

Online education in India during covid-19 pandemic (challenges and possibilities)

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Abstract:

Online education is a form of education where students use their home computers through the internet staying away academic institutions. In recent time online teaching learning has become a buzz word in the field of education as finding no other alternatives to providing education to the students in the class. Due to the emergence of the pandemic of Covid-19, the whole world is experiencing huge death toll along with widespread panic and uncertainty.

Countries of the world are trying to shun the gap and minimize the losses of students caused by the ongoing pandemic. However the outcomes of online education are not always a blessing to the learners' community as revealing a number of pitfalls to the context of online teaching and learning resulting in wide spread concerns over the controversial issue of teaching learning – online education during covid-19. With the consideration to the fact the present study tries to illustrate the challenges and possibilities of the countries which are not as advanced in technology as the countries blessed with high tech technology

Key words: online education; corona crisis; challenges; possibilities.

Introduction

Schools in India are currently shut owing to the global Covid-19 pandemic. There is discussion around how to continue the teaching-learning process in these times of emergency. Many schools have employed online learning tools to enable student-teacher interaction. Platforms like Microsoft Teams, Zoom and YouTube are being used to upload and view teaching content, conduct live lessons, and give and evaluate assignments.

In the higher education system, the outbreak has struck at a critical time when last few classes and examinations were to be held to close the academic year 2019-20. The lockdown meant that it was not possible to complete the syllabus with the regular classes in many institutions. There has been a question mark over how and when to conduct examinations. Many institutions have resorted to online classes to complete the syllabus. But there have been challenges in execution and effectiveness of online classes especially in the case of students in the rural areas.

Objective of the Study

- 1) To understand the concept of online education.
- 2) To show challenges and possibilities during covid-19 pandemic.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research paper is conceptual and Exploratory in nature. In order to meet such objective secondary method is adopted. The secondary data was collected through books, periodicals, and journal and published material related digital learning for the study.

Concept of online education

Online learning is education that takes place over the Internet. It is often referred to as “e- learning” among other terms. However, online learning is just one type of “distance learning” - the umbrella term for any learning that takes place across distance.

Online education is a form of education where students use their home computers through the internet. For many nontraditional students, among them all those who want to continue working full time or raising families, online graduations and courses have become popular in the past decade. Often online graduation and course programmes, some of which are conducted using digital technologies, are provided via the online learning portal of the host university.classroom.

Challenges during covid-19 pandemic.

➤ Barriers of Access and Connectivity

Many children have homes where television and internet facilities are not default features of a household but luxuries that they aspire to have some day. When we turn to digital learning, it is important to note the background and situation of children for whom having the pre-requisites of digital learning is not a given.

Continuous supply of electricity, availability of a device with stable internet connectivity, basic digital literacy among students are some. There is huge digital divide that exists, and one that is being brought to the fore as we look towards technology in these times of crisis.

➤ **Lack of Teacher Preparedness to Use Technology**

Research studies have pointed out the importance of knowledge among teachers on how to use technology in the teaching-learning process in order to make ICT interventions in education effective. The capacities of teachers to conduct classes online, ensure that existing online learning modules are being completed by students, check for understanding using virtual platforms cannot be taken for granted. Without adequate training and support, the feasibility of which under current circumstances is questionable, expecting teachers to seamlessly move to online platforms would be unreasonable.

➤ **Parent-teacher (dis)connect**

Even if we were to assume that the challenges of access and connectivity were resolved, there is a question of how to ensure that children get an environment conducive to learning. Small but significant prerequisites include a quiet space where children can engage with online classes with no interruptions. This would need a certain understanding between parents and teachers so that they co-create an effective learning space for children. Even during pre-lockdown times, this was a major challenge. Most teachers interviewed during my research felt that it was very difficult to make most parents understand the academic issues their child was facing and that they needed to be involved. Many believed “parents assume their job is done the moment their child is enrolled into school”. They nevertheless shared that most parents, on one occasion or the other, had said that they wanted a better life for their child than the one they were living and had requested teachers to guide their children. However, parents did not see much of their role except in enrolling their children in school, and registering them for external tuitions. 72% of the student respondents went for tuitions after school. On the other hand, less than 40% were asked about their day at school by either of their parents. Most principals and teachers shared concerns about very few parents attending parent-teacher meetings. They eluded this to both lack of time, as most parents were part of the unorganized sector where not going to work on time meant sacrificing the day’s earnings, and the lack of interest in knowing about their child’s academic progress. Even when they came, parents seldom asked any questions and wanted to “quickly sign on the attendance sheet and go back”. These insights from teachers pointed to a disconnect between them and the parents; both thought well for the children, wanted to help them succeed, but hadn’t figured out a way to work together towards that yet.

This disconnect between parents and a teacher is likely to act as an impediment in using homes as primary sites of the schooling process.

➤ **The Socio-Economic Disadvantage**

To add to the inequalities of access, connectivity and relationship with the school, the lockdown has led to half a million migrant population to leave cities and go back to their native towns and villages. The current crisis has left no semblance of normalcy for them, as daily sustenance is a major cause of concern for many. Expecting that they should find ways to make their children digitally connect with school or teachers and participate in online classes would be arrogant and irrational.

➤ **Gender Gap**

In the current situation, girls face a compounded predicament. In addition to suffering at the hands of the socio-economic disadvantage their families have been exposed to, the lives of girls have been affected in more ways. For many of them, the lockdown has meant an increase in domestic responsibilities. During my research, more than half the girls interviewed cooked meals for their families before coming to school in the morning. Some of them also got delayed in reaching school on a regular basis because they had household chores to complete before leaving home. For many girls, the hours they spent in school ended up being the only time they had to themselves and for studying. The current situation has presumably added to their responsibilities and taken them further away from the learning process. Self-learning activities like reading textbooks or practicing writing would thus be harder for them to take out time for as would be online classes, compared to their male counterparts.

Conclusion

The covid-19 crisis has thrown up unprecedented and complex issues for us all. In the education landscape, it has led to school closures and a disruption of the teaching learning process. The primary response mechanism has been to turn to online tools and platforms, and leverage technology to continue the process. While this has opened up possibilities for distance learning, it has also revealed glaring challenges that stem from economic, social, digital, and educational inequalities. Solutions that do not take into account these challenges would not only widen the learning gap on a socio-economic basis but may also make it more difficult for them to catch-up and for us all to realize the promise of education- at the heart of which lies equity and inclusion.

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