An Analysis of the Effectiveness of Online Learning in Colleges of Uttar Pradesh during the COVID 19 Lockdown

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Abstract- COVID-19 is a pandemic with no vaccine and ascertained medication currently and hence its negative impact may be beyond imagination. Among the pandemic’s significant effects is the closure of educational institutions across the globe. This closure was replicated in Uttar Pradesh too, in order to contain the spread of the deadly virus. In this situation ‘online learning’ emerged as an asset to connect with students, keep them engaged and prevent loss of study hours when traditional classroom teaching came to a sudden halt. Online learning was rolled out with fanfare, however with the passage of time chinks emerged in the model necessitating deep introspection and research. This paper investigates the impact of online education during COVID 19 crises in colleges of Uttar Pradesh and contemplates the route for making online education more effective.

Key Words: Online Education, Corona Virus Disease (COVID 19)

Keywords defined:

- **Online education** is a type of educational instruction that is delivered via the internet to students using their home computers (Online-education, 2020).

- **Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)** is an infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (Mayo Clinic, 2020).

I. INTRODUCTION

As per 2018-2019 survey conducted by AISHE (All India Survey For Higher Education for the year 2018-19) there are nearly 993 Universities and 39931 colleges in India. Total enrolment in higher education has been estimated to be 37.4 million. Uttar Pradesh comes at number one with the highest student enrolment followed by Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. The crisis of COVID-19 has spread globally and it is sabotaging not only the health of the people but also paralyzing them economically, emotionally and socially. Students too are undergoing problems as Covid -19 has eventually led to the closure of Universities, Colleges and Schools in India. Various countries have started psychological helpline numbers for the pandemic. In India National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) is providing counseling in 21 states. Counseling is being done on mental health and psychosocial issues related to the pandemic Covid-19 though its helpline numbers (The Hindu.com,2020). To prevent loss of study hours online education has been rolled out across colleges and universities. However not much time was available to train academicians and students in the process of executing the teaching-learning processes online or establishing best practices and standard operating procedures. Online education which was launched as a panacea for all ailments now is in need of deeper introspection.
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE
The internet has evolved in the past decades and has become an important part of our lives. Multiple platforms have initiated a plethora of online activities like online banking, buying groceries, checking of ticket availability and booking etc. The educational sector has also been quick to grab a share of the online platform.. Deepak R. (2018) states that through the internet each person can access education from the portals of any national or international college or university using personal multimedia device. Bakia M., Shear L., et al. (2012) mention that online education paves the way for affordable education to those who are not in the position to bear the hefty cost of educational institutes. Benson A., Conrad (2002) also believes that online learning has risen sharply in the education field.

Fitzpatrick, R. (2001) states that India is a progressing country and soon will enter the zone of a developed nation. To achieve progress the education sector also needs a boost. He propagated the idea and questioned as to why a student in India cannot access education from international Universities like Oxford without paying hefty fees and acquiring a degree and knowledge from the comfort of their own home. He thus states that shift is required from traditional to online techniques to attain multi-pronged advantages. Koehler M., (2005) indicated that using this medium students get the flexibility to prepare for any test, to answer it and to submit it online.

Watson J., Murin A., et al. (2012) states that in online learning process teachers and their students are separated. Bodzin &Park, (2000) assert that, feedback from students and teachers get derailed in many cases in the online mode. Even getting basic knowledge sometimes becomes a problem due to a lack of personal interaction. Thoughtful discussions are a problem too. Many times students lack motivation and determination too, so despite getting a lot of time, they are unable to follow punctuality and maintain productivity which may be harmful for internalization of concepts.

Closure of educational institutions has always been the first non-pharmaceutical solution in times of pandemic. (Qiu, W. & Rutherford, Shannon & Mao, A. & Chu, Cordia, 2017). It has been observed that closing of schools on time and cancellation of gatherings has successfully reduced the mortality rate during influenza epidemics in the United States in 1918 (Chen, Huang, Chiang, Chi, & Kuo, 2011). Thus the closure of educational institutions becomes imperative to curb contagious diseases. But there is a price to pay in terms of teaching-learning hours. Also families with underprivileged backgrounds are likely to be more affected so the closure of schools comes as an ethical and social issue (Cauchemez et al., 2009).

III. INITIATIVES BEING TAKEN IN INDIA
Rolling out online education was a step to bridge this learning gap and ensure the continuity of the teaching-learning processes during the pandemic. Various governmental and non-governmental bodies have initiated several online sources to fill the gap as educational institutions closed to formal education due to Covid-19 in March 2020. Some impactful initiatives are as follows:

MOOCS (Massive open online courses) introduced by the Indian government have been made free for learners to promote education during the lockdown. Some of these are as follows:

• **Swayam** (Study Webs of Active–Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) is an Online Platform started by Indian Government to provide education platform for all students (https://swayam.gov.in/)

• **NPTEL** initiated by MHRD to provide an online platform for multi-disciplinary students. (https://nptel.ac.in/)

• School Education **Shagun** is an overreaching initiative started by the Department of School Education and Literacy Ministry of Human Resource Development to improve the school education system.

• Various online learning resources like ePathshala and National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER), Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA) are covered under Shagun (https://seshagun.gov.in/)

• **Doordarshan (State television channel) and All India Radio** are also providing virtual classes and other educational support through there channels. (https://doordarshan.gov.in/)

Apart from Government efforts various Private Universities and Colleges are also trying their level best to connect with students through various online platforms. Everyone is trying to minimize the educational gap created by outbreak of Covid-19 and the consequent lockdown.
IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH
The propagation of online education has provided a gigantic leap to the education sector and it has entered a new technological era. However due to the suddenness of the contagion onset there was no time to orient the students and teachers in the tools required to make online education impactful. Hence there is requirement for research in the area to identify the lacunas. The objectives of the current research are as follows:

1. To identify the problems faced by teachers and students operating in the online mode.
2. To assess the attendance of the students during online classes.
3. To evaluate the impact of online classes during Covid-19 crisis on students.

V. METHODOLOGY USED
In the lockdown phase physical data collection was a challenge. Google Forms were used to reach out to college students and teachers randomly in select cities of Uttar Pradesh. An online survey was launched in a cross-section of cities viz. Lucknow, Agra, Meerut and Bareilly to obtain feedback. The responses received from a random sample of 100 students and 50 faculty members has been analyzed. Attempts were made to connect personally with some respondents to gain in-depth feedback. The limitation of the study is that since data was collected completely in the online mode, response of students and teachers not having access to internet has not been included.

VII. FINDINGS
1. Problems faced by Teachers and Students.
   a) No dedicated and uniform platform for online learning: In an all-new atmosphere as online classes and interaction are not regularly practiced by colleges and universities many of them do not possess Learning Management Systems (LMS) to support the smooth execution of academics. Therefore in the absence of uniform platform students and teachers are facing multiple problems. Awareness of digital platforms is a limiting factor and student-teacher engagement, active participation in classes, submitting work, and clearing doubts is still a challenge. As per survey conducted (Figure 1.1) teachers are exploring various online alternatives available like Zoom, Microsoft Team, Google Duo, Youtube, Whatsapp, Cisco Webex etc. to connect with their students. Not all teachers are well versed to using the software but they are emerging out as warriors and continuously working on it to enlighten the future of the students. Despite many obstacles, students do seem to take interest too.

![Count of Online Medium Used for Classes](image)

Figure 1.1 exhibits the relative popularity of online medium used for class conduction as per feedback received from Students and Teachers
b) **Technical Problems:** Based on Worldometer elaboration of the latest United Nations data the population of **India** was nearly **1,380 Million as on** May 17, 2020, out of which only 35% population lives in urban cities (worldometer.info,2020). As per (Simon Kemp, 2020) there were 687.6 million internet users in India in January 2020. Which indicated that nearly 50% of India’s population does not have internet access.

As per Survey (Figure 1.2) 24.8 % of students and teachers were having no problem during online classes while 75.2% (Graph 1.2) of the respondent had problems. Internet issues came out as the greatest hurdle. Access to multimedia devices with proper bandwidth and internet speed is not available to majority. Many students don’t have their personal multimedia device so borrowing from parents for the entire class is a challenge. As there may be 2 or 3 children in a house it may not possible to provide them all resources for online classes. Therefore uniform opportunity may not be available to all learners.

![Graph 1.2](image)

**Figure 1.2** exhibits the results of the survey indicating ‘internet issues’ as one of the major problem in implementation of online education as per teachers and students.

c) **Lack of Motivation:**
During the outbreak of pandemic Covid -19 Uttar Pradesh government has promoted all students till class 8th without any exams. Various students organizations have also come up with suggestions regarding exams of higher education sector in India. Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarshi Parishad (ABVP) the largest student union in India has submitted a memorandum to the University Grants Commission (UGC). ABVP claimed that the students have appealed for relaxation in the syllabus and even not to conduct online examinations (Outlookindia.com. 2020). The National Students' Union of India (NSUI) on May 10, 2020 has initiated a petition on its official twitter handle to MHRD, University Grants Commission of India and the Prime Ministers’s Office (PMO) India to completely waive of semester fees and promote students to next year, (https://twitter.com/nsui). In view of such thought processes students lack motivation to attend online classes. As per Survey (Figure 1.3) students seem to have less interest in studying. Only 36% of those surveyed agree to the fact that there is a possibility of online examination. Demotivation, stress, the uncertainty of the future affects their interests during classes.

![Graph 1.3](image)

**Figure 1.3:** Exhibits Survey Results for the possibility of Online Exams from home as per Students’ and Teachers’ perception.
d) **Misconduct during classes**: There is somehow a conception in the minds of students and teachers to maintain a certain level of discipline and a code of conduct while they are on campus. Grievance Cell and cameras are there to help enforce discipline during live classes. However during online classes, things sometimes go a different way. Breach of privacy and various cases of misconduct by students and teachers during online classes are rising as per the survey.

2. **Attendance of the students during Online classes**

In the current scenario with Covid-19 outbreak and the only source of education being online, problem of attendance during classes is a matter of concern. The current survey reveals that almost 22% of the teachers are not taking classes. Of the remaining 78% (Figure 1.4) teachers taking online classes 17% state that students are not at all attending their classes while 14% of the teachers taking online classes are not aware of the attendance of the students.

**Figure 1.4 Attendance of Students during online classes, Teachers’ feedback.**

Many of the Teachers who acknowledge that students attend their classes are not sure whether the student is present behind the screen. Many a time the students log in to fulfill the attendance criteria, they just leave their devices on but do not attend classes. Teachers do not always have video access to keep a check. Sometimes video access in not possible due to poor connectivity. Only a few self-motivated students attend classes in earnest with regularity.

**Figure 1.5 Attendance of Students during online classes, Students’ feedback**

As per Students (Figure 1.5) survey results, low attendance problem stands. More than 50% respondents either did not attended classes or had very low attendance. Low attendance in classes has been always a problem of many students even in regular mode of education in various colleges and universities but in online mode low attendance is difficult to identify and remedy.
3. Impact of Online Education

a) Positive Impact: Most respondents agreed that online classes have contributed a lot in maintaining mental and emotional health of students when the playground and classes where they belong are unfortunately locked. Teachers and Students enjoy these classes even parents feel satisfied that their children are gainfully engaged. It has indeed been a period of discovery and exploration as students and faculty have moved to the online mode due to a rapid stroke of circumstances and necessity. It has heralded the technological age in education and this will have far reaching consequences on the teaching-learning process even after the pandemic is over.

b) Negative Impacts: Excessive use of anything is bad and so is the case with technology. Many students and teachers as per questionnaire are of the opinion that online classes in the long-run may lead to many diseases and health issues due to longer screen time, body pain due to wrong posture and even short memory owing to constant availability of information at the click of a button. Students being in lockdown are getting physically less active following disruptive sleep patterns, and unbalanced diets resulting in weight gain. They also exhibit asocial behavior due to long periods of isolation and mood swings.

Discussion

Strong Communication bond between students and teachers is the need of the hour. Various technical problems and awareness of online classes apps can be solved to a large extent through active communication between them. Knowledge sharing and discussion on common available online platform for classes can improve accessibility. A feeling of face-to-face interaction seems missing in online education but continuous communication and responsiveness can build up the online bond. In the times of Covid-19 Pandemic keeping yourself motivated and developing a positive perspective is a must for each one involved in academia. Due to the influx of new technological medium there is bound to be resistance to change. Teachers need to motivate their students at the beginning of the classes, to keep them engaged until the end of the course. The relevance and importance of the syllabus as a whole and every lecture should be emphasized at the onset so that students stay positive and are convinced about the benefits of attending the sessions. Recognition and appreciation should be given to regular and active students. Classes should always be a two-way process with continuous feedback and questions should be raised to keep the students involved. These implementations may increase attendance in classes and raise student interest and enquiry level for achievement of learning outcomes.

Students are the future asset of the nation and ensuring their development and safety both physically and mentally is extremely important. Teachers have always been a guiding force and their role in implementation of online education is paramount. Short regular feedback should be taken from students to mitigate the psychological impact of lockdown and the Covid-19 scare. This way we can help students to stay healthy, stress-free and positive. Some counseling sessions can also be included to provide support and reduce anxiety of students. This may help to break the misbehavior patterns and also assist students to concentrate during classes.

Conclusion

In the present scenario, online classes are the only way to take the teaching-learning processes forward. Virtual education has emerged as a great tool to deliver education in the current scenario however it is not a substitute for live student-teacher interaction and bonding. Technology has empowered education however deliberation, introspection and planning is required to optimise learning outcomes.

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