IMPACT OF ONLINE TEACHING – LEARNING ON QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

Sub Title : Emerging Trends In Online Teaching & Learning
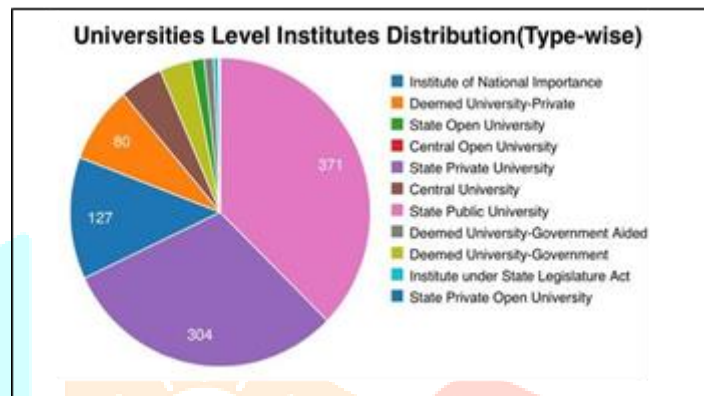
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ABSTRACT : Indian higher education can boast of being one of the torch bearers among many developing nations for its rich plethora of dynamic content. Due to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, in all the higher educational institutions, which includes universities, standalone institutes, and colleges, a total of about 10 million academic hours are compromised, which will be rather difficult to compensate. The University Grants Commission through its advisory instructed all the institutes to continue classes in online mode as per feasibility and engage ICT tools available for use in academic discourse. Many institutions have been using different social media platforms for the dissemination of knowledge. The Covid 19 crisis has turnaround the entire higher education scenario of the country through videoconferencing based online learning since there's no other option to compensate for the compromised classroom academic activities. The study aims at exploring the kind of platforms used to disseminate learning resources to the students, and the impact it is crafting on their educational loss. It also elucidates the effectiveness of online classes, e-learning pedagogy, and its outcome through structured qualitative analysis.
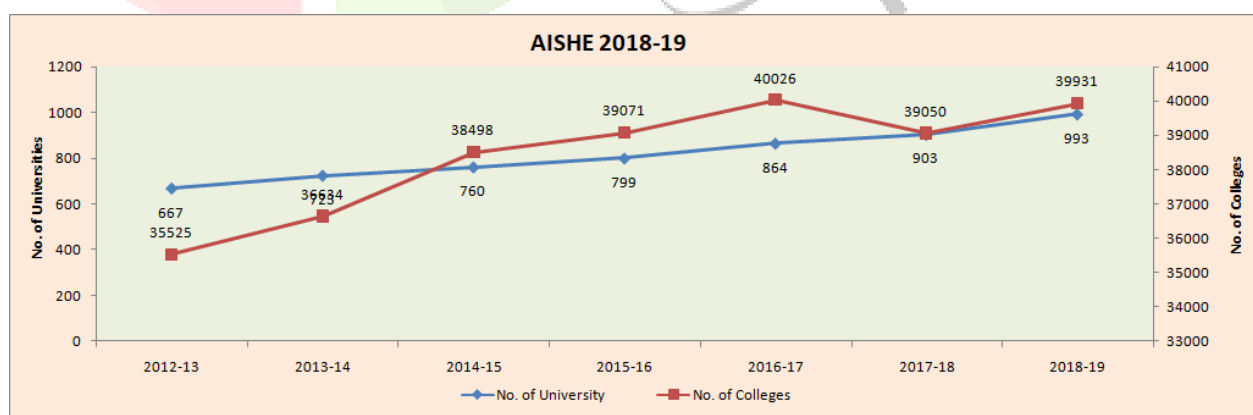
INTRODUCTION : The institutional framework of higher education in India comprises universities (run by State i.e. Centre and States as well as Private) , Colleges and stand- alone institutes, where millions of students pursue diverse academic programmes . The higher education system in the country has grown exponentially across the length and breadth of the country, particularly in the post-independence period. The education infrastructure has stealthily grown into the largest system of its kind in the world. While this exponential growth is often hindered by shortcomings that include finance and management, including access, equity and relevance, reorientation of programmes by emphasising on health consciousness, values and ethics, and quality of higher education together with the assessment of institutions and their accreditation. All these issues have been evaluated by the apex nodal body i.e. University Grants Commission (UGC) through different deliberations since they lay a strong foundation for the education sector which is a powerful tool to build a knowledge-based information society of this century

The even semesters of almost all the higher education institutes starts from January and the period between March and April is mid-semesters in different colleges and universities which is a crucial time for academic activities. Practically, in a semester, there are full-term classes only for a span of three to four months of a semester. But, due to sudden yet evasive coronavirus pandemic, all higher education institutions were compelled to shut down in between the mid-semester. This could possibly affect the higher education scenario in different ways. Having left with no options, the Government imposed a countrywide lockdown being the only possible way out to manage this unprecedented health crisis gripping the world. Now, such a crucial step should be assisted with wise academic decisions, proactive enough to bail out an academic year of around 37 million students as well as give a roadmap for future prospects. The architecture scenario of higher education in the country can be broadly segmented and grouped in following manner :

Higher Education Architecture in India

The All India Survey of Higher Education (2019) reveals the fact that Indian higher education comprises of 53,620 institutions with 37 million students. There is a total of 41,901 colleges, 10, 726 standalone institutions and 993 universities, out of which 385 Universities are privately managed and 394 Universities are located in rural areas. There are 548 General, 142 Technical, 63 Agriculture &Allied, 58 Medical, 23 Law, 13 Sanskrit, and 9 Language Universities and rest 106 Universities belong to other categories. Out of 1.4 million teachers engaged in higher education in India, 1.1 million teachers teach in the colleges, 158,000 teachers in universities, and 147,000 teachers are employed in the standalone institutions.

Impact Of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) In IndianHigher Education

Due to the Novel Coronavirus lockdown of 40 days (first and second phase), in all the institutions, a total of about 10million academic hours was compromised, which will be very difficult to compensate. The University Grants Commission through its advisory instructed all the institutesto continue classes in online mode as per feasibility and engage ICT tools available for use in academic discourse. The faculty members of the Universities and Colleges were requested by its advisory to make use of the various online tools in order to reach out to the students. To assist this endeavor, there are many open

access tools available, which are already used by many universities and colleges to   reach out to students located in remote areas. With the availability of high- speed mobile networks, online live classes from home started becoming a reality. Many success stories started emerging in the process of engaging the students effectively using different online applications. Despite the fact that the attendance rate in the classes is not more than 75 - 80 percent in aggregate due to the poor network connectivity, it resulted in restricting a sizeable number of students to avail of these opportunities.

Advisory To Utilise Online Resources

The UGC advisory has instructed the faculty members to develop online teaching content, such as instructional materials using modules, powerpoint presentations, recording video lessons, and even audio teaching materials that can be shared through different content sharing platforms and messaging applications like Whatsapp, Messenger, Imo, Viber, etc. The UGC's recommendation for the faculty members and students has been to avail maximum benefit from various digital/ICT initiatives of MHRD, UGC, and its Inter-University Centres. Among the ICT facilities, SWAYAM is one of the most user friendly MOOC (massive open online course) platforms. SWAYAM, stands for Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds, which was initiated by Government of India and designed to achieve the three cardinal principles of education policy viz access, equity and quality. The objective of this effort is to take the best teaching learning resources to all, including the most disadvantaged. SWAYAM seeks to bridge the digital divide for students who have hitherto remained untouched by the digital revolution and have not been able to join the mainstream of the knowledge economy. Swayamprabha is another ICT facility for viewing digital courses on television. The government facilitates different digital content through National Digital Library, e-PG Pathshala, Shodhganga, e-ShodhSindhu and Shodhgangotri. Accelerate hands on learning, the government initiated e- Yantra that creates a laboratory for training in embedded systems in collaboration with IIT Bombay. FOSSEE is a provision that allows access for use of open source software. Spoken Tutorial and Virtual Labs are also remarkable initiatives for self-training and virtual experiments. Govt. of U.P. has also initiated similar initiative and had created an online platform wherein faculties have been advised to upload various subject contents. The platform link is heecontentupsdc.gov.in. Students can access these contents for learning .

The UGC has encouraged the faculty members to carry on research and write research articles during the Covid 19 lockdown. Apart from the research based portals like Shodhganga, e-Shodh Shindhu, the Union Government has also created an expert database and national research network called VIDWAN, Indian research information network system called IRINS and ShodhShudhhi, a plagiarism detection software to encourage the researchers to contribute original information by preventing plagiarism in order to maintain the reputation of Indian research.
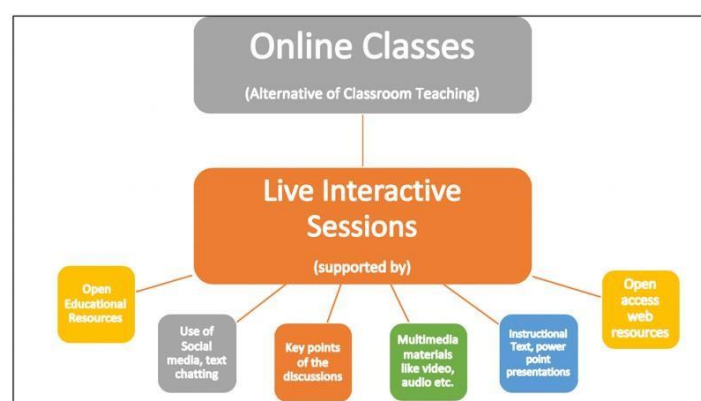
The recommendations set forward by the UGC have been visionary, provided the application of such facilities are widely accepted and applied by the teaching fraternity who have to understand that South Asian countries like China, South Korea, and Japan among others have not compromised on the teaching–learning time even at the wake of such crisis. Also, there were risk of many students having to drop a valuable academic year due to extra months   added to the course completion . Based on the analysis of qualitative coding, the findings were categorized under five major heads- impact of the lockdown, provision of online classes, pedagogy adopted in the teaching learning process, benefit and limitations of online classes.

The Covid 19 impact on the online teaching – learning can be understood in following dimensions :-

a) **Impact of Lockdown:** A lockdown is an emergency protocol that prevents people from leaving a given area. A full lockdown will mean everyone must stay where they are and not exit or enter a building or the given area. This scenario usually allows for essential supplies, grocery stores, pharmacies, and banks continue to serve the people. All non-essential activities remain shut for the entire period (ET Online, 2020). In India, the lockdown to curve the scale of novel coronavirus was initially given for 21 days, which was later extended to another 19 days until 03 May, 2020. The isolation and fear in the

lockdown era drove an escalating nervousness among many people. Not only those people with pre-existing conditions like anxiety, depression, and OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder) the elderly were also disturbed who were struggling with new levels of loneliness and helplessness. The psychological impact of lockdown or quarantine exposed proof of a range of psychological conditions, from post-traumatic stress symptoms to confusion, anger, depression, stress, insomnia and emotional breakdown .

b) **Provision of Online Classes:** Online learning can be termed as learning that takes place partially or entirely over the Internet. This definition excludes purely print-based correspondence education, broadcast television or radio, video conferencing, videocassettes, and stand-alone educational software programs that do not have a significant Internet-based instructional component. There are two purposes for online learning: learning conducted totally online as a substitute or alternative to face-to-face learning and online learning components that are combined or blended (sometimes called "hybrid") with face-to-face instruction to provide learning enhancement. Due to the unprecedented certain novel coronavirus menace, the higher education system in India became handicapped overnight. With the initiative at the institutional level and teachers' personal efforts, almost all the universities and higher learning institutes in the country started online classes in place of face to face traditional classes. Apart from the open universities and the distance education directorates of the dual-mode universities, many conventional institutes offered online classes to make the education continue and complete the curricular in this semester. A student credited the effort of online classes as, "Our online classes were not only about studies but also about our mental health''. Another master's student stated, "Even when the world is scientifically paralysed at the moment to dig out a solution to counter the pandemic coronavirus disease, online classes have been an innovative and digitally equipped medium to save and help every student to add their efficiency and upgrade their educational skills".

c) **Teaching Pedagogy:** Pedagogy is defined simply as the method, and practice, of teaching. It is the art and act of teaching to make learners to get knowledge and to acquire skill based experience. In general, pedagogy refers to the method in which a teacher teaches to make their classes more attractive and useful. It is the theory and practice of educating. Pedagogy is the relationship between learning techniques and culture and is determined based on an educator's beliefs about how learning should, and does, take place. Pedagogy requires meaningful interactions by establishing mutual respect between educators and learners. The teachers, who were literally challenged in using ICT for education also became experts in providing online teaching or using different social media platforms to engage their students academically and mentally. While discussing informally with a few university professors, the researcher found that providing meaningful teachings, creating an academic environment during quarantine by adopting new technologies is their accountability to the profession and responsibility towards their students. Even they denied receiving any instructions from their authority to conduct the classes except an advisory, they initiated the online classes only to help their students. The following is an alternative arrangement of face to face classroom teaching adopted by an academic department of an Indian public university.

Benefits of Online Classes: Online learning has become an indispensable part of academic and professional education during this novel coronavirus pandemic. The University teachers have been exploring to create a more appealing and effective online learning environment. Lots of benefits have been mentioned by the participants during the qualitative data collection. A master's student expresses gratitude to the teachers saying, "The government officials are saving us today by doing every possible thing and our teachers are preparing us for tomorrow for what comes next". Another student has articulated the benefits from the online classes as, "The online classes have been very fruitful during these difficult times. Firstly, during this lockdown the online classes provide us a daily purpose to attend it, which helps us in staying somewhat focused and keeps us in the correct lane. Secondly, the syllabus is getting covered during these off-days, as there will be hardly few days (hopefully) for the completion of the syllabus in the future. Moreover, it is a unique experience which we are having and it certainly brightens us with hope for the upcoming days .

Limitation of Online Classes: For any approaches, if there are some benefits or advantages, a few limitations will be there too. The students are accustomed to the face to face classroom learning and hence, some of them couldn't adjust themselves with the new academic environment while staying at home. There are pros of classroom teaching that digital or online education will find hard to replace, such as collaborative learning, enhancement of critical thinking skills, improvement of social skills, building organisational skills, keeping students stimulated, development of important personality and career building skills.

CONCLUSION: In a world where digital social media has taken a significant role in teaching and learning, any modern pedagogy much accounts for students' findings, analysing, and applying knowledge from a growing number of constantly changing sources. This requires higher-order skills like critical thinking and the ability to learn more independently, as well as in larger groups, both in person and online . This study focused on the impact of digital social media on student academic life in higher education during the Novel Coronavirus (COVID- 19) pandemic crisis.

The study explains the impact of self-isolation, quarantine and lockdown due to the pandemic on the academic schedule of the students of Indian higher education. After studying the phenomena that are of interest to the study, and transcribing the various responses of the participants, even though some of the responses were not transcribed because they were all communicating the same idea; the results reveal that social media is widely used by students of higher institution. Opportunities and benefits of digital social media for academic purposes incurred by the students became visible only after the crisis took place. Although digital education based online learning was not systematically implemented in India, even in the open and distance learning as a whole, because it was not an essential pedagogy until the pandemic struck the world and the Indian state in particular. The present Coronavirus crisis has revolutionized the entire higher education architecture of the country through e-tools for teaching and learning, since there's no other option for continuation of the academic activities. There are some limitations of this study, considering the number of participants involved and the methodology adopted due to the COVID-19 lockdown in India.

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