



# ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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*Abstract:* Online teaching was widely promoted as a response to the quarantine and the closure of educational institutions in the wake of Covid 19, though there were apprehensions about the safety, privacy and additive issues of online platforms. Many online courses were interesting, but they were an inadequate substitute for the classroom, which is not just a space for knowledge transaction, but also where lasting friendships are formed. Infrastructurally and spatially deprived, the vulnerable and underprivileged students faced accessibility issues. Away from the classroom and devoid of digital accessibility, they suffered a double disadvantage. Female students faced some additional issues - having to negotiate between attending online classes and doing domestic chores. The closure of the classroom also meant, besides learning disruption, missing the midday meal, health programme and scholarships. However, online teaching has been promoted as a permanent feature of education in the future, a surrogate for classroom teaching.

## I. The Closure of Schools

The unanticipated and unprecedented scourge of COVID 19 had its adverse impact on every aspect of life around the globe. India was no exception. Education, among other areas, had to bear the brunt. Classes were suspended, and online teaching began using various platforms like Zoom. Neither students nor teachers were prepared for the sudden shift to the online mode. But it was widely felt that a solution was found for the crisis in education, though there were apprehensions about the safety of Zoom and the possibility of data theft. "The university and college administrators as well as many motivated teachers were all suddenly full of the Zoom experience, and at last, it seemed as if a solution to this extraordinary standstill had been found." (Bhattacharya 2020)

## II. Impact of Online Teaching on Students

The closure of schools and the arrival of online teaching impacted students in a variety of ways. Krishna Kumar identifies several of them:

Digital learning is known to bring with it certain additive behaviours that may persist at school and take new and disturbing mutations. When children returned to school, they felt off - balance, experiencing an uncanny sense of deprivation that hits the mind after an ordeal is over. (Krishna Kumar, 2021)

Many online courses are interesting and of great value, but they are not comparable with learning in the physical space; the classroom has immense potential for transforming the lives of students. It is not just a space for the transaction of knowledge, but a venue for speaking and questioning, interpersonal relationships and durable friendships; while in the virtual world all this is lacking.

Unprepared for the pedagogic shift, the sudden closure of schools significantly impacted the vulnerable and underprivileged sections,

For the economically and socially disadvantaged children who do not have well endowed domestic spaces, the transition to online education was a poignant double whammy, according to Bhattacharya. The classroom is a common homogenised space provided by the college/ university, accessible to all students, a space of formal equality free from and away from particularised domestic constraints. With the advent of online teaching students are deprived of this common classroom space. On the one hand, they are deprived of the spaces in the college, classroom and library, and on the other, devoid of accessibility to online learning as well as domestic space. (Bhattacharya 2020)

### III. The limited Scope of Online Teaching

The reach and value of online teaching was limited, because the digital initiative was taken up in a haphazard way. In many institutions the digital infrastructure was inadequate, teachers were poorly equipped. There was hardly any consultation with teachers, nor were they trained in online teaching. The digital divide between the rich and poor, the urban and rural restricted the scope of online teaching. The planning of online teaching was neither context specific, nor gender responsive nor inclusive. The situation was aggravated by the deprivation of scholarships, midday meals and personal hygiene products for girls.

The loss of learning during the lockdown was caused by poor access to digital data, the children being burdened with household/ farm work and the apprehension that girl students would be given away in marriage.

The situation in Rajasthan is an example. Rajasthan is the second worst State in overall literacy in India and lowest female literacy rate. Twenty per cent of girls in the 15-16 age group are out of school. (The national average is 13.5%); this is in spite of the efforts of the Lok Jumbish and Shiksha Karmik projects. The State suffers from systemic issues of education, in terms of quality, equity and gender.

### IV. The girl child

The deprivation of education of the girl child as a consequence of COVID 19 is a worrisome area for India. It is estimated that nearly 300 million children were out of school after the pandemic struck. There were also challenges of delivery, especially of pedagogical processes, classroom assessment frameworks, students' support and teacher- student engagement. Various studies have borne out the hiatus in learning caused by the pandemic and online learning which followed and the poor performance of children, especially girls. (Sebastian 2021).

Female students face some additional disadvantages. Women share an unequal share of household chores. Female students had to take up some of these duties. They had to negotiate between attending online classes and taking up these responsibilities. There can be clashes of timings of online classes and these domestic duties. The patriarchal family ecosystem demands that the household duties take precedence over attending online classes in case of female students. The gendered mindset requires that the feminine world of domestic work must adjust to the supposed impersonal world of "productive" work. (Bhattacharya 2020)

### V. Accessibility Issues

The problem of access to technology - the availability of Internet and hardware - is a serious issue. Not having laptops, most students had to use their mobile phones to attend classes. The small mobile phone is not conducive to concentration. A recent survey in a central university shows that only 50% students had access to laptops, 45% could access Internet and 18% did not have Internet access (UoH Herald 2020). Not only in cities, but also - and more importantly in rural areas and small towns -- students had to face Internet fluctuations in the wake of covid 19. Many students did not have unlimited wifi plans. They had only limited data packs. Attending several classes was costly and unaffordable. In normal times they could go out and access free Internet, which was not possible during the lockdown.

## VI. Infrastructure problems

Many students faced infrastructure unavailability, the physical space to take part in online learning, a quiet space and no disturbance. For most students a silent private space was a luxury. The problem was aggravated for other family members, and all the more difficult when there were more than one student in the same house. In such situations, members of the students' family had to adjust their work schedules to enable the students to attend online classes.

The rapid transition to digital learning posed several challenges related to spatial, digital, gender and class issues, uneven distribution of technology and social and economic mobility.

When students returned to school, they forgot what they had learnt, the quality of education was affected by the postponement of examinations and automatic promotions. The closure of schools was accompanied by learning disruption, missing the midday meal, health programme and scholarships. A study by the Centre for Budget and Policy Studies showed that only 50 per cent of boys and girls would return to school due to the inability of families and communities to support education.

## VII. The Stress Factor

For online teaching, the situation that created the context is the lockdown, and the social distancing which came in its wake, the stress and anxiety of infection, emergencies and family members in quarantine.

After the reopening of schools, steps need to be taken to alleviate the stress of online classes, Krishna Kumar prioritises: arts, music, painting, theatre and dance - traditionally marginalised area - to provide the healing touch of aesthetic experience and for a rewarding resumption of routine; the reorganisation of curriculum, avoiding the linear syllabus coverage. (Krishna Kumar 2020)

## VIII. Advantages

In the aftermath of the pandemic, online teaching has been promoted as a permanent feature of higher education in the future, a surrogate for classroom teaching: the temporary COVID 19 solution is here to stay. Indeed it is seen as an opportunity, as the future of higher education in India, and a means to increase India's gross enrolment ratio in higher education. Online learning has the potential to provide access and optimal course pacing and content to students facing time, geographic and medical constraints. At the same time, the shift from emergency remote teaching in the early pandemic has morphed into innovation and investment in online teaching and learning. Many have since discovered an interest in understanding online learning's return on investment. "(Insidehighered. com).

The Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD), University Grants Commission (UGC), NITI Aayog and the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisage "that we should be spending at least 6 per cent of our gross domestic production on education. It is imperative that while the economy is growing, we need to invest more in education." (Businessworld, June 28, 2023). The Government initiated some measures, among them digital distance learning with emphasis on use of text, video, audio content through SMS, WhatsApp, radio and TV programmes. The Union Ministry of Human Resources Development has shared free e-learning platforms: --

- Diksha portal which has e-learning content aligned to the curriculum
- e-Pathshala, an app by the NCERT for classes 1 to 12 in multiple languages
- SWAYAM hosts 1900 courses including teaching videos, computer weekly assignments, examinations, and credit transfers aimed both at school and higher education
- SWAYAM Prabha - group of 32 direct to home channels devoted to educational programmes.

## CONCLUSION

"Technology holds out the exciting promise of reimagining schooling," says the Principal of a school in Bengaluru, "But it can be daunting, and it is difficult to be innovative if you feel scared and unsupported. Virtual platforms, vitally, also helped a vast population of students continue their education during the pandemic. And today, devices and educational apps have become ubiquitous in classrooms. ( Gandhi, 2023).

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