HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF DIGITALISATION IN CORONA PANDEMIC.

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Introduction

As we look back on the past two-three years and the harsh repercussions of the pandemic that continue until today, No one would have guessed that a virus-like COVID-19 would come and without differentiating, it will alter the lifestyle of people. Due to COVID-19, many changes came to our world and it took some time for everyone to adopt the new normal. The COVID-19 pandemic has without a doubt exacerbated major economic and social challenges across the globe. One of the most impacted sectors was education. So the education system has been hit hard neither the world nor educational institutions were prepared to embrace the shift to online platforms brought. The COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected the progress of some governments were making around increasing the education budget. Therefore, this is a crisis that requires urgent attention and collective action by all Governments, stakeholders and communities.

Technology has changed in India When the world was hit by coronavirus and countries went on lockdown, all schools had to close immediately to avoid spreading the virus. Teachers had to find ways to communicate with their students because we are unsure when the pandemic will end. A few months ago, what was impossible has become a reality and educational software tools allow students and teachers to communicate and learn.

COVID-19 pandemic forced many higher education institutions across the world to cancel face-to-face teaching, close campus facilities, and displace staff and students to work and learn from home. Teaching management systems like Google classrooms and Canvas, and even virtual reality have come into play and mitigated the issue and has helped support teachers in directing their students better. Virtual teaching was borne out of a need during the coronavirus pandemic. Most schools have adopted this new way of learning, and even if they go back to the classroom, some will still use online learning into their curriculum even after the pandemic.

Digitalization

Information technologies, hardware and software programs aim to improve and ease all areas of public communication, including knowledge sharing. Internet technologies offer the possibility to quickly and efficiently search, use, analyse, and process information. Digitization means the transformation of all types of information into digital language. This means that all the processes we encounter every day are now changing their form of existence and functioning of the entire system. Employees in companies, educational institutions and state-owned enterprises undergo training and improve their skills in using technology.

We are running into the 21st century where technology knows no bounds. This is the phase of radical development where technology is taking over every niche and corner. Smartphones, laptops, and tablets are no more unknown words. During this phase the education system is evolving for the sake of betterment, as this generation's students are not born to be confined

by the limits of simple learning; their curiosity is vast and cannot be catered with educational systems that were designed earlier. If we kept on teaching our children the way we taught them yesterday, we would deprive them of their tomorrow. Our old educational system lacks the capability to stand a chance in the 21st century. So we are compelled to use digitization in our educational system.

Thanks to technology, we place our knowledge and ideas in the world with one click. This means that we have access to all the information through smart devices and digital channels. Digitization should be observed as a socio-technological phenomenon with the processes of adoption and use of technologies for personal, organizational or social purposes. Emerging digital technologies influence our behaviour and the choices we make. In addition to the fact that we now "carry knowledge in our pockets", digitalization also has its downsides.

Effectiveness of Digital Education

The effectiveness of online learning is still the subject of debate. Experts have been studying the retention of information by students and how remote learning has impacted the development and social skills of children. They conclude that online learning's effectiveness is dependent on the following three conditions:

- Students having consistent access to the internet and computers
- Teachers receiving the needed training to administer courses online
- Platforms that provide personalized learning, to match the journey of each individual student

  These three conditions posed many challenges for schools, their faculty and the students – the latter perhaps bearing the brunt of the shift to online methods Corona-induced severe disruption the world over shut an unprecedented 1.4 billion students out of their pre-primary, primary and secondary schools in more than 190 countries. Schools were closed and children were confined to their houses. The education of around 360 million students was hampered in India alone!

Challenges & Difficulties in Digital Education

1. The big challenge for Digital Learning is that teaching, discussions and communication in classrooms are more difficult when students and teachers are not in the same classroom. Most of the things must also be driven by self-direction, and it is to be difficult for the students to focus on while learning.

2. The quality of education depends on the available infrastructure of a country. Internet connectivity was and still is choppy, and quite expensive for underprivileged students to gain access to. In addition, many children from less fortunate backgrounds do not have access to desktops or laptops allowing them to take part in courses. In addition, remote education has shown the need for much more support, and self-development courses, for children to grow academically.

3. There is a gap in education due to different socioeconomic backgrounds. The underprivileged students will be at the loss end during online classes due to financial matters especially in the cost of digital devices and data plans. To minimize such

inequality in education, there should be a decrease in the access cost and quality of access in all countries must be enhanced to widen the digital divide.

4. Online learning can actually be as effective as face-to-face education but schools and colleges need to up skill their staff to deliver online education effectively and efficiently. Without intensive training on how to deliver effective online classes, the students might have easily disengage and drop out early. A lack of skill and experience among academicians particularly in online course design and pedagogy impacted negatively on student learning.

5. Due to the global pandemic, and a drastic shift to fully online learning may cause a spark of uncertainty and ambivalence when dealing with technology. Support systems can be further collaborated with other bodies such as with the government, schools, enterprises, families, society, and etc.

6. The effectiveness of online learning varies amongst age groups and this has been a challenge to all in accepting the new normal.

Recommendations to make digital education more accessible in India

In order to get the full benefit of online learning, a concerted effort is needed from many as to provide this structure and go beyond replicating a physical class/lecture. Many solutions for education are proposed that could bring much needed innovation.

1. **Appropriate teaching methods and technology**

Classroom teaching where students can interact physically in an immersive environment, online lessons limits the teachers in a small screen that leads students to detach from the learning content. Long, one-way live streaming sessions tend to disengage students within 10-15 minutes. Therefore, you may consider organizing the session into short time slots and include a range of activities to engage students.

2. **Infrastructural Equity**

Online learning has created new equity gaps – in technology expertise, high-speed internet access, time-zone variables, equipment quality, or conducive study space. Familiarize yourself with each student's off-campus circumstances. If someone needs help with technical proficiency, direct them to tutorials or a peer partner. Use low-band communication systems where possible. Schedule synchronous sessions to align with student availability. Be sure to factor in accessibility for students with special requirements.

3. **Monitoring students' engagement and progress in lessons**

Ideas on how to monitor students' engagement and progress over time include the following:

- **Assess student learning**. Create assignments, quizzes, polls, and snapshots in classes to track students' progress.
- **Personalize learning experiences**. Create small groups within classes to foster student collaboration and discussion.
- **Reward positive student behaviour.** Create personalized badges online and award them to students to post on their profiles so that they can become more motivated by seeing and displaying these rewards.

4. **Designing interactive learning activities**

   Using activities such as debates, group work, projects, case studies, role play, and student presentation help students acquire the skills other than academic knowledge and make lessons more interesting! Many tools for online collaboration can be used to help facilitate group activities.

5. **Monitor Performance**

   Some students are facing intense personal challenges during the pandemic. Be sure that your learning management system lets you monitor performance and engagement and reach out to those who are struggling, whether through lack of focus, emotional issues, or learning disorders. Encourage your students to contact you if they are having difficulties with the content, the technology, or the schedules. It might be useful to conduct a small-group session where they can share their concerns, and discuss how to improve their time management and study habits.

   The experience of lockdown and the e-learning experiment, which many teachers, students, and families, but also policymakers, regarded as traumatic, could have over-dimensioned the importance that online education and digitalization should have in the post-Covid-19 era. Thus, such an important focus on digitalization may not constitute a sufficient response to the most immediate needs of schools and teachers in a post-pandemic scenario. Once educational institutions are back to business as usual, we should consider the possibility that the digitizing trend will deflate and that education technologies become rather ancillary in the day-to-day life of schools.

   We can say that it is still early to assess whether the identified responses in the domain of digitalization will mean a paradigm change of educational delivery and pedagogy in the long run or will instead become one more of the many instruments available within the educational toolkit and, accordingly, another factor of educational diversification (with, for instance, some schools in the same system more digitalized than others). The following years will determine whether and in which educational settings the Covid-19 crisis may represent a path-departing change in educational delivery and the role of technology therein.

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