An empirical study on challenges and opportunities of COVID-19 crisis on Education Sector in India.

Dr. S M Patil[*] and Dr. B S Hugar[**]

Assistant Professor, Faculty of Computer Applications, Sharnbasva University, Kalaburagi, (Karnataka)
E=mail: shrikant07.inc@gmail.com

** *Professor, Faculty of Business Studies, Sharnbasva University, Kalaburagi, (Karnataka)*
E-mail: bshugar039@gmail.com

Abstract

The COVID-19 crisis has disrupted various sectors in India and one among them is education sector. The unprecedented pandemic has significantly affected the ongoing academic activities in India. Closure of educational institutes results in an immediate effects on economic and societal consequences. To overcome the problem, the authors in this paper have explored various opportunities to engage continuity in learning. The technology driven teaching methodologies like e-resources, interactive video sessions, community social media etc. have become inevitable and making policymakers to think on the other side of the coin.

Keywords: Education sector, Academic activities, e-Resources, Policymakers.

1. Introduction:

Education has become key to success for every individual and education sector is increasing at an enormous rate. India has shown remarkable growth in education sector and offers greater opportunity with approximately 29 per cent of it's population being between the age group of 0-14 years. India's higher education segment is expected to increase to Rs 2,44,824 crore by 2025. India was ranked 34 out of 100 countries in English Proficiency Index 2019. The education sector in India is estimated at Rs 6,40,891.3 crore in FY18 (Financial Year 2018) and is expected to reach Rs 7,06,587.9 crore in FY19.

. India has one of the largest networks of higher education institutions in the world. Number of colleges and universities in India reached 39,931 and 993, respectively in 2018-19.

India had 37.4 million students enrolled in higher education in 2018-19. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education reached 26.3 per cent in 2018-19. India is aiming to attain GER of 30% by 2020. All these Statistics showing growing opportunities of education sector and India's skilled human resource becoming richer gradually.

Realizing the wide gap between demand and supply in education sector, the Government of India aiming to achieve highest GER for the upcoming days and made it their strategic priority. The Government of India has allowed 100 per cent Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the education sector through the automatic route since 2002. The sector has received cumulative FDI worth US$ 2.7 billion up to September 2019. Indian education sector witnessed 18 merger and acquisition deals worth Rs 342.4 crore (US$ 49 million) in 2017. In private equity and venture capital funding, education industries companies are expected to attract US$ 500 million by end of 2019. In May 2018, the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India launched Samagra Siksha scheme with the aim of achieving holistic development of school education in the country. As per Government of India, New National Education Policy to transform India's higher education system to one of the global best education systems very soon. Hence the idea of business in the education industry is growing.

With the advent of technological advancements in India, the delivery of education has become fun and effective in creative learning. Availability of internet at cheaper cost transformed the delivery of education and spread its wing farther. As of September 2019, internet penetration in India had reached 52.08 per cent. As of March 2019, there are 66 million internet subscribers in India in age bracket of 5 to 11 years.

2. Objectives

- To discuss corona virus impact on education sector in India.
- To discuss threats posed by COVID-19 on academic activities.
- To discuss opportunities emerged during COVID-19 crisis.
- To discuss government initiatives to supports education sector during the crisis.

3. The Pandemic

Currently COVID-19 not only posing threat to citizen's health and economy of a country, but also interrupted the academic activities. Schools shut, Universities closed, research activities ceased and so on. There is huge panic in educators and students community towards unprecedented novel corona virus threat and future perspective. Students of primary and secondary education going students, and UG and PG students are worried about their future prospective. This is the reap time in the transformation final year students as some of them looking for course wise examination, entrance examination, campus interviews, internships, withdrawal of offer letters and so on. On the other hand COVID-19 opened the door of opportunities and avenues. Educational institutes in India reinvented their radicals and made stronger commitments to grow even in the time of crisis. The switch to online education has become imperative as it ensures timely evaluation of student's progress. Traditional class room transformed into digital class rooms, effective usage of social media for communication, technology enabled applications such as video conference, e-books, hackathons, webinars and so on made educational community to adapt newer developments. The technology made educational objectives to run uninterruptedly.

4. Challenges

4.1 Education Disruption

Social distancing and physical restrictions made severe disruption from school going children's to scholars in their educational goals. The unprecedented pandemic has put academicians and students in a loop. The national lockdown and the ascending health crisis were striking the education of the students as well, with the universities being closed and their syllabi stranded until the situation improves. According to a report of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India conducted a survey on higher education and observed that there are 993 universities, 39931 Colleges and 10725 Stand Alone Institutions listed on their portal, which contribute to education. These institutions further reflect the student density of India as the total enrolments in higher education every year are nearly 37.4 million, reflecting the expanding horizons of the education industry. The sector was seen catching pace by the passing

day until Corona virus impacted the country intensely. Needless to say the pandemic has shed the light on accessibility to education and socio-economic issue as well.

4.2 Learning new technology and etiquettes

The 21st century is the era of technological inventions resulting from Artificial Intelligence to Cognitive Computing. With students being able to gain access to knowledge, and even learn a technical skill, through a few clicks on their phones, tablets and computers, made to redefine the role of the educator in the classroom and lecture hall. This may mean that the role of educators will need to move towards facilitating young people's development as contributing members of society. Unfortunately teachers in the age bracket 40 and above shows lack of interest in adaptability from century old chalk-talk teaching model to newer driven technology. Educators require resilience and adaptability as essential skills in this ever changing environment to overcome pandemic effect.

4.3 Internet Connectivity

The Indian Internet infrastructure is not ready for the paradigm shift to online learning mandated by the situation arising due to COVID-19, according to a report by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), which comes out with coveted global ranking for educational institutions.

The report titled *"COVID-19: A wake up call for telecom service providers"* is based on a survey conducted by QS I Guage, which rates colleges and universities in India with complete operational control held by London-based QS. The report pointed out connectivity and signal issues as the most prevailing problems faced by students while attending online classes.

The survey pointed out that the infrastructure in terms of technology in India has not achieved a state of quality so as to ensure sound delivery of online classes to students across the country. It is seen that both the state and the private players have not yet managed to overcome technical challenges, for instance, in providing adequate power supply and ensuring effective connectivity as the data reveals," The report said. "Although, due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the world had witnessed a massive shift from the traditional Face to Face (F2F) to online

platform as a mode of delivery of classes. Due to lack of proper infrastructure, a shift to a total reliance on the online platform for the delivery of lectures seems to be challenging," it added.

5. Opportunities

5.1 Online Education Boom

In terms of consumer habits or behaviour, the Coronavirus crisis most probably marks a point of transition in the adoption of the online medium as a primary point of access for a range of activities, from office work to healthcare. Education is one of these key sectors. As universities, teachers, and students embrace and adopt new ways of learning—often a democratizing process—interest in online education will soar. But, in India this has special resonance. Even before the COVID-19 crisis, the online education market in India was set to grow to $1.96 billion, with 9.6 million users, by 2021, up from $247 million and 1.6 million users in 2016. In January, Indian edtech company Byju's hit unicorn status with a valuation of $6 billion with support from financiers Tiger Global.

5.2 Technology-driven education

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in educational institutions across the world being compelled to suddenly harness and utilize the suite of available technological tools to create content for remote learning for students in all sectors. Educators across the world are experiencing new possibilities to do things differently and with greater flexibility resulting in potential benefits in accessibility to education for students across the world.

While the schools were all using video conferencing tools like Zoom, Microsoft Teams the extent of usage varied depending mostly on the quality of access available to students. Google Classroom was the most popular 'learning management system'. However, all schools used a variety of tools to try and ensure student learning – these included online worksheets, teacher recorded videos sent on Whatsapp, assigning videos available on YouTube, getting the students to work in groups and one to one in turn and of course, using EdTech learning programs like Mindspark.

5.3 Upgraded Teacher Skills

Regardless to say that teachers were not having length and breadth of experience in engaging the online sessions. Most of the teachers doesn't know how to teach online or how to get better at it and education institutes never motivated to teachers to teach on online platforms. As soon as lockdown was announced by the Government, it has become imperative to think on alternatives. As a result teachers were allowed reach student community via mobile or computers. This motivated teachers to utilize e-resources which are freely available such as e-Library, YouTube videos, simulated experiments and so on. This has opened the new horizons in the education sector in India as teachers can now reach larger audience to share their knowledge. However, this new role of teacher has increased the responsibilities too. Some of them are adaptable to increased role technology, different strategies needed to engage learners, necessity of multitasking.

5.4 Government Initiatives

To tide over the challenges posed by the Covid-19, the Union Human Resource Development Ministry has decided to open a separate division in the ministry on 'Online Education' as the government prepares to get through the digital divide.

The Government of India has also undertaken efforts such as the DIKSHA Portal, to help teachers and boost e-learning. There is SWAYAM, aimed at improving access, equity and quality of education. E-Pathshala, which is available in many languages, enables access to various e-books and such learning material".

To support the teachers and accelerate the process of learning, the Ministry of Human Resource Development has been encouraging the use of DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure Knowledge Sharing) platform. This platform has engaging content for the students, teachers, and parents to facilitate the process of learning at the times of social distancing and nationwide lockdown.

Simultaneously, teachers training are being conducted through for the up skilling of teachers towards the usage of e-learning resource under the Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya National Mission on Teachers and Teaching (PMMMNMTT).

The country is witnessing a greater acceptance of online education as a large number of students and working professionals are joining e-learning platforms to enhance their skills. The learning platforms includes DIKSHA, NISHTHA, NREOR, SWAYAM, SWAYAM Prabha, NROER, – PG Pathshala, Shodhganga, E-Shodhsindhu, E-Yantra, FOSSE, Virtual Labs, SAMARTH, VIDWAN, Shodh Sudhi among others.

To address the digital divide, MHRD has tied up with Ministry of Information & Broadcasting to air SWAYAM PRABHA channels on the DTH platforms. Now a student anywhere in India can request, DTH 'Service Provider' for these channels without any extra cost as these are free to air channels to continue their education and learning even sitting at home in this difficult situation arisen due to unfortunate outbreak of COVID-19.

MHRD is putting more efforts to strengthen the future of e – learning in India to make it more immersive and constructive to the teacher and student community than it is today.

6. Conclusion

Even though the country has been adapting to the new-age learning, but there still lies an obstacle in making the endeavors entirely successful. What still remains intact is that only 45 crore people of our total population of the country have access to the internet and thus to e-learning. The people residing in rural areas are still very much deprived of the latest advancements and therefore hampering the cause of online learning. Now, virtual classrooms are not only dependent on e-lectures but also require one to have access to the e-content and online study material, practice sheets etc. as well. And that's where we lag behind as India is not fully equipped to make education reach all corners of the nation via digital platforms or online classrooms. The students who aren't privileged like the others will be held back due to the current resort and there is no denying that. But universities and the government of India are relentlessly trying to come up with a solution to resolve this problem.

Uncertain times call for stronger measures and the education industry has been stepping up to take some measure. The pandemic has been working as a catalyst for the educational

institutions to grow and opt for platforms and techniques, they haven't used before. The times are changing, and the theories have always pointed out towards the survival of the fittest. Surviving these crises with a different approach and digitizing the sector are the two elements which will get the industry through the storm and wash away the blues of the pandemic.

References:

1. www.aishe.nic.in
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impact_of_the_2019%E2%80%9320_coronavirus_pandemic_on_education
3. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/internet/covid-19-indian-internet-infra-not-prepared-for-shift-to-online-teaching-learning-says-qs-report/articleshow/75269679.cms?from=mdr
4. https://www.ibef.org/industry/education-presentation
5. https://www.news18.com/news/politics/free-dth-channel-e-syllabus-calendar-task-force-hrd-minister-nishank-on-dealing-with-covid-19-education-challenge-2-2598597.html
6. https://www.highereducationdigest.com/impact-of-covid-19-on-higher-education/
7. https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/featurephilia/story/how-is-the-covid-19-pandemic-affecting-education-all-over-the-world-1664380-2020-04-07
8. https://blog.ei-india.com/2020/04/06/8696/