



STUDY OF TRANSFORMATION OF ONLINE EDUCATION IN SOUTH ASIAN UNIVERSITIES DURING COVID-19

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Abstract

The education systems of all the countries of the world are facing many challenges due to Covid-19. South Asian countries like India, Nepal and Sri-Lanka are also seafaring in the same boat. All these countries have adopted online teaching to overcome this problem. With the advancement of technology and impact of COVID 19, traditional, outdated, rigid and stereotyped method of learning replaced new, flexible, innovative, forward looking, research oriented and online method. MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) acts as panacea for all these challenges. The purpose of this article is to develop an insight towards challenges of higher education in the context of South Asian Universities due to COVID 19. To achieve this purpose, in this research article, an attempt has been made to discuss in detail the current status of higher education and sudden change in higher education due to COVID 19.

Keywords: Online Education, MOOC (Massive Open Online Course), H E, COVID-19 etc.



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INTRODUCTION

Entire world is facing biggest changes in education systems (UNESCO, 2020). Although the changes in education systems have been continuous over a period of time in the process of educational evolution but substantial and sudden transformation in education systems all over the world are being observed in post 2020 period. Indian Higher education system faced irreversible learning crisis in this pandemic (Sharma, A, 2021). Indian higher education system is facing dual

impact of distancing between teachers and students due to COVID-19 pandemic and the release of National Education Policy, 2020 by Ministry of Education recently (Saxena & Khandelwal, 2021). The release of the policy is a positive and fresh change amid the challenges due to Covid-19 and the consequent negativity prevailing in India (Kurien & Chandramana, 2020). NPE 2020 is very significant policy in history of Indian education system.

Indian Higher Education needs achievement of three basic and cardinal principles of Ministry of Education of India i.e. access, equity and quality which have also been emphasized by NEP 2020. Sustainable Development Goal 4 of 2030 which has been already adopted by India in 2015 also aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and advance chances for life-long learning opportunities for everyone by the year 2030 (p. 3). For a developing country, like India, it has been a challenging task to provide its young, talented and aspiring minds an easy access to higher education based on equity and quality. NEP 2020 is envisioned as a policy to give big leap to Indian Higher Education with a tight grasp on present Indian socioeconomic landscape and to combat immediate future challenges (Kumar, 2020).

ONLINE EDUCATION STARTED IN SOUTH ASIAN UNIVERSITIES

India

Since the lockdown began in March or April of 2020, the University Grant Commission of India has instantly modified their old policies and implemented a COVID-19-based education policy. New academic calendar and examinations issues, such as new admission, enrolling, new session, and running session examination have been noted in the UGC of India's newly released educational policy. UGC has also prepared a complete calendar for the academic session 2020-2021 with new dates keeping in view of the lockdown. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India have jointly initiated some measures for continuing educational activity properly during this lockdown situation. Various virtual platforms, e-books, e-libraries, and teaching and learning tools have been introduced in this area. The introduction of educational channels on radio and television encouraged many students in general to keep up their studies.

To connect with remote learning, students must become accustomed to various online platforms and applications including Zoom, Facebook, Google Meet, YouTube Live, Telegram, and

Whatsapp during lockdown. ICT introduced a unique platform, namely MHRD (e-Boucher: <https://mhrd.gov.in/ictinitiatives>), that accumulates all advanced education and research-based international journals to support e-learning.

Nepal

Nepal has been considered the most vulnerable nation by the WHO as a result of its poor economic and healthcare systems. Since March 23, 2020, all instructional activities have been suspended. In order to cope up with the situation, the government of Nepal has modified its educational policies and methods of instruction. Due to a lack of technological understanding and inadequate internet access, it was difficult for learners and educators to adapt to the online system at first, but a few weeks later they were able to do so.

Sri Lanka

The first to intervene to safeguard pupils from danger resulting from this epidemic crisis was Sri Lanka's education ministry. According to the government's calculation, educational institutions in Sri Lanka were closed on March 13, 2020. The government of Sri Lanka took some steps to reduce the cost of remote learning. For both instructors and learners, participating in online education entails a number of expenses. In this regard, universities used their own LMS or Moodle and the government facilitated the continuation of academic activities using the Zoom app through the Lanka Education and Research Network (LEARN). Some web companies provide diffident online access and services without charge. Currently, remote learning is regarded as a substantial portion of education in Sri Lankan universities.

UNEXPECTED INTERVENTION OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC

The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic on 11th March, 2020 and more than 33 Million confirmed cases of COVID-19 has been affected globally (Bozkurt, et al., 2020). Out of which more than 6.5 million confirmed cases in Southeast Asia Region (SEAR) as reported by World Health Organization and Out of these approximately 6.5 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 in SEAR, more than 6 million confirmed cases affected only in India. First confirmed case of COVID-19 was found in the State of Kerala (India) on 30th January, 2020 and first death was on 12th March, 2020 in the state of Karnataka (India), who was 76 years old man. The Prime Minister of India proposed the 'Janta Curfew' on 22nd March,

2020 to curb the spread of COVID-19, resulting various sectors in India including oil and gas, automobiles, aviation, agriculture, retail, all business, transportation services, educational institutes etc. has significantly disrupted/suspended/shut down across India. Due to approximately 500 confirmed cases of COVID in India, the Prime Minister of India ordered first lockdown (Lockdown 1.0) for 21 days on 24th March, 2020 as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 pandemic and further the lockdown was extended four times (i.e. Lockdown 2.0 to Lockdown 5.0) till 30th June, 2020. During these phases of lockdown, no relaxation was given to the educational institute. Hence, COVID-19 pandemic effected all the educational institution throughout the Nation. To control the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, all the educational institutes/universities have temporarily closed by most of the countries around the world and this closure has affected the students mentally, physically, socially etc.

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused serious damage to human life and has spread quickly. All aspects of human life, such as economy, health, education, business etc., have been drastically interrupted by this crisis. More than 90% of the students around the world were impacted, and it quickly pushed educational institutions to close. Distance learning replaces traditional classroom instruction during this peculiar phase of the COVID-19 epidemic, and face-to-face instruction is no longer acceptable; The crisis forces students to immerse themselves in online learning rather than traditional offline or classroom learning. An unfortunate educational disruption has occurred due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Owing to the restriction and lockdown, all educational institutions experienced extraordinary and unanticipated inconsistencies and problems. A report on UNESCO (2020) stated that the closure of educational institutions has affected about 1.5 billion students and youth globally. According to UNICEF (2021), over 90% of the nations shifted to distance learning and about 463 million students have dropped out or disconnected from formal education. According to Korkmaz and Toraman (2020), the majority of instructors had some issues when using online learning. They believe that crucial steps must be made in education to protect against a potential outbreak in the future, and they anticipate certain changes in educational practises in the post-COVID-19 era. Angelova (2020) concluded that online environment make students feel work easier in individual tasks, but not in team works. These

accounts exhibit that online can be an effective alternative for physical classroom teaching and learning letting learners' individual autonomy of face and pace of learning at their own place though it has both positive and negative consequences. Manak (2020) stated in his research paper that higher education in India is not based on efficient mechanism to ensure accountability and consistent performance of teachers. Unplanned expansion has lead to poorly accredited institutions with substandard quality. Tilak (2020) discussed in his research paper that higher education in India is facing excessive hike in student's fee and privatization. Knowledge landscape in the world is undergoing change and the unskilled jobs may be taken over by the rise of big data, machine learning and artificial intelligence. With quickly changing employment and global ecosystem, India is to go with the recent call of Prime Minister Sh. Narendra Modi on leveraging the fourth Industrial revolution for leading the country to new heights (Sreeramana & Shubhrajyotsna, 2020). Sun and Chen (2016) examined on "Online education and its effective practice: A research review" in which they used a qualitative content analysis approach and found that effective online instruction is dependent upon 1) well-designed course content, motivated interaction between the instructor and learners, well-prepared and fully-supported instructors; 2) creation of a sense of online learning community; and 3) rapid advancement of technology. At last, they hoped that this will stimulate an on-going discussion of effective strategies that can enhance universities and faculty success in transitioning to teach online. In order to determine whether there were substantial discrepancies between Korean and US students' perceptions of the calibre of online education support services, Lee (2010) performed a study. The researcher looked at possible variations between Korean and American students in terms of their acceptance and contentment of online learning as well as their perceptions of the quality of online education support services. Additionally, it was discovered that students in both nations, regardless of their assessments of the quality of the online support services, believed that taking classes online would be more beneficial to them than taking traditional classes. Patricia (2020) studied on "College Students' use and acceptance of emergency Online Learning due to COVID-19". In the study 270 students were selected as sample and collected quantitative and qualitative data. In the article, the factors analyzed were attitude, affect, and motivation; perceived behavioral control (ease of use of technology, self-efficacy, and accessibility), and

cognitive engagement. Concluded that how motivation, self-efficacy, and use of technology play a significant role in the cognitive engagement and academic performance of students and participants preferred face-to-face learning.

OBJECTIVES

- To study the current status of Higher Education in context of South Asian Universities.
- To study the transformation in Higher Education of South Asian Universities due to Effect of Covid-19.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research study adopted descriptive research methodology. Various data sources involved use of different government websites, official documents, statistical reports, national policies and the available literature related to the theme have been explored and reported. Researchers own professional experience also contributed for adding insight to the answers of the objectives / research questions.

CURRENT STATUS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH ASIA

The higher education system in South Asia is vast. Compared to other regions, it is the second largest in terms of higher education enrolment and accounts for 18 percent of all tertiary education students globally. Across the eight countries, there are almost 42 million students enrolled in the roughly 50,000 HE institutions (HEIs). In the region, the private sector is a significant player in technical education. Private universities, colleges, and standalone institutions account for over 65% of HE enrollment in India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka; over 40% of enrollment in Bangladesh and Afghanistan; and 20% of enrollment in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. A substantial share of students is also enrolled in remote learning courses or outside degree programmes. In addition to this, some of the countries also offer massive open online course (MOOC) programs. The level of instruction and effectiveness of these courses vary, and there is limited data on student enrollment and completion.

TRANSFORMING ONLINE EDUCATION DUE TO COVID19

Initially in March 2020, when India was to go for first lockdown, Whats-app helped teachers to connect with their students. Online classes were used with the help of different platforms like WebEx, Google - meet, Go to meeting, Microsoft teams, etc. With significant demand, there has

been rise in many online learning platforms which offered open and free access to the learning services. As universities free they were to engage in online learning (Jena, 2020). During this period educational community put concerted efforts for continuity of teaching learning process. Pandemic Covid-19 has forced scrambling of educational material and online platforms which have posed great threat to teaching profession and its autonomy (UNESCO, 2020). As per IAU-Covid-19 Global Impact Survey, 2020, 60% of Higher education institutions have gone through virtual mobility or collaborative online learning as an alternative option to face to face mode of teaching. As per OECD's recent Economic Outlook, the most optimistic outlook also endorses a major global recession (OECD, 2020). And even for keeping people mentally stress, Gangwar & Gala, 2020). Education with digital platforms cannot be imagined without pedagogical concerns. It should also involve human relations between teachers and students. The teachers who were not equipped with ICT based pedagogy or not well versed with these online platforms had to struggle with conducting online classes (Tari & Amonkar, 2021). Now it has become very clear that impact of Corona virus may be longer than it was expected. The continuous lockdown and social distancing is forcing the Indian higher education sector to evolve. Education is transforming drastically with a distinctive rise in online education and teaching remotely with various digital platforms.

ADAPTING INDIAN CHALLENGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE LIGHT OF COVID19

Teaching learning methods of higher education shifts from traditional to modern methods in all over the world due to Covid-19. The shift from face-to-face to online teaching did not come without challenges. The first challenge was to access internet connectivity, especially, the students which belongs to rural and backward areas. To broadcast the live instructions, the pupils were expected to have a smartphone that is 4G compatible. In order to prevent buffering and lagging of the live stream, the second challenge was to have strong internet connectivity even in urban areas. These issues can arise when the Internet connection speed is insufficient to support the encoder's bitrate or when the server is overloaded, which will cause the application to crash. The third issue is that, because technical education is more practical in nature, live streaming focuses mainly on the theoretical transmission of the material. Covid-19 not only interrupted

teaching but also assessment. Many exams all over the world has been postponed or cancelled. Traditional exams have been replaced by online exams. As it has been the new area both for teachers, learners and administrators; so in assessments, larger measurement errors have been observed than usual. The learners at all the stages faced cancelled practical experiences and apprenticeships (UNESCO, 2020). This forced move to online learning with no training, poor connectivity, less prepared system resulted in serious concerns for education in general and online education in particular; Poor user Experience, Poor mental health both for the teachers as well as the learners (OECD, 2020). Challenges to Students - From the student's point of view the challenges were, the students had to leave the hostel and PG's immediately due to lockdown and they could not carry their text books and laptops to their native and as such it was not possible for them to take part in the e-learning. The final year students are worried and are anxious to know if they will have an extension of the current semester due to which there joining dates for companies are extending. Students who are planning to take admission in foreign universities and who want to pursue their higher education in India are worried that due to this lockdown they might have to lose one year. There are many organizations and online platforms which have been offering various development courses to the faculties as well. The teaching faculties are making use of this lock down to upgrade their knowledge by enrolling themselves in various Faculty Development Programs offered by ATAL, NPTEL and MOOC. As a benefit to the teachers, many IITs offer two-week online Faculty Development Courses which are a boon to the teachers. With the help of the numerous online courses offered by IITs, the faculty members have been improving themselves, and a good information exchange mechanism has been started that would not have been feasible without the online platform.

CONCLUSIONS

The pandemic has radically changed the educational environment in a way that has never been seen before. To adjust to the new changes, though, institutions, teachers, and students must all be flexible. Leading academicians might develop new methods to providing universal education to all students.

All countries are currently working towards the reopening phase. South Asia's education budgets don't seem to be in a good position to handle the situation as it develops. Between 2019 and

2021, central government budget allocations for education in South Asia decreased by 2.4 percent in real terms (Byron, 2021). A huge amount of investment needs for well-educated, healthy and productive human capital in future. During this pandemic, a significant portion has been suffering from learning losses. Losses can be reduced by having access to educational resources and ensuring their efficacy.

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