

Emergence of an Alternative Education System Following COVID-19 Pandemic: Possibilities & Pitfalls

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Abstract: *An indomitable courage is necessary to combat disasters like COVID-19 pandemic and a prompt action is deserved to resist the shocks. The present century has witnessed an unprecedented pandemonium situation affecting education, health and employment sectors tremendously. By virtue of in-built capacity, Medical Science has registered its progress, while education sectors have to be accommodated with a new online system which requires a bit hardship to tackle with the teaching-learning process. The situation becomes more precarious in the third world countries, where technology-based higher education system has not been well-built yet. Neither the teachers, nor the students are accustomed with the modern e-learning process. As such COVID-19 has taught us to set up a new framework by which online course development coupled with student support functions are to be modernized and required managements of online learning system have to be revolutionized.*

Keywords: pandemic, unprecedented, hardship, precarious, revolutionized, COVID-19

1. Introduction

Every emergency condition in any forms leaves a deep impact upon the society. The prevailing education system is also not an exception. We're very much familiar with the COVID-19 pandemic from the very beginning of the present year throughout the world and our country is not also an exception to gear up the increasing devours of the global pandemic. The education system has to accept the challenge for its change over. Not only near about a million lives have been sacrificed and almost 10-12 millions of people from different parts of the world are in the swing of survival and death. So, this is a period of worldwide emergency in true sense ever in the 21st century. Where millions of common lives are facing a big question regarding survival, then the education system is naturally affected at a large extent. It's not a matter of fact that the normal activities of the common people is pulled up for a couple of months, but our concern is to organize our daily movements for the future life with this epidemic. A very common question of setting up the education system for the future may come up and this paper critically highlights upon the system of teaching-learning for the future.

Unlike MNCs education system can't be worked out from home, the times have been challenging for the concerned persons to think about the need for re-arranging and re-inventing the education system keeping the standard at par with the conventional one uncompromisingly to the quality.

2. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this proposal are –

- 1) To focus upon an alternative method of educational instruction for the upcoming days keeping in mind the rubrics of social distancing for a greater interest
- 2) To enhance the amenities of learning through online mode or distance mode

- 3) To highlight more and more uses of technologies i.e., ICT based learning for every levels of education
- 4) To propound for extending infrastructures necessary for ICT based learning and instruction

3. Background of the Study

We have witnessed that most of the developed countries of the developed countries have been severely damaged due to this epidemic; millions of lives of mostly hard-working people have lost and the economy of the developed countries have been terribly suffered a huge loss during these few months and the after-effect will continue in upcoming few years. We're very much familiar to the fact that the developed countries need less time to accommodate new method of learning for the sake of the learners according to their needs, whereas developing countries like India require a bit more time and infrastructural rearrangement befitting for the new set up for their future generations. Our country has moved on the way to a better developed education system after the independence, though we're not yet in a position of comparison to the prevailing education system of the western countries.

This emergency condition has taught us to think further to reconstruct our surroundings for a better future taking into account the different pitfalls frequently seen in undeveloped parts of the country and this will lead to think about an alternative education system to be constructed with the help of modern technologies. Self-reliance will be achieved only when our education system will become an ideal one.

Indian Perspective

Uses of modern technologies in Indian school education system are mainly obstructed by lack of proper infrastructures. We've witnessed that the there have remained huge differences between the Government aided and the Non-Government private schools in infrastructural benefits for their students. The private schools in recent times have installed CCTVs inside every portion of the

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school area for the protection of each and every learner, but the scenario of the government or government-aided schools is not up to the mark. A large number of students of semi-urban areas and almost cent percent students of the rural areas and their families depend upon government or government-aided schools for their wards for only two reasons one of which is, rural areas do not have such schools with enough infrastructural facilities nor the general students are well-equipped with smart devices required to utilize e-learning processes and if they do, the cost of education is beyond their level to reach and the other is low fee structures. Also server problem put tremendous hindrances to have their support services. Students, when they face such problems during their learning get upset because of feeling solely alone when they can't understand the intricacies of the subject under discussion properly; neither they ask their friends nor request the teachers to repeat the same. Therefore, all they depend upon the traditional method of teaching-learning.

Now, during the emergency lockdown period the educational institutions of any level remained closed owing to the fear of contamination and failing to maintain social distance, if opened; then the alternative way that came up to continue the studies is online method of teaching or giving instructions through online. But the institutions, mainly the government-aided schools, which do not have proper infrastructures to adopt online mode of education, have to remain fully closed and the learners of that schools, i.e., the students of comparatively undeveloped areas or the students from the economically weaker section are the worst sufferer. Also the main barrier to the government-aided schools to adopt this new system is the huge number of students admitted there. Though, theoretically the optimum ratio of teacher and learners in a classroom is 1:40, but the classrooms of government-aided schools in the rural areas possess near about 100 students at average. However, the way adopted by most of the non-government private schools, that is, uploading study materials by using some online network based applications, is not sufficient to fulfil the learner's need, but through this system the process of guidance and teaching-learning continued during this period. In this process a very few number of students were benefitted, but the majority suffered at a large extent. Moreover, a recent survey in the Sunderban areas in West Bengal, India reveals that the guardians of the school boys and girls are very much reluctant about the use of devices required to operate online teaching and as such students also get no attraction through such mode of teaching. Proper evaluation in this issue can expose the horrifying results: Educationally backward areas will deviate further.

Proposal for Alternative Method of Education:

Under such disastrous condition academic experts, especially equipped with e-learning knowhow's may consider this as an ideal time to experiment virtual teaching through ICT empowered education process, which may come to make a bridge between the teacher and the students as close as visualised in the traditional method. Technology thus may turn education from teacher-centric to teacher & student-centric education process. To them, digital education may make a balanced co-ordination between course content, educationists, stake holders, technology and course-takers.

However the successful implementation is fully depended upon availability of basic amenities like internet connectivity and devices accessible to the general learners.

We are familiar with the concept of virtual classrooms and these are being used in a very few educational institutes. This practice may be one of the best applicable alternative methods of teaching-learning, through which students from anywhere may follow the instructions of their teachers through mobile or laptops. Some of online platforms like Google Classroom, Zoom, Hangouts Meet etc. may be used for evaluations based on assignments and students can also clear any other complications concerning their subject materials with the guidance of their teachers through Whatsapp or telegram Apps. This process not only arise another alternative method of instruction parallel to the face to face method, but also enhances learning opportunities for the learners from distant places. The teachers may elaborate and explain the laboratory based topics in front of cameras installed inside the laboratory rooms and upload the videos for the pupils. As such students from anywhere may understand the subjects with detailed explanations. The class teachers may also assist his/her learners in various project based works or completion of assignments. As a result the rubrics of social distancing may also be fulfilled and the on the other hand the barriers of long distances may be overcome. This will help the learners in co-operative or collaborative learning too.

Initiation of different Online Courses endorsed by different home Universities:

Developed countries have already initiated online learning courses in different subjects by developing necessary infrastructures giving priority to e-learning methods. In most western countries notable universities like, Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Sussex have taken the pioneer role in this direction. Under the circumstances developing countries like India should give importance to begin the said programme at par with the developed countries. The responsibility rests upon the top ranking universities in our countries to take the pilot role in making e-learning commensurate with our standard. As such necessary demonstrations by the expert lecturers in this trade be recorded and uploaded in the well protected e-cells of the universities for the benefit of the interested learners. Hence the merit certificates could be provided to the successful learners evaluated through proper assessment of assignments submitted in this regard. In order to prepare the system duly standardised exchange of teachers across the countries should be given opportunities; at the same time technologies required to fulfil the goal be made available to teachers/instructors/demonstrators. In this way our country not only upgrade its standard to the level of the developed ones but a parallel system of traditional face to face learning method could be restored. As a result such type of learning may cover each and every corner of the country and at the same time cost of education per se could be minimized; also indigenous resources will come into effect and thereby enrich the country.

Training needed for the teachers

We're aware of the fact that the teacher education programme is based on some theoretical education and some

practical training; but this sort of online instructions and online platforms of learning needs more skills for giving online instructions for their pupils and this should be included in the future curriculum for teacher education with an eye to fulfil learners' need by using modern technological platforms besides face to face method of learning-teaching. It will help the teachers to get in touch with the guardians of the learners for the betterment of the learners. As the teachers are the agents of change in the society, therefore they are the best mediums who can accept the new trend of teaching-learning and easily carry forward the new genre to the next generations.

Steps needed to be done

Infrastructural facilities are very much essential for the well-beings of this new trend and for this the following measures needed to be taken into account –

- a) Whole time internet facility and uninterrupted supply of electricity at remote areas are the basic infrastructures needed for this new form of education
- b) Classrooms and laboratory rooms of government-aided schools are to be developed in such a way that the modern ICT facilities can be installed inside the rooms.
- c) Skill development programmes for ICT-empowered online method of learning-teaching must be included in the curriculums for pre-service and in-service teacher education
- d) Students are to be inspired for sharing of learning materials by using co-operative learning and collaborative learning methods
- e) Teachers, teacher-educators and lecturers must attend different faculty development programmes including online workshops, webinars for development in their teaching skills
- f) School libraries should be modernized so that audio-video cassettes should be kept on important subjects/chapters besides books and journals in the stack.

Government Intervention

In India, both the central and state governments along with autonomous regulatory bodies have come up with various initiatives to support the beneficiaries. Government has also deployed numerous support system and advances measures to ensure continuity of learning in a way so that students should not suffer during the pandemic situation. A number of apps have been launched namely, DIKSHA portal, e-Pathshala, SWAYAM, STEM etc. There is no doubt that the present crisis has made the people to be aware of keeping health hygienic on the one hand and develop a bold alternative education system to counter any types of emergencies to come.

4. Conclusion

Adaptation of this new trend of e-learning is not a matter of one day; it needs a paradigm shift which is a lengthy process, but infrastructural development and necessary steps are essential steps to be taken in no time, so that a parallel process of teaching-learning can run besides the usual face to face method. In this way the new education or teaching-learning procedure could replace the traditional one smoothly. It is a true fact that all the basic subjects like Mathematics and other Laboratory-based subjects are not so

easy to teach through completely online method, but if the subject matters may be taught in correlation method along with adaption of problem-solving or project methods then the flow of study can run in a continuous manner. However we've narrated the possible benefits of e-learning so far one-sidedly ignoring probable inconveniences faced by the learners, i.e., during the course of discussion in traditional face to face method, students or student in particular when face difficulties in understanding the topic under discussion, may raise questions or request the teacher to repeat the same by giving further examples or discuss among themselves. Under the new system of e-learning the learner can't avail of the benefits, all of which they have used in traditional method of learning. Prior to the adaptation of advanced technologies required for online education, consciousness among parents, guardians/elders about the new system is essential. Further co-operative learning, which is recognized as one of the best method of gathering knowledge with strong psychological basis, can't be sustained through e-learning process in Indian setup. That is why this ICT-empowered e-learning system can never replace the conventional face to face teaching-learning system in connection with the direct vicinity of the teacher with the learners, in which learners can follow the ideals of their teachers which is an inseparable part of education, but a parallel education system to uphold the subject matters in an easy manner for the students may run for the time being if necessary.

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