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E-learning in education during the COVID-19 Pandemic: With Special Reference to Nagaland.

[1]Thejasanuo Khezhie, [2]Dr. Thokchom Sunanda Devi

[1]Research scholar, [2]Research guide

[1]Department of English

[1]St. Joseph University, Ikishe Model Village, Virgin Town, Dimapur Nagaland – 797115

Abstract: E-learning has transformed the education sector in a drastic way. With the sudden shift away from the traditional classroom due to the pandemic, there is a dire need to implement e-learning for the benefit of both the learner and the educator. Keeping in mind the vast scope of e-learning, the paper will be an attempt to redefine the role of the educator and the learner in e-learning, the usage of the terminology, the fundamental perspectives while also highlighting the advantages and the disadvantages particularly in reference to the state of Nagaland.

**Keywords*: E-learning, Education, Learning, Teaching, Technology*

Introduction

The unforeseen outbreak of the Corona virus disease (COVID-19) has immensely changed the outlook of each individual towards life. With no other option left, people are compelled to 'work from home' while some are facing a standstill in their financial income as their works are put on halt. As a matter of fact, every sector is being affected in one way or the other. A sector which has been prominently affected during the pandemic is the education sector. It has been globally observed that, more than 1 billion students are being affected due to the closure of schools. UNICEF reports that out of 134 countries 105(78 per cent) have closed schools.

The pandemic is undoubtedly causing a tectonic shift in the education system forcing it to adapt to the mode of e-learning which has been rather neglected till today especially in the state of Nagaland. Never before has the state seen a situation where education had to rely solely on the mode of online education. Yet, it can be well thought-out as a silver lining of the pandemic which gave the opportunity for both the educators and the learners to be able to explore e-learning like never before. The new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has been implemented slowly but surely to force digital education. What has been predicted by researchers in the past few decades is evidently taking place at this time of the pandemic. Researchers have predicted that technology will become the main moderator in the education sector:

The next big killer application for the Internet is going to be education. Education over the Internet is going to be so big it is going to make email usage look like a rounding error. (Chambers Web)

Defining e-learning:

Jay cross is credited with coining the word "e-learning" in1998. It is noteworthy to mention that definition of e-learning changes over time and it also carries different nuances. According to the American Society for Training & Development (ASTD) e-learning covers a wide set of applications and processes which include web-based learning, computer- based learning, digital collaboration and virtual classrooms. Another important definition that limits e-learning to the internet has been propounded by Marc Rosenberg:

E-learning refers to the use of internet technologies to deliver a broad array of solutions that enhance knowledge and performance. It is based on the fundamental criteria:

1. It is networked.
2. It is delivered to the end-user via a computer using standard internet technology.
3. It focuses on the broadest view of learning. (Mason, Rennie 14)

E-learning can be looked at as a tool that create, foster, deliver and facilitate in the learning process. While teaching can take place either in or out of the four walls of classroom, the use of e-learning resources can reshape education. Already, the old users of e-learning are searching for new words or adapting the term in order to find new meanings. One recently coined term is M-learning, a concept given by Alan Kay which means Mobile e-learning that can be accessed outside home or office or on the road. Furthermore, e-learning has also been given a new meaning as 'enhanced learning' or even as 'experiential learning'.

Replacing 'electronic' in e-learning is a representation that the true value of it is the opportunity to integrate all the spheres of learning, working and community whether it is at university or office and not the usual electronic nature of e-learning. In addition, the old users of e-learning have reverted in doing away with the view of online learning in opposition to the face-to-face (f2f) learning. This is also one of the reasons why blended learning has become vital in the learning process.

An overarching definition has been made with the intention to give e-learning a broader idea. It has also referred to e-learning as a subset of 'flexible learning':

E-learning as a component of flexible learning describes a wide set of applications and processes which use any available electronic media in the pursuit of vocational education and training. It includes computer-based learning, web-based learning virtual classrooms and digital collaboration. (Australian Flexible Learning Framework for the National Vocational Education and Training System 4)

If one examines the varieties of methods involved in the teaching and learning process of e-learning, their applications will provide wide-ranging skills to the instructors and the learners. Some of which includes the following:

- Motivating self-learning: It allows students to become self-learners. If any doubt arises they can quickly access the internet anywhere, anytime without having to put their doubts or inquiries on hold.

- Access to learning resources: The web provides unlimited access to a wide range of materials which can enrich and support content designed for learning such as the Electronic journals which are usually free and gives open access to papers.

- Equal opportunity in education: To some extent, it can be said that e-learning has given equal opportunity of quality education to students irrespective of the geographical or economic status.

- Developing the standard of teaching: It develops the quality of teaching. Teachers can explore the varieties of aids that are available as e-resource and utilize them for an engaging experience in teaching.

- A better option of education in today's scenario: In a time when the students are tech savvy and much more involved with gadgets, educating them through it will boost their interest making learning easier and appealing for them.

- Factor of time and location: Online classes can be set up anywhere and managed with ease thus providing more convenience while also bridging the gap between the teacher and the learner.

- Factor of accessibility: Intervention of e-learning in the education has given easy access to learning with teachers being able to teach their subject beyond districts, national and even international lines.

At the moment, online learning is commonly conducted in using MOOC or Massive Open Online Course which is the use of recorded videos of lectures which can be publicly viewed. Another method of conducting online learning is through live online classes which are usually conducted as webinars and online meetings via apps such as Zoom, Google Meet, Cisco webex etc. The digital modes of instruction and also conferencing outside Nagaland are done more smoothly. When it comes to Nagaland, the digital learning is still a very new and novel concept that carries its limitations. The problems range from poor bandwidth and internet data facilities to the lack of knowledge on how to utilise e-learning tools. In fact, it is a distressing fact that among the main problems of using online learning, most students do not have a mobile or laptop in their possession which has become a basic need to attend online classes. These devices are not affordable for students or in some cases even the average salaried worker cannot afford such consumer commodities.

According to the data recorded from 2018, the internet connectivity could reach out only to 35 per cent of the population among the 8 North-east states of India and about a number of 8,600 villages still do not have access to the internet. The Ministry of Development of North-East Region have also implemented Comprehensive Telecom Development Project (CTDP) to boost tele-connectivity at an estimated cost of Rupees 5336.18 Crore which is further enhanced to Rs. 8120.81 Crore for the installation of 6673 mobile towers for 8621 villages, 321 towers for National Highways and to strengthen the transmission of network in the North East Region (NER). However, The Times of India has reported in 2019 that about 7000 mobile towers are still needed to be installed in the NER. In Nagaland itself, the state is still in dire need for more mobile towers to be installed especially in the outskirt villages.

Besides the connectivity issues and lack of proper reception of network in the state, the state is also facing other critical issues. NCERT have made a survey which showed that 27 percent of students in Nagaland do not have either phones or laptops which make it impossible to attend the online classes. These devices have become a basic necessity which creates a lot of problem for the low income group. Also, in the survey NCERT also found that 28 percent of parents and students are of the opinion that infrequent electricity or lack of electricity can be blamed for the hindering of teaching-learning.

However, in just a matter of few months, Nagaland has also been able to rise up above the existing issues. The Department of School Education Nagaland (DoSE) have taken a huge step in starting the online/tele education. In view of the Pandemic, classes have been suspended which led to this initiation which in the state is a novel concept as this has never been done before. The online/tele classes have been broadcasted in Doordarshan and All India Radio from the 1st of May. It has also been shared in larger public viewing applications with easy access such as YouTube and Face Book. These classes have benefited students not only in Nagaland but students from other states as well as it has been observed that students from other states have subscribed to the Youtube channel. The educators of this platform were scrupulously chosen after a proper screening and as a result 23 teachers were selected.

In May 12th 2020, DoSE have announced that Nagaland is the 14th state in India to have launched the tele/online education programme during the COVID-19 lockdown. Furthermore, the incorporated sign language in the video broadcast for the students with disabilities. The state went further to provide online evaluation for classes V to VII on 9th July. Rewards in the form of prize money and certificates of appreciation were distributed to encourage the students to perform well in their online evaluation.

Higher education in Nagaland is also making every effort to overcome the difficulties of having regular online classes. Colleges around the state have started with online classes but with a lot of difficulties. G Suite has been most commonly used by colleges and it has greatly assisted in the online classes. Furthermore, Nagaland will be holding online exams for all the final year Bachelors of different streams which will commence on the 21st of September 2020. Nagaland University is doing the utmost by hosting webinars, workshops and trainings through the online mode.

After reviewing about a hundred research papers on e-learning in higher education four main characteristics were found to be in good practice which were propounded by Coomey and Stephenson:

- ➢ *Dialogue*: The instructor will organise interactive platforms into the content of the course. Making use of 'real time' chat, email, asynchronous chat, group discussions and debates.
- ➢ *Control*: It refers to the degree to which learners control the key to the learning activities and are encouraged to practice such control.
- ➢ *Involvement*: It includes active participation and response to tasks, involvement with material, collaboration and group activities.

> ➤ *Support*: It refers to the frequent face-to-face (f2f) contact, feedbacks, advices, supervision on the online tutorials and support from peers. It basically is anticipating and quickly responding to the needs of the learners which makes this feature on of the most vital among the others.

Online assessment through e-learning:

In a learning society, it is necessary for a learner to develop their individual skills, assess their own and others' resources to determine quality, to evaluate and also to give or receive feedbacks. This is a lifelong process and the role of the educator is to help develop these skills to the learners. For this matter, e-learning is an ideal option. However, despite the benefits it would be wise to be aware of the negative aspects simultaneously as learning n online mode is constantly precipitating. With easy access to the internet, there arises the problem of plagiarism which has become a common problem. There is lack of originality and the effort of the learner seems to be reduced in the online mode. Despite the existence of drawbacks the web, provides various innovative methods to assess the learners. The web has produced multiple choice testing software that can help assessment for the larger classes. Also, online assessments provide a student-centred environment which can help facilitate their self-learning and self-development.

Online assessment must be made in such a way that it meets the demands of the students. This is why there is a dire need to re-position and re-structure the methods of assessment. As the learner is more isolated in the online mode of learning it is necessary to keep them engaged. This would eventually make online assessment more valid and the student accreditation more deserving. The following includes some effective ways of approaching e-learning for assessment:

1. Opportunities must be created for students to take part in constructing and reconstructing the criteria to evaluate work.
2. Opportunity to apply the teacher's feedback on their work to show improvement.
3. Assignments involving group work must be incorporated to develop skills of team work.
4. Opportunity to evaluate not only others' work but their own.
5. Creating awareness of the issues and problems in them by practicing discernment.

Online assessment can be of great support to assess the students as it is more sophisticated than the face-to-face assessments. However, evaluation must be carried out in a way that the course pedagogy and the demands of the assessment are compatible. A good practice of online assessment must be able to test the skills of the students to its fullest potential while also testing the learning outcomes.

A good practice of e-learning can create a huge impact on both learning and teaching as it provides a range of advantages. Following are features and examples of e-learning which Robin Mason and Frank Rennie brings forth:

Features	Examples
Communication between students and teachers	Emails, discussion boards and virtual chat facilities which support various types of communication: synchronous and asynchronous one-to-one one-to-many and many-to-many.
Self- assessment and summative assessment	Multiple choice assessments with automated marking and immediate feedback.
Delivery of learning resources and materials	Through the provision of learning and teaching materials, images and video clips, links to other web resources, online discussion and assessment activities.
Shared work group areas	Allows designated groups of students to upload and share files as well as communicate with each other.
Support for students	Could take the form of communication with tutors or other students, provision of supporting materials such as course information and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).
Student tools	Individual student web pages, 'drop boxes' for the upload of coursework, electronic diaries and calendars.
Management and tracking of students	Usernames and passwords to ensure that only registered students can access the course; analysis of assessment undertaken by students or their use of materials within the VLE (Virtual Learning Environment).
Consistent and customisable look and feel	A standard user interface that is easy for students to understand and use. Courses can be individualised with colours graphics and logos – but the essential mode of use remains constant.
Navigation structure	Structure delivery of information supported by a standard navigation toolbar. Most VLE software assumes that students will work their way through linear sequences of instructional material. Others are more flexible and will accommodate alternative information structures, e.g. multi-path case studies.

Source: Table 1 from *E-learning: The Key Concepts*, 34.

As the well-known science fiction writer Alan Moore quotes, "Technology is always a two-edged sword. It will bring in many benefits but also many disasters." In the same way, using the online mode for the purpose of teaching and learning through technology enables us, but it simultaneously has certain limitations. Especially in the state of Nagaland due to lack of resources and unavailability to possess the necessary gadgets that itself creates inconvenience. It not only leads to lack of attendance but also lack of participation. Another challenge that lies with the students and teachers in remote areas is the network connectivity issue with little or no access to the internet. Therefore, in such a condition it comes to a point where technology is not the solution to all educational problems nor is it suitable in all contexts. It is to a certain extent limited to teach practical or physical skills. Lecturing in the face-to-face (f2f) classes consumes less time for the teachers because for online classes, the preparation seems more time consuming. It does not provide the degree of interaction and communication as in f2f classes. However, despite of all the shortcomings and limitations, e-learning is progressively more in use and achieving in acceptance.

According to the researchers of education there is an urgent need to create standardised platforms for online education which must train both teachers and students. This can help understand the nature and purpose of the online platforms while learning the use of online tools.

Role of the teacher in e-learning:

Most of the time what happens to the status of the teacher in online teaching is that, the teacher's role is reduced. Technology has made learning a very individual expedition. It appears as if machines have taken the place of human beings. However, a point to be noted is that, it is the human being who is the creator of machines and not vice versa therefore human beings are irreplaceable. Machines can store information and process them but people attach value by transforming it. Teachers are valuable assets who can bring a lot of difference through student motivation and maintenance. For example, Computer-based training(CBT) that is put up on the internet without the help of human support ultimately turns out to be unsuccessful and is a futile attempt. Online teachers play a major role in creating a vibrant classroom environment and in promoting a sense of strong community through their style of teaching and interaction with students. It is a known fact that the goal of student centeredness is a vital aspect in teaching but even more so in online teaching. One of the most significant role of the teacher in the online setup is to give opportunity to the students to e-learn using the facilities and tools available. As much as possible, students ought to dominate the classroom discussions while also letting the teacher be the facilitator and guide.

Role of the student in e-learning:

Imparting education through e-learning has a lot of advantages besides the sophistication it provides. The flexibility it offers, it helps students to attend lectures at any location and for the asynchronous learners, they can gain access to the recorded classes at a convenient time. Those students who do not flourish very well in the f2f classes are seen to be thriving in the online classes. They are observed to be more

comfortable and outspoken about their views or opinions than in traditional classes. Moreover, they seem to be the ones who show more participation in the classes than the other mates. Students also find it beneficial because it gives them more time to think, read materials and respond to their teachers. One very noteworthy positive aspect of e-learning is its ability to assist students with disability. It is ideal as they do not have to move from one place to the other. Using audio and enlarged font size are features that can help overcome their limitations.

A software that can benefit students is the use of PowerPoint (PP). Using PP goes a long way in making students feel more motivated and engaged. This popular tool is very helpful for delivering lectures of both f2f and online classes as well. E-learning being more student-centered than f2f classes helps in their self-development and self-learning. They are made to be more independent in this platform which is why even the students who do not flourish well in the traditional f2f classes are improving in their online class performance. Due to the pandemic of COVID 19, education system in Nagaland is compelled to use to e-learning as the last resort. However, coming across the positive impact that e-learning has on students, it is time to reinvigorate and incorporate it into education. This means that even in the post pandemic scenario, e-learning needs to be given a spot. Blended learning, which is a combination of both f2f and online class, will be a good strategy that needs to be considered for education in Nagaland.

Conclusion:

Remodelling education is the need of the hour in such a pandemic situation. Fortunately, the intervention of e-learning comes to the rescue which is able to assist in running classes atleast regularly, if not smoothly. E-learning, leans more towards self-directed learning and gives the most attention to the learner than any other mode of learning. The approach of Constructivism in e-learning is basically a concept which emphasises more on the student or learner than the educator or the teacher. The efficiency of the Constructivist approach however depends upon the socio-cultural experience and communication. There is a need of constant interaction with the teacher and mates because in e-learning, learners feel more isolated. While this self-directedness in learning is appreciated by most students, it is not accepted by all. There are those students who are weak in studies, lack self-discipline or will power and for such students e-learning becomes a little too bewildering. Students do need an online environment which is student-friendly and is able to provide encouragement, support and even reward interactions. The role of the teacher here may not be the ultimate determiner of the student experience but is still a strong pillar of support. Therefore, although self-directed, the teacher or the educator still plays a significant role as the guide or the catalyst for education.

The present situation in education is a combination of paper and pencil versus screen and keyboard which presents both positive and negative challenges. In this pandemic era, the ongoing trend is moving towards online learning. However, the drawbacks cannot be ignored. As much as it benefits most people, the disadvantages that it brings forth especially to those from remote areas with low financial income must also

be considered. There is an urgent need to keep a check until almost all, if not everyone benefits from it. If one is not technically equipped both in skill and knowledge, the learning curve will be definitely flat.

A time has come to change the traditional system of education and reinvigorate the curricula to meet the challenges of the scenario at present. Exploring the appropriate and most suitable pedagogy must be the current target. Redefining literacy in the age of technology and using technology to teach accordingly are two vital burning issues that educators have to currently confront. Hence, educators must take up the challenge to observe that proper education policies are not only implemented but also followed for the same.

It is foreseeable that job opportunities in the near future will be of digital technology involving global communication which also implies that there will be a demand of people with digital skills and knowledge. Those who are brought up around the technological environment can be trained and guided to learn the necessary skills that the future jobs will demand. It is time to integrate e-learning in education lest the students of today become incompatible in a digital world. It is best to start early and equip them with the best knowledge for the students of today, will be our tomorrow.

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