Effectiveness of Online Classes amid COVID-19 Era

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Abstract: The aftermath of COVID-19 can be observed worldwide, and all sectors are equally suffering from this. The education sector across the world is also suffering hampering the process of education. The total lockdown enforced in 42 countries, badly affected the life of the students. Around 1.277 billion students around the world are being affected due to the halt in the education process. As it is said that Change is inevitable, but growth is optional, the outbreak of COVID-19 has taught that. This scenario has proven itself to be a boost to explore the unexplored and pushed every educational institution to equip itself with ICT (Information and Communication Technology). This review highlights how the world is matching steps and finding a solution to every drawback. This review contains the level of dissemination of online education, the steps were taken by Indian and world government to fight this, how effective it has proven so far, and some challenges that have yet to be overcome.

Keywords – COVID-19, Lockdown, Education, Online Classes, Effectiveness, Government of India.

1. INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2019, what we call COVID-19 now, first appeared in Wuhan, China. The fast spread of COVID-19 to every corner of the world instigated **WHO** (World Health Organisation) to declare this as a 'pandemic' as of March 2020. Due to this spreading cause, governments around the world have implemented total lockdown and that includes the closing of educational institutions. As of 4 September 2020, approximately 1.277 billion students are being affected due to this. According to **UNICEF** monitoring, while 46 countries are in nationwide closures, 27 countries are implementing local closures, affecting about 72.9 percent of the world's student population. 72 countries' schoolscurrentlyopen.

The first positive COVID-19 case in India was found in Kerala on 30th January2020. As of 16th September2020, there are **995933** active cases of COVID-19 (**mohfw**). Common initiatives by governments worldwide to stop the spread of COVID-19 is imposing lockdown, social distancing, avoiding face to face teaching and learning, and the minimization of immigration (**Gonzalez et al. 2020**). India suffered in every field be it the employment, economically or in the field of education. So, what options are left for ensuring that the process of learning doesn't stop, the only possible solution is to switch to online classes. With the rapid increase in the cases, it is difficult to conduct face to face classes; even if the government allows to open the schools, we cannot ignore the need for online classes in the 21st century. But then comes the question; if every country's students can access the online classes and if this is something really effective for them. Everything that is implemented on a global basis comes with some merits and demerits; on one hand, online classes come with easy access and usefewer resources to provide more but on the other, there is the issue of

availability of these resources to each individual and the fear of hampering interpersonal relationship between teachers and students. (**Jena,2020**).

Concept of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) is not something that is new, but the idea of implementing it for online classes regularly is very new to many. Educators know that technology is never neutral and everything new has to meet some resistance (**Ali,2020**).**UNESCO** is also aware that transitioning to online learning and relying on technology for our education at this large scale is very complex, even in best circumstances this transition is not an easy task but this is the need of the hour (**UNESCO, 2020**)This review gives an introspect into the efficacy and necessity of online education amid the COVID-19 era.

2. DISSEMINATION OF ONLINE CLASSES AMID COVID-19

There is an urgent need for online learning, to match the steps of development in the sector of education which has the support of information technology that is lead by the digital era. The process of online learning can happen flexibly, anytime, and anywhere. The rise of the COVID-19 outbreak has thrown the balance out of the world, so it is important to be prudent, which can only be possible through interaction with others. In this case, the impact of the disruption of learning can be overcome by implementing online learning (**Verawardina,2020**). There is a need to suspend classes, but we can not suspend the learning. The spread started from China, and it was hit badly which made them realize that closing everything is the only option. So, they started an initiative "Suspending Classes Without Stopping Learning" which aimed to fight against COVID-19 by suspending offline classes and turning to online education (**Zhang,2020**).

Not only in China, according to Census data of the U.S (United States), there are around 76 million students in the U.S, representing roughly 23% of the U.Spopulation. Now, these students need access to quality learning resources and instruction. **Eurekly** (education technology platform) has seen a rise in new users from the U.S. It has experienced 19,324 sessions over around March2020. With an increase of 12% within a month and 30% in a week. This platform now has over 8,500 users both teachers and students from 25 countries (**businesswire, March 2020**).

The rise in online classes is not only because of COVID-19, but this is need of the hour, even before COVID-19, there was already a rise in the need of education technology, with global edtech (education technology) investment reaching around **Rs. 1,866 crores** in **2019** and predicted to reach **Rs. 35,000 crores** by **2025,** and there is a significant surge in usage due to COVID-19(**weforum, April 2020**).

According to an article published in **World Economic Forum (April2020)**, there is an increase in online classes and online educators' applications are flourishing (**Table**), worldwide.

Country	App	Increase in users
India	BYJU'S	200%
China	Tencent K-12 Online School	81%
UK	The Los Angeles Unified School District and PBS SoCal/KCET, through different broadcasting channels including **BBC**	All the users for 14 weeks.

There is no argument that COVID-19 has a drawback on education systems worldwide. But this has given a chance to explore the opportunities given. It is evident that online learning has a role to play, and now it is incumbent to explore its full potential.

3. iNITIATIVES BY THE iNDIAN gOVERNMENT FOR oNLINE EDUCATION

Like all the governments around the world, the Government of India has taken all the necessary measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The central government announceda nation-wide lockdown on all educational intuitions on 16th March 2020. Prominent boards like CBSE and UPSC even postponed all their exams throughout India. All state governments were instructed to conduct the classes online. The best solution during this pandemic COVID-19 is online learning (**Pravat, 2020**).

According **to the Ministry of Education India**, "the school education system alone in India is larger than that of European and African continents having more than **240 million** students" and adding the students in college this data will get bigger. We know the fact that the process of learning never stops and we just cannot close the schools and colleges and let them be. The spread of COVID-19 led to the closing of every educational institution worldwide and in India. In a developing country like India, the concept of online education is not new but not common also. MHRD (Ministry of Human Resource Development) has made several initiatives that include online portals, educational channels, home TV, and radio channels for students to learn. Even the applications like Zoom, WhatsApp, Google meet, YouTube is helping students to continue their education (**Jena,2020**).

To make sure that learning reaches every corner the government of India has taken many initiatives and we can easily find them under **PRAGYATA – guidelines for digital education.** Aninitiative was taken by the Ministry **of Human Resource Department (MHRD)** called **PM eVidya (May 17, 2020),** where the main aim is to unify all the components of digital education benefiting "nearly **25 crore**going children". These initiatives of the Indian Government are as follows (**PK Jena,2020**)

Secondary Education

DIKSHA- National platform todigitalize the education of state/UTs by providing QR code textbooks for every grade, MOOCs courses, and e-content under One Nation, One Digital Platform.

e-Pathshala - e-Learning application by NCERT for every class in multiple languages. The app contains books, videos, and audio aimed for both teachers and students in languages like Hindi, English, and Urdu.

National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER) – Education portal providing resources to every student of every class. Contents are arranged in such a way that has aligned resources for teachers. It includes a total of 14527 files including 401 collections, 2779 documents, 6153 videos, 1345 interactive, 1664 audios, and 2586 imagesin multiple languages.

Online Coaching: ITPAL for IITJEE/NEET preparation

Higher Education

SWAYAM PRABHA- Designated TV channels for every grade under One Class, One Channel.

SWAYAM- MOOCs for Open school or NIOS.

Expansive use of Radio, Community radio, and CBSE Podcast - Shiksha Vani

Special e-content for visually and hearing impaired: Established using Digitally Accessible Information System (DAISY), in sign language available on NIOS website or YouTube.

e-PG Pathshala – Application for postgraduate students can access this platform for study materials, eBooks, and online courses during this lockdown period.

The government realizes that in a diverse country like India there always be a limitation of availability of resources and making the education online is very challenging. But with the co-operation of the National level and state level organization, the country can survive the post-COVID-19 phase and it will help in enhancing the education of India.

Initiatives by World governments for Online Education –

Whether it's a developing country or a developed country, transaction to online education has been a difficult phase for all. And seeing the grave need for online education, **World Bank** has highlighted a number of challenges for education providers, to make sure that the students are least affected at times like this (**Ali,2020**). Some of those concerns are –

➢   Even in the best of conditions, transaction to online education on this large scale is a very difficult and complex process;
➢   Transitioning to online education at a large scale raises concerns for the impartiality;
➢   Learners with previous experience or the learners with high motivation, are to take most advantages of the opportunities of online education;
➢   It is usual for the education systems and parents to expect lower grades of students due to newness of the online learning;
➢   The organization of digital education in cooperation with the existing curriculum is very critical, to ensure that the online opportunities provided are a representation of the broader educational objectives;
➢   It is critical to make content available on a wide platform of devices and mobile-friendly;
➢   Keeping up with the issue of low bandwidth and including offline solutions is key to efficacious learning;
➢   There is a need for universities to mediate with internet vendors to help provide access to online learning for students for free or at a lower price;
➢   Every subject can not be moved to online education equally, some are easier than others (World Bank, 2020).

Every government around the world are doing their best for implementing methods for online classes. Here is a synthesis and meta-analysis of 20 countries both developed and developing across all six WHOs, on how similar and different they are, on moving to online classes (**Crawford, 2020**).

WESP (2020) category	Country	COVID-19 Cases/1M pop*	Extension of semester break	Reported campus closures*	Reported move to online teaching
Developed economies	Australia	166	No	All	All
	Germany	745	No	All	All
	Italy	1,616	No	All	All
	Republic of Ireland	530	No	All	All
	United Kingdom	288	No	All	All
	United States of America	431	No	Some	Some
Developing economies	Brazil	20	No	Some	Some
	China	57	Yes	All	All
	Chile	112	No	All	Some
	Egypt	6	No	All	All
	Hong Kong	86	Yes	All	All
	India	0.8	Yes	All	Some
	Indonesia	5	No	All	Some
	Jordan	25	No	All	Some
	Malaysia	81	No	All	No
	Nigeria	0.5	No	All	Some
	Republic of Korea (South Korea)	188	Yes	All	Some
	Singapore	144	No	Some	Some
	South Africa	22	Yes	All	Some
	United Arab Emirates	58	No	All	Some

1M pop = 1 million population, * = Worldometer, 2020 (30 March 2020), *UNLSCO, 2020 (30 March 2020)

Further, UNESCO stated, "We cannot return to the world as it was before". So, it initiated **The case for Education for Sustainable Development**, and in November 2019, in the 40th UNESCO General Conference approved the new *Global framework on Education for Sustainable Development* (ESD for 2020) for the timeline of 2020-2030. ESD for 2030 aims to focus on integrating ESD in policy learning environments, mobilization of youth, capacity building of educators, and empowerment and local level action on it.

This shows that almost all the countries are taking steps for online education and this is something necessary. There are challenges to be faced as World Bank advised, but as

Roy T. Bennett quoted " Nobody is free from the trials of life, but everyone can always find something optimistic in everything even in the worst of times."

4. EFFECTIVENESS OF ONLINE CLASSES AMID THE COVID-19 ERA

The current condition has pushed everyone into online education. And it won't be wrong to say that most of the countries are already there. Now, that everyone has taken a step into this, is this as effective as our traditional system of education. The strengths of online education can change and improve the education system.

How online education is proving its effectiveness –

➢ It is flexible for students and teachers whether its time or location, it is easily accessible.
➢ It is catering to a wide range of audiences be it students of school or higher education.
➢ Its wide array of content available gives a lot of exposure to choose from a variety of contents.
➢ It provides immediate feedback for improvement in its system.
➢ Online education is a step toward blended learning.
➢ Rise in the usage of learning management systems (**Mishra,2020**).
➢ Improvement in learning resources which caters to individual differences of students.
➢ The rise in collaboration of students and teachers.
➢ Access to global education through the vast array of contents.
➢ Demand for online and distance education.

Challenges of Online classes –

If something has a positive effect, it is natural to have some challenges and everything new comes with these challenges no one asks for but has to overcome. Like this online learning comes with various challenges with educators and learners both incorporated.

According to a study by**Kapasia,2020**, a study was conducted on 232 students in this lockdown.It was reported that most learners were suffering from stress, anxiety, and depression(42.0%). Some students were facing problems due to poor connectivity of the internet(32.4%), followed by the absence of a study environmentat home (12.6%). Further, poor economic conditions are a major reason for the unfavorable environment and lack of resources for education.

Some other challenges of online education due to COVID-19 –

➢   Computer literacy and technical issues – Not all have the same knowledge when it comes to computer literacy and digital education, and some learn very slowly.
➢   Social status or economic condition – Some weaker sections can not afford the internet or the devices, which comes as a drawback for them. (**Jena,2020**)
➢   Hampering of educational sessions – Postponed many exams, and the sessions are late for many.
➢   Unprepared teachers – Many teachers lack training and knowledge for conducting online classes.
➢   No access to digital education – Many can not afford the internet and even if they can there are network issues.
➢   Lack of interaction – Among teachers and students there is a lack of interaction as compared to face to face education.
➢   Issue of fees payments – Many students' parents faced unemployment due to COVID-19 and it is effecting their timely fees payment.

5. CONCLUSION –

The effect of COVID-19 is widespread and is impacting all the sectors equally. The Impact of COVID-19 on education is very prominent and can be seen clearly. This has thrown the education world out of balance and provided every government, around the world number of challenges. But with challenges, there are many opportunities provided in this chaos to turn the education around. Not every country is prepared whether it is developing or developed, there is still a way to go. The government of every country is trying their best to provide all they can to make the transaction to online classes as smooth as possible. They are making this a priority to make sure that the process of education does not stop and providing them everything be it funds or the platform needed to progress.

COVID-19 emerged as a pandemic, and there is no surety on how long it will take to recover completely. Even if there is a cure for this, still there is a concern about the balance of the society left. The education system that was before this has changed now, it has become digital and it was needed to digitalize education. What could be done now is to accept the new concept of education provided through online classes, and incorporate it into our concept. This shows us what the future has in hold for education, which is new to imagine but beneficial in long run.There is still a need to work on policies to make this a normal feature of education. Even if this lockdown ends, the process that has started to transform education should continue to prosper because this drawback has been the best push for excellence.

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