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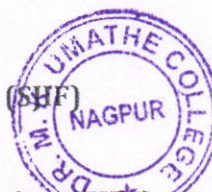
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Relevance of Online Teaching and Learning in Higher Education During Pandemic : Its Advantages, Disadvantages and Different Technical Tools

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Abstract:

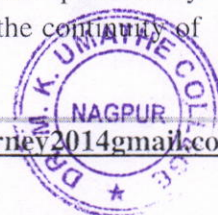
The spread of pandemic Covid-19 has drastically disrupted every aspects of human life including education. India has been facing the pandemic of 'COVID-19 for almost a year. Due to unavailability of proper medicines and vaccine for the treatment of COVID-19, the Government of India has imposed the country lockdown from 25th March, 2020 in order to break the chain of the transmission of coronavirus in community. The government has called for social distancing and it has made mandatory for people to stay at home for long period of time. As a result, the educational institutes were also closed during the lockdown period and traditional class room teaching switched to online teaching in India to compensate the educational losses. Online learning is the best solution during this pandemic situation. Teachers can use virtual classrooms to teach from home with all necessary tools which make the online lectures as effective as traditional ones. The present paper is an attempt to study the impact of Covid-19 on Higher Education, the relevance of online teaching-learning during the crisis, some tools for online learning, its advantages and disadvantages and also to study the measures taken by Government of India to support online learning process during the lockdown period of Covid-19.

Keywords: Online teaching-learning, Higher Education Institutions, Covid-19, Pandemic, advantages, disadvantages. New Normal

Introduction:

Covid-19, the global pandemic has affected every sector around the world. Not only the education sector of India but also the world is badly affected by this as it has enforced the world wide lock down creating very bad effect on the students' life. In India, around 32 crore learners, stopped going to schools and colleges. Pandemics often compel the learners to stay at home for long period of time and obstruct teaching-learning process. As a result, all educational activities halted in India. It is observed that during this testing time many grown-ups and students lost their mental balance and got depressed. It has created an unprecedented test on education. Online learning proved to be the best solution during this pandemic situation. Online learning played a pivotal role in keeping people and students engaged and free from mental stress. Teachers preferred to use virtual classrooms to teach from home with all necessary tools which make the online sessions as effective as traditional ones.

This pandemic has taught us that change is the need of the hour. Despite of all these challenges, the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have taken everything positively and managed to ensure the continuity of teaching-learning, research and service to the society with some tools and techniques during the pandemic. UNESCO is supporting the different countries in their efforts to slower the immediate impact of school and college closures particularly for more vulnerable and disadvantaged communities and trying to facilitate the continuity of education for all through remote learning.





Importance of Online Teaching-Learning during Pandemic:

India has the world's second-largest school system, after China. Shutting schools and colleges to maintain social distancing amidst the COVID-19 crisis was the most logical solution to avoid community transmission. However, this extended closure has an excessive negative impact on the most vulnerable students. The pandemic has not only caused the wide gap in educational inequality but also worsened existing disparities. In this pandemic situation many new modes of learning are emerged and it is realized that knowledge can be transferred virtually using multiple media. Online teaching-learning has proved the best solution during this crisis. UNICEF has also reported that "School closures and strict containment measures mean more and more families are relying on technology and digital solutions to keep children learning, entertained and connected to the outside world, but not all children have the necessary knowledge, skills and resources to keep themselves safe online" (UNICEF). Online learning is a learning environment that takes place over the Internet. It is often referred to as e-learning. An online educator compensates the lack of physical presence in the virtual classroom by creating a supportive environment where all students feel comfortable to participate in online class (Joshua). It plays a significant role in transforming our lives to digital world by providing flexible places, class timings and quality contents. Online learning is beneficial because it is instantly accessible and flexible. The educators and learners use Internet, E-mail, WhatsApp, Videoconferencing, Instant messaging and other technological tools to communicate virtually with each other. However Videoconferencing may be effectively used in online learning to enhance group collaboration with sense of community between learners which may replace face to face class room learning to some extent. In the past, students from rural areas used to miss many of the opportunities due to inaccessibility of internet. Connecting these rural students for online learning via other online platforms can improve the quality of their learning experience will be able to attend school/college from home. Online Learning is encouraged during lockdown period for Covid-19 since one can gain knowledge staying at home and can maintain social distancing. In this way an outbreak of Covid-19 can be minimized due to social distancing.

Initiatives taken by Indian Govt. to promote online learning during lockdown

Most of the Governments across the world have temporarily shut down educational institutions to control the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. All the sectors have got immensely affected by the pandemic but the worst hit sector of all is the education sector, as most of the exams have been cancelled during the final assessments leaving behind the chaos in the mind of teachers and students. The ill effects of the lockdown could be seen among both the stakeholders. The University Grants Commission (UGC) came up with a wonderful solution during this pathetic situation. It promoted online classes for the smooth conduct of teaching-learning process and appealed teachers to adopt Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to enhance the learning process and to ensure that no student is deprived of education during this crucial time. MHRD advises students to carry on with their studies using the online learning platforms in order to ensure that there is no break in the education and students get full-access to classes like before. These online learning platforms help the students not only get full access to the study material but also allow them to engage in online classes and interact with the teachers like the traditional classroom. Numerous portals are available but few are





included in the list of some of the digital initiatives of MHRD & UGC along with their access links for UG and PG.

1. SWAYAM Online Courses: It provides access to best teaching learning resources free of cost. Link- <https://storage.googleapis.com/uniquecourses/online.html>
2. UG/PG MOOCs: It hosts learning material of the SWAYAM UG and PG (Non-Technology) archived courses. Link- https://ugcmooes.inflibnet.ac.in/ugcmooes/mooes_courses.php
3. SWAYAMPBHA: This is a group of 32 DTH channels providing high quality educational curriculum based course contents covering diverse disciplines. These channels are free to air and can also be accessed through your cable operator. The telecasted videos/lectures are also as archived videos on the Swayamprabha portal. Link- <https://www.swayamprabha.gov.in/>
4. e-PG Pathshala: It has high quality curriculum-based interactive e-content containing 23,000 modules (e-text and video) in 70 Post Graduate disciplines of social sciences, arts, fine arts and humanities, natural & mathematical sciences. Link- <https://www.epgp.inflibnet.ac.in>
5. CEC-UGC YouTube channel: It provides access to unlimited educational curriculum based lectures absolutely free. Link- <http://www.youtube.com/user/cecedusat>
6. National Digital Library: It is a digital repository of a vast amount of academic content in different formats and provides interface support for leading Indian languages for all academic levels including researchers and life-long learners. Link- <https://ndl.iitkgp.ac.in/>
7. e-Shodh Sindhu: Link- <https://ess.inflibnet.ac.in/>
8. Vidwan: Link- <https://vidwan.inflibnet.ac.in/>
9. DIKSHA portal

Free online platforms used for Online Classes:

There are many live-video communication platforms available for teachers and students in internet. Some of them are paid while some others are free. Some of the free online platforms that can be used by learners are as follows:

Zoom: Cloud platform for video and audio conferencing, collaboration, chat and also used for webinars.

Google Meet: The most convenient platform used for online lectures and meetings. Video calls integrated with other Google's G-Suite tools, video meeting recordings, screen sharing, join calls using Google Calendar.

Skype: It has video and audio calls with talk, chat and collaboration features.

Facebook Live: It is good for businesses or individuals who are looking to broadcast demos, videos, or showcase their company culture while streaming live, followers on Facebook can comment and chat live.

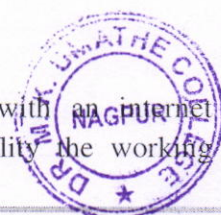
YouTube Live: It is a platform for demonstrating a product with live interaction, hosting an educational session to teach audience with screen sharing or using a whiteboard, having features with Location tags and advanced scheduling.

Let's now discuss the advantages and disadvantages of online education in detail.

Advantages of online education during lockdown

1. Learn from anywhere, at any time

Since online education only requires a laptop or a smartphone with an internet connection, students can learn anywhere at any time. Due to this flexibility the working





professionals can now pursue new courses along with their jobs. They can learn at weekends or in their free time and the course materials are easily available at student's fingertip.

2. Learn at your own pace (Flexibility)

The perception level of each student is different and hence everyone learns at a different pace. In a classroom many students find it difficult to comprehend the lessons even though they are taught at the same time together. This is must be a serious problem for slow learners. Online education solves this issue. The study material is provided in advance.

3. Save Money

Online education is much more cost effective than doing a regular on-campus degree. It helps economically disadvantaged students to accomplish their dream without spending much on college education.

4. Efficiency

Online teaching-learning provides teacher an opportunity to deliver lessons effectively by using a number of tools such as videos, pdfs, google classrooms, YouTube, Facebook live etc. as a part of their lesson plans. The teachers can become more efficient educators by extending the lesson plan beyond traditional textbooks and include online resources for proper understanding of the topic to students.

5. Accessibility of time

Another advantage of online education is that online lectures can be recorded, archived, and shared for future reference. This allows the students to access the learning material at a time of their comfort.

6. Suits a variety of learning styles

Every student has a different learning style. Some students are visual learners, while the others prefer to learn through audio. Similarly, some students thrive in the classroom, and other students are solo learners who get distracted by large groups.

7. Highly effective learning environment

The online learning system, with its range of options and resources, can be personalized in many ways. It is the best way to create a perfect learning environment suited to the needs of each student.

8. It offers complementary interactive support that allows students to study 24/7 and work at their own pace.

9. Online class/conference session can be saved in website for future reference e.g. class notes can be saved and distributed via different tools for references by students. The digital recordings of the classes/meetings can be uploaded in website to review later.

10. Useful to women and physically handicapped learners who can learn at home.

Disadvantages of online learning during lockdown

1. Unavailability of technical gadgets

Learners from humble background and disadvantaged groups are the more likely to suffer during online learning as they may not afford high-speed internet connection and required technical gadgets. It may widen the gap between privileged and unprivileged learners.

2. Lacks Personal touch

The atmosphere of a face-to-face meeting is lost. Interpersonal relationship between students and teachers or between students may hamper.

