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## IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION SECTOR-THE ROAD AHEAD

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**Abstract:** No industry, across the globe, has remained unaffected by the severe impact of Covid-19 that caused never-before-experienced-situations in general and enormous changes to education in particular. A large number of students could not go to their schools or colleges and all educational activities came to an abrupt halt. This crisis has shown us that change is inevitable. A large number of schools and educational institutes responded to the panic by imparting education via online mode to follow the protocols (Kamanetz 2020; Sun et al. 2020). It compelled the educational institutions to rise to the occasion and explore previously unused platforms as well as parameters. Therefore, it is generally recognised and acknowledged that “this crisis has stimulated innovation within the education sector” (United Nations 2020, p. 2). The crisis came, causing fear and anxiety, classes were suspended, exams were postponed, and the educational activities were severely disrupted. The admissions procedure took ages due to the restrictions imposed. Students lost precious time due to the lockdowns, making it arduous for them to resume school work after an endless break. With the re-opening of schools and colleges, these sudden transformations may not sustain to a large extent. This paper identifies and examines three massive changes that education sector should make post pandemic: curriculum that is current, personalized, and embryonic; pedagogy that is student-centric, inquiry-based, reliable, and determined; and immersive learning that capitalizes on digital technologies in a big way. As an uncertain future stares, us in the face, we got to reimagine and redesign education. It is for the policy makers as well as the educators to bring about revolutionary changes and realign them with the education needs of the masses. The changes that are advocated in this paper are not novel but they also never got streamlined in the educational scenario before. But of late our experience has endorsed the crying need to reimagine and relook what is most suited and sustainable. Hence, it is now incumbent upon us to make the best use of this crisis-driven opportunity and take significant strides towards reforming and readjusting every facet of education- be it curriculum, pedagogy, teacher, taught, learning, assessment, locale or time-with a fresh perspective.

**Key words:** covid-19, education, innovation, curriculum, pedagogy, immersive, learning, digital

### I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic can be regarded as a once-in-a-generation prospect for bringing about radical changes in the education system. Firstly, the outbreak of the Covid-19 was all pervasive and impacted almost all academic institutions. Hence, it provides an occasion for the educators and learners alike to join hands and revamp the education we direly require to combat the crisis. Secondly, educators from the world over proved that they could change their pedagogical preferences to remedy the crisis. The pandemic compelled closure of academic institutions, demanding teachers and the taught to continue with their educational pursuits in unforeseen circumstances. As a result, Government bodies, education institutions and schools dished out instructions through online platforms without adequate groundwork and much needed digital expertise (Kamanetz 2020; Sun et al. 2020). Thirdly, when academic institutions were shut down, most of the in-place regulations and examinations that regulate systems were also forced to be lifted or only partially implemented.

Students used popular social media platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, Telegram, Youtube live etc., for online learning during the long spells of lockdowns. The digital initiatives of MHRD like e-Pathshala, Diksha, National Repository of Open Educational Resources, and Swayam had positive Impact on Educational Sector. Digital technology got the centre-stage during COVID-19. Institutions of higher learning as a result shifted to a hybrid learning approach. It forced all teachers and students to become tech savvy. The covid has resulted in optimum use of teleconferencing, webinars, virtual meetings, and e-conferencing. This trend increased digital literacy. Students using online learning have the freedom to manage their time. Many students vouched for the online learning approach because it expands self-learning and gives the liberty to grasp from varied resources. Students are extensively making the most of this opportunity to network with peers, globally.

The flipside is that owing to unforeseen circumstances, the government sector in India is grossly affected and in the private sector, fresh graduates are scared of losing their job offers. Moreover, most of the teachers have been struggling to come to terms with the new found reality. Similarly, some informed and educated parents can guide their wards, but others may find it difficult to educate their children at home. Online teaching creates a digital gap among learners since majority have limited or no internet access at all. Many students can find it arduous to afford a computer, laptop, or a mobile phone with the limited resources.

## II. CHANGES SOUGHT

### 1. 2.1 Curriculum

There no denying the fact that to survive and thrive in a crisis afflicted world, outdated knowledge and skills will not work as a new spectrum of core competencies will become more critical and crucial (Barber et al. 2012; Florida 2012; Pink 2006; Wagner 2008; Wagner and Dintersmith 2016). The skills that respond to the current situations and circumstances will be practiced such as creativity, critical thinking, curiosity, communication, collaboration, entrepreneurship, positive mindset, global competence along with a multitude of skill-sets that are indispensable to sail through (Duckworth and Yeager, 2015; Zhao et al. 2019). In an AI world that we live in, individual creativity, aesthetics and human values will be far more important commodities to make a difference. In fact, there seem to be no specific skill-sets that can be deemed to answer the requirements of the unfathomable future. Due to this, challenges call for a comprehensive approach that could provide our students with a firm footing. Education will serve its purpose if it opens new pathways to achieving lifelong learning skills, contentment, goodness and wellbeing, opportunity and service to humanity. A newly designed curriculum that answers to these needs must accomplish certain things like it must facilitate the learners cultivate latest competencies to stay afloat in the fast emerging new-age that we have suddenly landed in (Barber et al. 2012; Wagner 2012; Wagner and Dintersmith 2016). This new age curriculum should give ample space for personalized learning by the learners (Basham et al. 2016; Zhao 2012b, 2018c; Zhao and Tavangar 2016). It needs to assist students to take charge of their learning and inculcate lasting learning habits, skills and mindsets. It is to see them reach another level of their learning—beyond what they acquire and comprehend the purpose why they learn.

### 2. 2.2 Pedagogy

It is desired in the current circumstances that the learners become more involved in their learning. The reason being, students are diverse and possess different levels of competencies that might not be in character with the content they are jointly expected to grasp in a traditional teaching-learning situation. Teachers are being motivated to follow the dynamics of differentiation in classroom for better results (Tomlinson 2014) and students are being counselled and reinforced to come forward in attuning their styles of learning and learning spaces in association with their teachers (Zhao 2018c). Students ought to have some freedom over the content they want to learn, the manner in which they learn, the place where they learn and the method through which they are assessed (Zhao 2018c). Hence, it would rather be good for the academic institutes to have students in the role of teammates in the learning processes and subsequent changes (Zhao 2011, 2018c). Teacher education is required to focus specially on bracing the teachers with the mindset of being human educators who genuinely care about every student and serve them as mentors and guardians rather than teaching apparatuses (Zhao 2018a). Face to face instruction need to be discarded for the “unproductive successes” or short-lived gains but long-lasting damages (Bonawitza et al. 2011; Buchsbauma et al. 2011; Kapur 2014, 2016; Zhao 2018d). Unique pedagogical structures should consider student engagement in findings the solutions to valid and relevant problems. The new pedagogy needs to instil core competencies in the students to squarely face the uncertainties of our time and age rather than necessitating memorization of common solutions to common problems.

Technology has supported academic institutions to practice online options of delivering content to the students for quite some time now and quite a large number of students are opting for online courses. After the deadly and unannounced arrival of COVID-19 maximum education is being delivered through the online platform. There are multifarious reasons for academic institutes to get back to “normal,” this normalcy seems to be a distant reality because of the deadliness of the virus. The current situation has made it obligatory for teachers to practice digital mode of teaching without proximity to the taught. It has also provided many teachers with the food for thought to reimagine the drive of teaching and collaborating with students. Online teaching methods have been adopted by most of the academic organizations, but this approach has resulted in disengagement, distractions, distress and limited

individual interface and scholarship as compared to old-style direct situations (Darby 2020; Dorn et al. 2020). Instead of delivering lecture to students in a classroom situation only, videos of the lectures can be prepared by the teachers and shared with the students. There can be brainstorming sessions with limited number of learners at a time for specific consultations and support services. This could remove the bottlenecks in learning. The fundamental idea is that there are limited advantages for education providers to impart instructions ceaselessly when there are far more stimulating and challenging instructional tools and techniques that can be developed and put into use. The idea of “blended learning” or “flipped classrooms” (Bishop and Verleger 2013) has been explored and endorsed recently as very innovative and result-oriented methods of teaching. The situations that have arisen due to the COVID-19 have already compelled the teachers and the taught to come out of their shells and venture into unexplored realms of education.

### 3. 2.3 Immersive Learning Systems

With more and more educators and learners becoming tech savvy, educational technology is now the cornerstone of education, besides safeguarding a smooth educational involvement, educational technology is uplifting learning for students by making it more pleasurable. There is no doubt that in India access to technology continues to be a barrier given the costs, connectivity problems, social constructs and mindsets. Technology may assist hugely in the learning process but to provide it to each student is still a task. By using technology, the education system in India can be revamped and reinforced to help students study and learn more effectively. In the world that we live in, education has become unimaginable without technology which has now become as crucial as pen and paper for students. Among the many applications of educational technology, the use of Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) stand out. These tools are not only enriching the learning experience but also bolstering creativity among students.

The students will now be taking long strides towards learning that is contingent upon the development of their core competencies, exclusive skills and capabilities. Learning systems will have to be contingent upon personalized learning to address the strengths and passions of the students. Therefore, education providers need to make the education completely student-centric by keeping their needs and requirements of learning centre stage while renovating pedagogy and transforming the constructs of learning. Students need to be fairly vocal about their own learning patterns that are best suited to them and their learning communities at large. The academic institutions now have a distinct opportunity to per force change to respond to the demands forwarded by the COVID-19 and the resultant circumstances that make distant mode of teaching-learning mandatory. The academic landscape is bound to change because of the revamping of the academic schedules and locales of teaching to help students participate in varied and yet challenging learning opportunities. Online learning poses to be the norm and become an inseparable part of the education delivery systems as the new normal.

Since it is imperative in today’s world to have a firm grip on technology, digital capabilities as well as infrastructure must reach far off lands. We need to adopt and adapt to out-of-the-box measures to ensure that all children have uninterrupted access to education. It would be better to have representatives from varied backgrounds, including remote regions, subaltern and minority groups to have a collective voice with regard to the changing learning patterns. Alongside, it would be better to have a more incisive statistical assessment of COVID-19's impact on the Indian education system to enlist the additional measures.

## III. CONCLUSION

The global pandemic has impacted the Indian education sector phenomenally. If on one hand It has built numerous obstructions in the normal course of actions, it has also resulted in plethora of opportunities for the learning communities. The Indian government and the specialists from the field of education have delved deep into the landscape of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) by employing countless digital technologies. Students who are not as fortunate as their peers are feared to lag behind due to the current digital platform approach. Relentless efforts are being made to counter the problem. There are discrepancies that must be addressed. There is no level playing field when it comes to the use of technology for education purposes by the students. Differences are stark. Digital divide is a common phenomenon that proves to be Achilles’ heel when it comes to the implementation of online mode of teaching and learning. It is critical to reimagine and rethink a better education system with the use of technology and discover different means to make education more just and all encompassing. The purpose is to use digital technology to reach out to millions of young Indian students. Educational institutions ought to be armed with required knowledge and information technology infrastructure to face COVID-19-like situations. Multiple variants of the virus are doing the rounds, still, all is not doom and gloom. The education sector in India is reviving and will come around with the best solutions to meet the threats and accompanying challenges of staying afloat. Because of the age that we live in, universities and colleges are better equipped today, more than ever, to put the online mode into practice to give easy access to the students and help them continue with their studies interrupted. The pandemic sent the alarm bells ringing and the stakeholders are responding with elan against all odds. As they say and rightly so, ‘Never waste a crisis.’



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