

# Higher Education in the Era of Global Pandemic

Dr. Anupa Singh

Associate Professor, Department of Economics, Deva Nagri College, Meerut, INDIA

Corresponding Author: anupasingh2@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

The impact of COVID-19 can be seen in every sphere of life. It has significantly disrupted the higher education sector as well, which is a critical determinant of a country's economic future. The higher education sector is undergoing a tectonic shift right now. The closure of colleges and universities has widespread implications for students, faculty, administrators and institutions themselves. Research on online teaching and learning is inconclusive so far as research on coronavirus. Education is not only a cognitive process but also a social process. The transition from on-campus to online teaching and learning is not easy, as there are many challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored how indispensable it is for our population to be digitally literate. It may fashion a long overdue and welcome rebirth of our education systems. The long-term sustainable triumph of this tectonic shift will depend on some major elements of online learning. COVID-19 is causing us to challenge deep rooted notions of when, where and how we deliver education, the role of colleges and universities, the importance of life-long learning and the distinction between traditional and non-traditional learners. We can expect a new and different kind of educational model to emerge from COVID-19. This paper discusses the problems faced by the higher education sector due to COVID-19. Some suggestions have also been pointed out in this paper with regard to how we can further revolutionise the teaching and learning process to improve the experience of both, the teachers and learners during the pandemic.

**Keywords--** COVID-19, Pandemic, Higher Education, Online, Teaching

## I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic is set to change the world sooner than we know. Not only it has shuttered economies around the world but it has also battered education systems in developing and developed countries. It has significantly disrupted the higher education sector as well, which is a critical determinant of a country's economic future. There is nothing like a good crisis to shake up an industry. The Corona virus is now doing the same for higher education. It has struck our education system like a lightning bolt and shaken it to its core. Among many economic sectors, the higher education sector is undergoing a tectonic shift right now. The closure of colleges and universities has widespread implications for students, faculty, administrators and the institutions themselves. College and university closures have a domino effect on economies with far-reaching

implications. What several futurists and education technologists have been forecasting for long, is now happening.

## II. ASPECTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

In the wake of COVID-19 pandemic, millions of students across the globe have been driven out of their University spaces, and Professors are confined to their homes. Higher education stands disaggregated, and faculty and students are grappling with the sudden new norm of completely tech-mediated teaching and learning (Gopinathan & Ramachandran, 2020). Online has become the default mode of education during this long lockdown period in the wake of COVID-19.

Right now video conferencing apps like Zoom, Google Meet and Webex are throwing universities a lifeline. However lecturers are still struggling to maintain the same depth of engagement with students they could have in a classroom setting. They need to find solutions-and fast-to avoid a dip in the quality of education they are providing. While traditional institutions once viewed online education as a threat, it has come to their rescue. With the online segment still comprising a small fraction of the \$ 2.2 trillion global higher education market-less than 2%, according to market intelligence firm HolonIQ-the market is ripe for disruption. The liking of students for online offerings is likely to grow because of COVID-19 (Kandri, 2020). The solution that most people around the world are seeing as the default and safest option is technological- online teaching.

While each level of education faces its unique challenges, it is the higher education segment that may end up, by necessity, triggering a learning revolution. Universities and colleges are distinctive in that their students are both old enough to handle the rigours of online work and technologically savvy enough to navigate new platforms. The real challenge lies for the institutions in which they have enrolled. Organizational structures are often among the biggest impediments to meaningful change. That is certainly the case in academia as academics are really slow to change. We teach the same courses year after year and while many of us update our materials quite regularly it is a far different matter to change our mode of delivery. Converting a course for online delivery is time- consuming work (Lerman & Sen, 2020).

Research on online teaching and learning is inconclusive so far, just as research on Coronavirus. The global education experts have emphasized that even while using the best Ed-tech solution, we need to pay attention to the vital relationship between technology, teacher and the students. Even in this time of "social distancing", we cannot forget the fact that education is not just a cognitive process but also a social process. Teaching and learning online is somewhat more successful in higher educational contexts. But compared to the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), a blended-model of online (asynchronous) teaching and learning utilising LMS platforms (such as blackboard or moodle) and, on-campus(synchronous) classroom interactions are more effective.(Mukherjee,2020).

The good news is that the mainstream institutions are willing to move to online. The adoption of online solutions in recent months has been unprecedented. In the short term, educators are applying a 'first aid' solution by switching entirely from in-person to remote instruction, a move that has been imposed upon them by sudden mandatory campus closures.

#### ***Challenges faced by Higher Education Institutions, Learners and Faculty Members***

The transition from on-campus to online teaching and learning is not easy. Now with the COVID-19 crisis, faculty even in the most technologically developed education systems are struggling to transition to fully online courses. It is taking a huge amount of time and work to make their course fully online using synchronous online platforms. Students from privileged backgrounds are more used to taking exams and assignments online and typing on the laptop and computers. The socio-economically disadvantaged students and those without personal computers and internet at home work at the campus library to complete their online assignments. What will such students do now- in the US, in India and larger global context?

Modern Indian universities have been historically more theoretical because of its colonial legacy. Now with the online transition we need to think seriously how we can deal with the practical component of teaching and learning to prepare respectful professionals for the "World of Corona". Educators are quickly realizing that remote learning is just a baby step experiment in the long journey to offering online education that has been conceived as such, which includes effective student engagement tools and teacher training. Once we get beyond the current crisis universities should accept the focus from basic training on tools to more advanced training incorporating course design and assessment of learning. Even the most tech-savvy faculty needs a good deal of hand-holding by trained instructional designers to offer their courses online and to learn the learning management systems-both synchronous and asynchronous platforms. Moreover an interrupted power and internet supply will pose a challenge for online education. If we have to run

online classes in full swing for the rest of the academic year in the context of COVID-19 with social distancing as the new norm, all students and faculty will need access to a personal computer, uninterrupted power and internet supply. This is a huge challenge in a large populous country like India and even in some of the more economically developed countries such as the US and Australia.

### **III. PROSPECTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION POST-COVID-19**

Having taught a few online classes and discovered that they can make creative use of the technology, many faculty will be changed forever. We expect that even those who go back to teaching in a traditional classroom will incorporate some of the online tools that they are now learning to use. Universities should embrace the staff engagement and seize the opportunity to transform pedagogy to meet the needs of the next generation of students.

As painful and stressful a time as this is, it may fashion a long overdue and welcome rebirth of our education systems. The pandemic has been a great leveller in a way giving all stakeholders (educators, learners, policymakers and society at large) in developed and developing countries a better understanding of our current education systems' vulnerabilities and shortcomings. It has underscored how indispensable it is for our populations to be digitally literate to function and progress in a world in which social distancing, greater digitalization of services and more digitally centred communications may increasingly become the norm. A university or college that values universal access to education as its top priority might view online learning as a key element in its mission. We need to build on the speed and enthusiasm with which academics have embraced online teaching. Finally we should preserve the culture of change that has swept across universities over the course of just few weeks. We should institutionalize that culture to respond to the demands of the digital era. While the land is fertile for habits to change, the new digital landscape has its unsolved problems.

The long-term and sustainable triumph of this tectonic shift will depend on some major elements of online learning:

1. Creating high quality digitized learning content must be contextualized and 'byte-sized' to make learning interesting and engaging which requires a rare skill set which few organisations in the world can boast of.
2. Subject matter covered in classroom is to be delivered online, but with technology as the intermediary which requires a great deal of understanding and application of learning science and digital pedagogy.

3. Classrooms have typically diverse learner groups. Institutions need to spend as much time on the context for the diverse learner profiles, as on the content and weave it into the program design.
4. Higher educational institutions must embrace new technologies including the emerging sciences of artificial intelligence and deep learning models quickly to overcome the ills of current digital higher education.
5. On line learning is not about one pedagogical model but an aggregation of various models. Working with specialists and 'hand- stitching' a delivery mechanism is the key.
6. Learning science and not technology, has to be put in the forefront. Each teaching faculty needs to be massively re-trained and oriented for online teaching- learning mode. While they could be content experts or great classroom teachers, they need to place equal importance to 'learning sciences in digital media'.
7. Even in the post COVID-19 era, offline or conventional education models will not become obsolete. They will survive. However blended learning (a combination of classroom and online modes) will be the norm. Institutions and teachers will blend the two judiciously according to the context and the content.
8. Universities will have to be willing to collaborate with digital learning specialist to train their teachers and re-design higher education for the newest online education world.

#### IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The global health crisis has exacerbated many other challenges in the society and economy. A purely technological solution to deal with the global public health and related challenges is probably not enough. It will take a huge amount of public and private sector investment (both time and money) in the middle of the health crisis to also tackle the educational crisis looming large in front of us, as a side effect of this health crisis. More fundamentally, COVID-19 is causing us to challenge deep-rooted notions of when, where and how we deliver education, of the role of colleges and universities, the importance of lifelong learning and the distinction we draw between traditional and non-traditional learners. We can expect a new and different kind of educational model to emerge from COVID-19. In this time of crisis, a well-rounded and effective educational practice is what is needed for the capacity – building of young minds. It will develop skills that will drive their employability, productivity, health, and well-being in the decades to come. In the meantime we will

have to learn to live in a "World of Corona" and learn to teach online the future citizens of this world.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Choudhary Richa. (2020). COVID-19 Pandemic: Impact and strategies for education sector in India. *ET Government*.
- [2] Gopinathan, C.P & Ramachandran, K. (2020). Higher education post- COVID-19. *The Hindu*.
- [3] Kandri, Salah-Eddine. (2020). How COVID-19 is driving a long-overdue revolution in education. *The World Economic Forum COVID Action Platform*.
- [4] Lerman Dawn & Sen Falguni. (2020). Could the coronavirus force positive change in higher education?. *Times Higher Education*.
- [5] Mousumi. (2020). What coronavirus outbreak means for global higher education. *Outlook*.
- [6] Wikipedia. (2020). *Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education*. Available at: <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/>.