



Education In India Amidst A Global Pandemic

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Abstract: This research study aims at analyzing the shift from offline to online teaching, from interactions in a physical classroom to interactions to online platforms like Zoom and Google Meet, from blackboard to Google jamboard and from traditional classroom education to digital education. On account of the imposition of lockdown from March 2020, the teachers had no other option but to dive into the digital world so that the teaching-learning process is not hampered despite the global crisis. When we fail to adapt according to the changing environment, we fail to survive. Even though most educational institutions have adapted by using electronic modes of teaching-learning, some have been unable to keep up with it resulting in their closure. The pandemic has created a crisis for many sectors across the globe and education is one of them. There have been several problems faced not only by the teachers but by the students as well. However, as the career of the is at stake, teachers and educational institutions have taken great efforts to ensure that the learning of the students is not compromised. Through this research study, one can get a better understanding of the intense struggle faced by the education sector in implementing this teaching-learning transformation and coping up with the need of the hour.

Keywords: education, digital education, online teaching, e-teaching, online education, online lectures, digital transformation

I. INTRODUCTION

During this pandemic, many people have lost their jobs while many others have had to adapt to using technology on account of work from home. For a few, adopting and adapting to the technological systems has been quite swift especially in terms of corporate jobs. However, for those involved in professions like teaching, the challenges have been enormous. After the imposition of the lockdown, teachers were handed over the great responsibility of imparting education giving a backseat to the traditional methods of teaching and greater emphasis on electronic modes. In terms of providing digital education, the Indian educational system was not prepared for this kind of transformation. Several schools and colleges both - from the public as well as private sectors did not have the required resources to adopt e-teaching. Digital education is not as simple as it seems. It is not just about taking lectures on platforms like Zoom and Google Meet, it is also about fostering interaction, maintaining the interest of the students in the subject, addressing their queries, checking their understanding of the concepts through various tests and quizzes and enabling them to come up with creative ideas in effectively completing their assignments. The syllabus of various courses and programmes was pending when the lockdown was imposed. This left the professors and academicians with a very short span of time to equip themselves with the required skills to handle the technology required for teaching online. Many teachers had never used these digital tools and technologies ever before. The teachers in India are more acquainted with the traditional classroom's chalk and talk method of teaching for effectively imparting the knowledge of various concepts especially the practical ones like mathematics, engineering and accountancy. In order to resolve the problem of imparting education in times of a pandemic, institutions worldwide have resorted to the digitization of education. However, digital education has some challenges of its own with respect to the accessibility of technological devices, connectivity issues, inexperienced faculty in terms of technology and other such complex issues.

In a country like India, where education is imparted in multiple languages and there is a need to devise a systematic plan for implementing the idea of digital education, the situation is more complex than what one can imagine. Approximately 24% of Indian households have access to internet facilities. However, there is a huge gap in this accessibility between urban and rural areas. Therefore, digital teaching has created a dilemma for the students in rural areas whose learning is compromised on account of the inaccessibility of the required technology. It is during this time of crisis, that we need to adapt to digitization more than ever before. Even though there is a huge concern as to how the students will be able to cope up with this shift, we have been ignorant of the efforts put in by the teachers in adapting to this transition and keeping up with the need of the hour so that the wheels of education do not come to a halt. However, in the interest of the students, teachers and educational institutions have adopted a learner-centric approach so that irrespective of the challenges put forth by the pandemic, the education of the students does not have to suffer.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To analyze the challenges faced in the implementation of the shift from traditional teaching methods to digital teaching.
2. To find out how the teachers and educational institutions have adapted to the digital transition in education.
3. To understand the measures that can be adopted by students, teachers, educational institutions and the Government in order to cope up with the impact of the global crisis created by the pandemic.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The data for the following research paper has been collected using secondary data sources such as online blogs, websites, articles and various other secondary sources to study the impact on the educational system of India due to the COVID-19 pandemic in order to better understand the topic "Education In India Amidst A Global Pandemic."

IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Anurag Mehra, a Chemical Engineering Professor at the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay explained how teachers faced the difficulty of speaking in front of the camera in the absence of students. He also added that it would be advisable to discontinue the minor courses in order to tackle the major ones with a greater focus to facilitate ease and convenience for all. According to Anjali Gera Roy, an English Professor at IIT Kharagpur; having a face to face interaction with students enables teachers to use non-verbal cues and gestures to supplement verbal communication in teaching. Also, feedback from students revealed that they too craved face-to-face interaction as it facilitates a smooth doubt solving process.

Vinay Kirpal, an English Professor at IIT Bombay, said that teachers are also taking efforts to devise new test strategies to ensure that they cannot cheat. In fact, not just the teachers but the students as well are exploring new ideas to help their teachers and classmates such as the creation of an offline app, sharing of recorded lectures and sending practice problems. According to Professor Vinay, a little training to the teachers with respect to the operation of apps like Zoom, Webex and Google Meet would have gone a long way in making the transition from the classroom to online teaching more smooth. However, teachers have taken a brave leap to prevent the teaching-learning process from being hampered, he added. During this pandemic, teachers have demonstrated a spirit of true innovation and leadership to safeguard the education of our youth.

Teachers all across the globe have worked to foster a new learning environment for their students and to ensure that even if the world comes to a halt, education doesn't. The UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.), ILO (International Labour Organisation) and Education International in a joint statement on World Teachers' Day 2020 said that it is now more than ever that we need to reimagine education and strive towards the achievement of equal access to quality education for all children. The statement added that it is now more than ever that we need to acknowledge the important role played by teachers in influencing students and pushing them to perform to the best of their potential in a manner that in the future these young minds stimulate economic growth and social cohesion post-COVID-19.

V. EDUCATION AMIDST A GLOBAL PANDEMIC - TRANSITION TO ONLINE TEACHING

On account of the imposition of lockdown in March 2020, there has been a shut down of all the activities except for the provision of essentials. And educational institutions have been no exception to this lockdown. It was very clear that the assembling of students in schools and colleges was extremely unsafe especially if the spread of the virus needed to be controlled. In such a scenario, traditional teaching methods had to be traded for modern measures. Educational institutions had no choice but to adapt their teaching systems to continue doing what they do best - impart knowledge. And no, it is not just the institutions that have adapted to this change but all parties - teachers, students and even parents have adapted to effectively incorporate the changes as required to keep up with the demanding times. For many, this transition has been quite a hard one simply because prior to the pandemic we were extremely reluctant towards digital methods of imparting education and were significantly reliant on the traditional classroom method. However, it is now when there is no choice but to implement digitization and use e-teaching as the only tool for bridging the gap between teachers and students; that the educational institutions, teachers and students have moulded themselves to cope up with the changing times. This step towards the digital transformation of education has both- a few advantages as well a few challenges which have been stated below:

VI. THE MERITS OF DIGITAL EDUCATION

E-teaching is a cost-effective way of imparting education as there are various learning resources and reference material that is accessible through the internet. Apart from this, it is a very simple, easy and cost-effective method of fostering an environment of learning even during tough times like these. Any individual keen on accessing an online course simply needs a stable internet connection and a mobile or computer device. Also, it is not a necessary condition to be present in the live class. One can also avail the benefit of viewing the recorded classes at a later date and time. Online education also liberates the parties involved in the teaching-learning process from the hassles of commuting which spares a little more time for the students to focus on their studies and other important tasks.

There are a wide variety of tools that educators can use to enhance interaction with the students and capture their interest through various learning videos, using animation, creative infographics and the like to make the online teaching-learning experience a pleasant one. The online teaching transformation also enables students to raise their doubts to the respective teachers without being shy or embarrassed. It offers a channel to the students to maintain a certain level of anonymity and privacy where they have access to the option of sending the message privately to the host or panelists rather than everyone. This in turn helps them to boost their morale and actively engage in classroom activities. Also, on account of the digitization of education, the students are assigned online activities such as preparation of various word documents, PowerPoint presentations and excel sheets which serves as a great way of helping the students to pull up their socks and get ready for the corporate world.

The flexibility of time is the greatest advantage of online education. It makes doubt solving possible not just during the live class but also after the class hours via effective email or chat systems. Not only this, like other countries in the West, the Indian education system is also transitioning by providing a greater emphasis on the application of theoretical concepts rather than simply mugging them up. The digitization of education has facilitated to bridge this gap between theory and practice by providing an ocean full of resources at the disposal of the students. Teachers these days are not just giving online assignments but also taking online tests and quizzes to monitor the absorption, understanding and clarity of the concepts in the minds of the students.

Therefore, this transition to digital education was a much-awaited and a much-needed one. However, in a country like India, this transition is certainly not free from the consequences of its challenges that follow.

VII. THE CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL EDUCATION

In India, even though using digital modes of imparting education is the best option that we have at our disposal but one cannot overlook the fact that the nation battles severe economic problems like that of poverty and unemployment on account of which a large chunk of the population may not have the access to the required technological resources especially in remote areas. Also, for those who do have access to the required technological resources, one is certainly not free from the consequences of technical errors and issues that hinder the teaching-learning process. As the digitization of education leads to a lack of face-to-face communication and interaction between the teachers and the students, it creates a lack of personal touch which has essentially been the foundation of the education system in India for a long period of time. Such an absence of personal interaction may make the learning process boring and mundane for students and teachers may have to come up with newer ideas to attract and maintain the interest of the students in various subjects at the same time ensuring balanced attention being provided to all students. According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 1.6 billion learners have been directly affected due to the COVID-19 pandemic which accounts for more than 90% of the total enrolled student population of the world and 63 million teachers of the primary and secondary schools.

The transition to online education has not been difficult merely for students, it has been a difficult one for teachers as well. The teachers have had to adapt to the required technological resources in a very short span of time to ensure that even as the world comes to a halt, learning doesn't. The teachers did not have any kind of formal training with respect to the usage of various digital resources. The absence of formal training created a great challenge for the teachers as they had to now understand the functioning of the digital mediums on their own, discovering and devising effective online teaching strategies, understanding individual students' needs and ensuring effective class engagement and interaction. Unique challenges demand innovative solutions. So as teachers take up this significant responsibility of imparting education to the learners, they themselves must first learn to adapt to the new era of technology so that they can create an environment that truly encourages the spirit of learning.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS:

➤ *Making Internet and Necessary Technology More Accessible and Affordable -*

The Government and service providers must come together and take efforts to make the internet facility and the required technologies for e-learning more accessible and affordable so as to ensure that the underprivileged are not excluded from receiving education. The real transformation in our education system will be possible not simply by transitioning into digital education but by ensuring that digital education is accessible to all those who possess a hunger for knowledge and education.

➤ *Efforts to Make E-Learning More Simple, Easy and Interesting -*

Educational institutions and teachers must understand that as much as this change has impacted them, it has impacted the learners equally. So, they must take a rigorous effort to see that the interest of the learners is being effectively captured by using the required tools and techniques at the same time ensuring that the learning objectives are being met.

➤ *Provide Formal Training To Teachers*

Government and educational institutions must focus on providing formal training to the teachers so that they can get acquainted with the different digital resources and can effectively incorporate them into their teaching. It is vital for the success of digital education that teachers equip themselves such that they can utilize the online resources to the fullest so as to impart their knowledge to the students to the best of their ability.

➤ *Other Government Initiatives*

There are certain initiatives introduced by the Government that focus on the promotion of digital skilling in the nation thereby taking measures to develop and enhance the digital infrastructure. This will go a great way in giving a push to the educational institutions and with the help of technology, learning resources and materials can now be accessed in a variety of regional languages as well.

IX. CONCLUSION:

It is this ability to be able to acquire new information, knowledge and skills anywhere at any time that makes digital education a very opportunistic and attractive mode of imparting education. With online education, the horizons of learning have expanded beyond an imaginable measure. By carefully analyzing the merits and challenges of digital education, we could be in a better position to avail of the opportunities it has to offer and at the same time effectively cope up with its challenges.

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