



Education Sector at cross roads- A Paradigm shift during COVID crisis- : Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract:

The challenges before us are multifarious- completion of syllabus, conducting of examination, assessments, internships and science practical. Besides these problems, more serious concern has been mental health issues-anxiety and stress related to fear of losing academic year, job opportunities and future uncertainty. For parents and students future appeared as a dark sky ahead resulting into emotional turmoil and psycho fear. The challenge before the teaching fraternity was not just to look for online methods of teaching but also to explore effective and innovative pedagogy to teach the students, keep them engaged in learning, arouse their interests in new methodologies and relax them from their anxiety and stress.

Key words: innovative pedagogy, COVID 19, syllabus

Introduction-

COVID 19 has adversely affected our education sector resulting into closure of all educational institutions from mid March 2020. During this pandemic everything stopped moving and it appeared as if life has come to a halt. But the morale and motivation of human beings are so high that world had to move with it and so as the education sectors. We had to look for new opportunities, new ICT tools and follow online education rigorously to alleviate the stress of students, parents and the entire teaching fraternity. The Ministry of Human Resource Development played a very important role in motivating and assuring digital learning to all the stakeholders. The MHRD along with UGC came out with several notifications to facilitate educational activities, seeking proposals and methods to minimise potential academic loss to students and

adopting technologies for academic sessions, examination and assessment. The response of some of the Universities and others institutions having better technology and ICT enabled infrastructure has been encouraging while few others have been resisting against introducing new techniques.

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to teach the students, keep them engaged in learning, arouse their interests in new methodologies and relax them from their anxiety and stress. Majority of the teachers appeared confused and showed reluctance to adopt new online teaching learning methods. However few considered it as an opportunity to enable their students, their colleagues to be more technology friendly to learn and motivate others to follow .
Importance of this study

ICT enabled education is not new to India .Long back, University Grants Commission had started massive on line courses(MOOCs) and so did the private universities. But people in general were ignorant of it or not interested in learning online courses due to their mental blockage of sticking to traditional style of teaching learning methods. They are comfortable in the class room with chalk and Black board and teaching face to face with the students thereby getting personal touch with them. So the biggest challenge came from this segment only, which resisted against any kind of new concept of online teaching learning methodology.

But this global health crisis demanding Social distancing as the only way to keep the virus away, forced them to adapt this physical distancing from the students, colleagues and the institution. Ultimately they were left with no alternative but to explore and invent new technology enabled education in the crisis situation as they have to learn to live with the coronavirus.Initially Education sector landed in the state of lockdown not knowing which way to move but the Ministry of Human Resource Development, the Universities and their faculties came forward with their

valuable suggestions and effective ways for smooth functioning of this sector.

Methodology

During this lockdown period the only way to collect data and information was through news channels, whatsapp messages and interacting with the students, teachers and university staff through webinars, Google classrooms, zoom apps and personal dialogues and discussions. Several advisories were passed by the Education Ministry ,which were circulated through mails to all the Universities to follow .During lockdown News channels appeared of immense help in understanding the problems and constraints faced by the Ministry in making new academic calendar for meeting diverse needs of the students from all streams.

Background challenges

The rate of infections was going up alarmingly worldwide and also in India so everything was looking uncertain and fluid. Students were in panic and it was difficult to counsel them about their academic future in an unprecedented time.

Realizing the grave and seriousness of the pandemic, complete lockdown was declared by the union government from 25th March onwards .Education ministry of State Government declared promotion of all students up to class 8th without any examination under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. They focused more on students learning process and examination of students from class 9th onwards and higher education. Through its advisories, educational institutions were asked to do online teaching for completing the syllabus, online



assessments and online examination as well through various mechanisms .MHRD constituted an expert committee to explore the possibilities of adapting online methods of learning. Meanwhile the Ministry and UGC provided many digital platform to pursue academic activities and more than lakhs books were made available on line for reading and reference purposes .All academic institutions were advised to make good use of all online courses and reference materials, so that learning does not stop. Through webinars almost all the Universities, Private teaching platforms oriented the faculties and the students about existing portals, designing and delivery of online teaching materials through google sites, gnomic and moodle sites. For visually impaired persons special webinar was organised for the Principals, Teachers and staff, where several modes and modalities were explained and assurance was given for starting of new digital platforms for special children.

These webinars connecting to hundreds of people were of great help as such opportunities were never available earlier nor was possible to entertain such big number of people at a time. It was made possible only through digital learning and people learnt also how to use these apps-zooms, live face book, live YouTube and other interactive platforms

Initially there was too much resistance from the teaching faculty, students and pressure groups of universities against online teaching directives. They were simply in the denial mode and few even rejected the guidelines of the universities of teaching online and uploading of their digital teaching materials on the

websites. They expressed their inability to handle it because they were not technology friendly. Some even refused to take assessments as they found it harassments and imposed directives by the authorities and the universities. Unfortunately party politics and unionism also aggravated the matter when they opted for demonstrations, dharma and fast but interestingly all these were also done online through digital platforms.

Responding to such rejection and withdrawal tendency, some senior teachers expressed their fear of being replaced by a younger lot who are more conversant with online methods .They were afraid that in Post Covid 19, there would be shift in pedagogy. It will no longer be completely traditional style of class room teaching rather Blend learning methods of both class room (face to face interaction) and online methods .Many senior teachers expressed fear of rejection and loss of respect by the students if they failed to meet the expectations of the students while teaching them online. They also expressed their apprehension that new generation teachers were more technology friendly, more advanced and had logical digital teaching techniques as compared to them. Not only this, students too, were more trained and smarter than the teachers in using digital platforms so it could cause embarrassment to them.

Some Principals even shared their experiences of resistance from their staff who simply refused to follow the instruction of teaching online and learning design and delivery techniques. They argued that online teaching will be monitored by all the stakeholders –



Students, their parents and the authorities and such observations will expose their weaknesses. It will be reviewed by them and lead to subject of criticisms but in class room teaching there is no monitoring of teachers teaching practices. It's true, on line teaching needs extensive and comprehensive knowledge of the subject, good preparation to develop quality lectures using etexts, videos and audios which most of the teachers are neither interested nor willing to do .

Others complained of not having personal touch with the students in online teaching which they used to have in classroom interaction, so they are not able to monitor the activities of the students. In classroom learning environment there is face to face interaction so it gives closer insights of the students whether they are able to understand the concepts or not. Students are more interactive, more participative and can pay better attention which was lacking in online tutoring classes. Students also accepted that by switching off videos and muting audios they used to get engaged in other activities. Few other students reported of non availability of smart phones, laptops and poor connectivity of internet .This was true as students from remote areas and those staying in the hostels really faced these Problems. University of Delhi has approx two lakhs regular students enrolled in colleges and three lakhs in Distance learning programme. Some even reported of health issues -severe stress, headache due to longer screen time and exposures to other unwarranted sites as they were not fully conversant with digital platforms. This was actually a crisis situation for Indian educational setup where neither teachers nor students were

exposed to such online teaching learning pedagogies so it was difficult for them to accept it all of a sudden.

However this lockdown period can be best utilised by the teachers, who can devote their time in learning and reading quality materials as it is saving their several hours of travelling to their institutions. They need to be motivated to be more innovative, interactive and accessible. And the teaching faculties realized that sooner they learnt the methodologies of teaching online better it would be for them as crisis of Covid 19 was not going to be over in near future .They had to come out from unwillingness mode and inability syndrome to teach through digital apps.They had to learn to live with the virus and teach in the given environment . In such a situation, it is the moral responsibility of the teachers to cooperate and learn to be ICT enabled as huge financial resources is being spent on them despite of economic challenges. Covid 19 has come as an opportunity so it must be utilised and explored.

Parents also had many serious concerns - psychological and social. Their young children are being exposed to more screen time, anxiety and stress to handle apps and some other also complained of Cyber crime and fraud. They were anxious about opening of schools and colleges in post Covid period and preparation to meet the challenges of sanitation, conveyance and social distancing in the premises of schools and colleges. These concerns are of serious nature but there is no immediate solution to them. It all depends on the number of cases of infections, lockdown situation and preparedness of central and State Government machinery .All state



governments are responsible for designing and redesigning their containment strategies as per the situation of their respective states. So it is too early to predict rather follow wait and watch method

Opportunities Ahead

It cannot be denied that willingly or unwillingly people are exposed to new culture of teaching learning process-constantly using digital platforms to read and write as no other means are left for them. This online teaching has provided dynamic interaction between students and teachers where both students and teachers are enjoying this new mode of teaching learning with great enthusiasm. They are collaborating with their peer groups to learn new concepts and tools of learning. The scope of teaching learning is not just confined to class syllabus but simultaneously learning many life skills and other activities. Unlike traditional style of teaching many new unexplored aspects have been explored which is keeping the students engaged. Webinars has emerged as an important tool of enriching teachers and students which were not possible earlier due to financial costs, teachers preoccupation with teaching and travelling to their respective workplaces to complete the fixed days of semester. But now on phone calls all experts are available nationally and internationally and without any infrastructural preparation webinars are organised. This online and digital teaching has added new scope for knowledge and can also lead to close interaction and tie up with foreign universities

From Pandemic pedagogy to planned online techniques:Post Covid strategy

Post Covid situation is going to be more crucial having many unwarranted challenges such as loss of life,economic recession and loss of job. After opening of schools and colleges authorities have to face the problems of sanitising schools and colleges maintaining social distancing, reducing the number of students in the class rooms and interaction among students. Commuting in public transports will risk the life of students and other staff using these modes of conveyance. The fear among students to go to their respective institutions and also of the parents sending their children to the institutions will be a determining factor .There will be genuine and sincere demand for online teaching platforms. Placed in such crisis situation, education sector has to reframe its structure, redesign its syllabus and change its pedagogies. They have to focus on virtual interaction with the students by creating a discussion forum so far as admission and other issues are concerned. Digital e internship should become responsibility of both the host institution and the industry. Some learning can, however, not be imparted purely through virtual labs for example experimentation with chemicals. Today many institutes do not have high speed connections and adequate bandwidth to conduct multiple digital platforms simultaneously. All educational campuses need to be fully ICT enabled so as to facilitate teaching learning process. Innovative techniques of teaching by videos and audios, uploading on the websites for future reference and collaborative teaching will become the necessity in post COVID 19 . So for Infrastructural development Government aids and assistance should be ensured and deliberated upon. Proper training should be given to the entire academic



staff and the students regarding usage of all these techniques through webinars and web workshops during lockdown period itself to be prepared for Post COVID 19 situation.

Strict surveillance of the campus is expected for maintaining physical distancing in the classrooms, washrooms, labs, canteens and corridors. Parents and students need to be relaxed psychologically and be tolerant with the hardships. Parents need to counsel their children, help them in learning new apps, and make the environment comfortable for them. It is not panic time rather learning and knowing time so patiently both should develop the desire to learn.

Teachers need to understand that online teaching can never be substitute of the classroom teaching rather it will supplement and complement to it. So in no case the teachers on roll are going to be replaced rather their knowledge of online learning practices will enhance their academic professionalism and will also boost their morale to fight with their inability. This is the time they should develop their desire to understand new technologies. There is a possibility of its continuity in future so this new era shouldn't stop because This is a wakeup call , a lesson learnt for all.

Conclusion

It goes without saying that initially the teachers themselves appeared apprehensive about the techniques of online classes .It was a bigger challenge for the teachers to convince themselves first and then to move ahead with all the stake holders of education-students, parents and the Academic staff. However after initial resistance and inability, they

finally accepted the underlying truth that Technology is an Enabler and there is no other way but to accept its existence as the only way to move ahead during COVID Crisis. The students' community too realized the necessity of adapting to new methods and pedagogy in the time of crisis justifying the proverb- Necessity is the mother of Invention. It becomes the joint responsibility of the teachers and the students to adapt and change their mindset and continue learning and delivering during lockdown and later also. No one knows for how long this crisis is going to continue so learning should not be under lockdown. We need to move on accepting the Change.

During the period of Lockdown we have to be more creative, more innovative and more mature in handling our educational crisis. Online teaching learning process is more convenient and more comfortable providing us ample opportunities to enhance our academic calibre and desire of being a good professional. It ensures uninterrupted teaching learning process which has come as an opportunity, an enabler during COVID 19 crisis .Education will move towards Blended model having both physical campuses and virtual class rooms. Now we will be better prepared to meet any future crisis like COVID 19

(This write up is totally based on my observation ,behaviour and analysis of the insight shared by all the stake holders of Education Sector-teaching community,Head of the institutions,students and parents through personal discussions and interviews in webinars)