to apply their knowledge in a constructive way that they have learned that provides a solution to a problem.

➢ Students are encouraged to think, analyze, innovate and apply their knowledge and improve their sense of reasoning.

➢ Students also improve their communication skills by explaining their solution and the logic behind it to the examiners.

➢ Alternative assessment tests are more realistic and bring in an understanding with the importance of the knowledge gained.

- ➢ Student's gained knowledge along with skills is measured with more complete and correct.
- ➢ It is more transparent and fair because it provides an equal opportunity to apply knowledge gained by all students.

Disadvantages of Alternative Assessments:

- ➢ It can be time consuming for teachers to create assessment tool.
- ➢ It is more subjective than the traditional method.
- ➢ It is difficult to develop high quality items. Response rate may be low and interpreting responses may be challenging.
- ➢ It is difficult to administer the technique specially in large number of students.
- ➢ It is difficult to assess objectively.

Conclusion:

In present scenario, online learning and alternative assessment techniques are the only powerful instruments to keep continue the teaching-learning and evaluation process. In India, the online system of learning is facing lot of issues and problems due to disparity in accessibility to education through online platforms because of network issues, accessibility to internet, personal computer and other devices in India. Hence, all the stakeholders of education primarily the students, teachers, administrators, policy makers of education as well the Government of India should put efforts to minimize the challenges of online learning.

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