



Government Of India Initiatives Towards Education During Covid-19

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Abstract:

In the wake of the recent outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), the human inventions' health infrastructure has been revealed to be compromised, forcing nearly all countries, including India, to shut down their social, economic, and educational activities. Education systems across the globe were affected by this situation, which forced educators to switch to an online mode of teaching overnight. To address this challenge, the government of India, along with state governments and private players, has taken numerous initiatives to provide children with quality education during the COVID-19 outbreak. This paper is an attempt to study the efforts of government of India to continue education during the COVID-19 crisis.

Keywords: COVID-19, education, India, online mode of teaching etc.

Introduction:

Education (schools, colleges, and universities) in India is largely based on traditional methods of instruction, that is, face-to-face lectures in a classroom. Despite the fact that many academic institutions have begun to implement blended learning, many remain trapped in the past. The abrupt emergence of COVID-19, a fatal disease caused by the Corona Virus (SARS-CoV-2) shook the world. COVID-19 has taken the entire world under its grip, exposing the weakened health infrastructure facilities of human innovations and forcing practically every country to halt all social, economic, and educational activities. Over 32 crore students were affected in India, as they could not move schools or universities. All educational activities were halted. The outbreak of COVID-19 has taught us that change is inevitable. In fact, it has played an important role in motivating educational institutions to grow into new technologies. It was labelled a pandemic by the World Health Organization. This event posed a challenge to the global education system, forcing instructors to switch to an online form of instruction overnight. Many academic institutions that had previously been hesitant to adapt their traditional pedagogical method now have no choice but to fully embrace online teaching-learning. Teachers that are experienced in Blackboard, Chalk, Books, and classroom teaching are new to digital teaching, but they are quickly adapting and handling it like a pro to help students in their current situation.

What is COVID-19?

Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that can cause illnesses such as the common cold, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). In 2019, a new coronavirus was identified as the cause of a new disease called coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak that originated in China. The virus is now known as the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic. When the whole world was fighting against the pandemic, the first case of COVID-19 in India was detected on 30th January 2020 in the state of Kerala in a student who returned from Wuhan China. As a result On the evening of 24 March 2020, the Government of India ordered a nationwide lockdown for 21 days, limiting movement of the entire 1.38 billion (138 crore) population of India as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 pandemic in India. Consequently, this has brought hardship and challenge for Indian education system too.

Government of India initiatives towards education during COVID-19:

Over the past few years, e-learning has seen a jump in popularity due to widespread internet connectivity, the proliferation of smartphones, and substantial technological advancements. In the wake of COVID-19 and nationwide lockdown has accelerated the pace of digital education. A methodology or method of learning that uses technology and digital devices is known as digital education. This new technological advancement will assist any student in gaining knowledge and information from anywhere in the country. E-learning breaks down geographical barriers and ensures that everyone has equal access to education. It also allows for easy, rapid, on-the-go, and 24-hour access. It has created a more efficient and effective way to build new and better professional skills/knowledge through online learning. During the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning has emerged as the greatest option. As a result, the government's digital India vision is emerging as a critical tool for resolving the current COVID-19 crisis. Technology-based education is undeniably more transparent in every way. In response to the problem of colleges and institutions closing, the Indian government, as well as state governments and private players, have adopted appropriate measures. For students to continue learning, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has made many arrangements, including online portals and educational channels via Direct to Home TV and radios. Students use popular social media applications like Zoom, WhatsApp, Google Meet, Telegram, YouTube live, Facebook live, and others for online teaching and learning during lockdown. The digital initiatives of MHRD for secondary as well as higher education during Impact of COVID-19 on education in are listed as below:

- **PM e VIDYA:**

To ensure that every student has access to education during the pandemic, an integrated multi-pronged approach has been adopted. PM e-VIDYA, a comprehensive initiative for multi-mode education, was launched on 17th May, 2020, as part of the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan. PM e-VIDYA comprises all

digital/online/on-air initiatives related to education to enable multi-mode access to education.

- **DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing):**

DIKSHA is a nationwide school education platform that is accessible to all states and the central government for grades 1 to 12. It is accessible via a web site and a mobile application. It provides access to a wide range of curriculum-related e-content through a variety of use cases and solutions, including QR coded Energized Textbooks (ETBs), courses for teachers, quizzes, and more. It is the 'one nation; one digital platform' for school education. It has over 80,000 e-content items in multiple Indian languages, catering to Grades 1-12.

Vidya Daan was launched in April 2020 as a national content contribution program that leverages the DIKSHA platform and tools to seek and allow educational entities, private bodies, and individual specialists to contribute/donate e-learning resources for school education.

- **Access through TV channels- Swayam Prabha TV Channels:**

Swayam Prabha DTH channels are designed to assist and reach those who do not have internet access. There are 32 channels dedicated to broadcasting high-quality education programmes. On the SWAYAM portal, online MOOC courses related to NIOS (open schooling grades 9 to 12) have been uploaded; around 92 courses have begun, with 1.5 crore students enrolled. SWAYAM allows students and teachers to access all course modules, including text, videos, and assessment questions.

- **Extensive use of Radio, Community radio and Broadcasts:**

Radio broadcasting is being used for children in remote areas who are not online. 289 Community Radio Stations have also been used to broadcast content for NIOS for grades 9 to 12. A Podcast called ShikshaVani is being effectively used by learners of grades 9 to 12. It contains over 430 pieces of audio content for all subjects of grades 1 to 12.

- **For the differently-abled:**

One DTH channel is being operated specifically for hearing impaired students in sign language. Study materials in the Digitally Accessible Information System (DAISY) and sign language have been produced for visually and hearing impaired students, and both are available on the NIOS website/YouTube.

- **E-textbooks:**

E-textbooks can be accessed via the e-Pathshala web portal and mobile app (Android, iOS, Windows). More than 600 digital books including 377 e-textbooks (grades 1 to 12) and 3,500 pieces of audio and video content of NCERT are

available in the public domain in various languages (Hindi, English, Sanskrit and Urdu).

▪ **National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER):**

NROER is an open e-content repository. There are about 17,500 pieces of e-content available for all grades and disciplines.

▪ **PRAGYATA Guidelines on Digital Education:**

In New Delhi on July 14, 2020, Union Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank virtually unveiled the PRAGYATA guidelines on digital education. The guidelines recommend a cap on the screen time for students. Plan- Review- Arrange- Guide- Yak(talk)- Assign- Track- Appreciate are the eight steps of PRAGYATA's online/digital learning guidelines. These steps guide the planning and implementation of digital education step by step with examples. The guidelines outlines suggestions for administrators, school heads, teachers, parents and students on the following areas:

- Need assessment
- Concerns while planning online and digital education like duration, screen time, inclusiveness, balanced online and offline activities etc level wise
- Modalities of intervention including resource curation, level wise delivery etc.
- Physical, mental health and wellbeing during digital education
- Cyber safety and ethical practices including precautions and measures for maintaining cyber safety
- Collaboration and convergence with various initiatives

▪ **Manodarpan:**

Manodarpan is a government of India (GOI) initiative that intends to provide psychological support for students' mental health and well-being during the COVID outbreak and beyond. The Hon'ble Minister for Education launched the Manodarpan programme on July 21, 2020, and since then it has been addressing the needs of students, teachers, and families through its several activities.

National Toll-free Helpline (8448440632) has been set up to provide tele-counselling to students across schools, colleges and universities and their parents and teachers to address their mental health and psychosocial issues.

Under the Manodarpan programme, a series of Webinars and discussion sessions called 'Paricharcha' are held to reach out to students and all stakeholders with the goal of raising awareness about mental health and well-being challenges and strategies of dealing/coping with them. It provides a forum for anyone to seek psychosocial assistance from mental health specialists, counsellors, psychologists, and educators. Every day from 5-5:30 pm on the PM e-vidya channel, 'Sahyog' live

interactive sessions for students (classes VI-XII) are held with the goal of providing counsel for enhancing mental well-being among students.

Furthermore, to mitigate the effects of COVID-19, the Department of School Education and Literacy has allocated Rs. 818.17 crore to promote online learning through digital initiatives, and Rs. 267.86 crore for online teacher training to ensure ongoing professional development for teachers.

Impact of digitalisation in the field of education during COVID-19 in India:

Though the COVID-19 outbreak has had many adverse effects on schooling, yet the Indian educational institutions have accepted the challenges and are doing their utmost to give students with smooth support services during the pandemic. The Indian education system now has the opportunity to evolve from a traditional system to one that is more modern.

Positive effects include the following:

- The usage of digital technology to deliver education has accelerated during COVID-19. Educational institutions have shifted to a blended learning environment. It urged all instructors and students to learn more about technology. New methods of delivery and assessment of learning have created enormous opportunity for fundamental changes in curriculum development and pedagogy. It also provides access to a large group of learners at a time.
- A fresh possibility for collaborative teaching and learning has arisen. Faculty/teachers from all around the world can collaborate to benefit one other.
- The pandemic has created a massive rise in teleconferencing, virtual meetings, webinars and e-conferencing opportunities
- The epidemic prompted people to learn about and use digital technology, resulting in an increase in digital literacy.
- Learning materials are easily shared among students, and the related queries are resolved via e-mail, SMS, phone calls, and various social media platforms such as WhatsApp or Facebook.
- Educators and students are interacting with peers from all around the world. Students adapted to a global setting.
- Improved time management: During pandemics, students in online education are better able to manage their time.
- Most students favoured ODL mode during the epidemic because it supports self-learning and allows them to learn from a variety of resources while also tailoring their learning to their specific requirements.

Negative impacts include the following:

The sudden switch to online learning without any forethought — especially in countries like India, where the backbone for online learning was not ready and the curriculum was not prepared for such a format — has put majority of our children at risk of becoming passive learners and they seem to be losing interest due to low levels of attention span.

For a country like India, where 67 percent of the population lives in rural regions and barely half has access to the Internet, online schooling is a near-impossible step. The lack of electricity is a huge barrier to online education. According to a Ministry of Rural Development survey conducted in 2017-18, just 47% of Indian families have access to more than 12 hours of power each day, and more than 36% of Indian schools are without electricity. Due to a lack of funding and resources, some schools have even closed down. COVID-19 changed the dynamics of higher education, and while students who are privileged can still take advantage of online lectures, study material, and other resources, those belonging to harder luck are still struggling to attain even the bare minimum. Rural students have limited or no access to the Internet, and many of them may not be able to afford a computer, laptop, or smart mobile phone. This has created a digital divide among students. In India, the lockdown has caused a great deal of distress to students who are economically disadvantaged. Various reports suggest many students are unable to take advantage of online learning, which means those with better facilities have access to study materials, lectures online, and information while those without are unable to meet the bare minimum. While educated parents are helping their children throughout the pandemic, we must recognise that some illiterate parents are feeling helpless to assist their children in their schooling. Furthermore, not all teachers/students are adept at it, and not all of them were prepared for this abrupt shift from face-to-face to online learning. Most teachers just deliver lectures using video platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and others, which may not constitute true online learning in the absence of a specific online learning platform.

Suggestions:

In today's world, having access to technology and the internet is a must. As a result, digital capabilities and infrastructure must reach the most remote and impoverished regions to allow students to continue their education during pandemics. It is necessary to use taxpayer money to close the internet gap and ensure that students can continue to learn online. Teachers should be given internet and electronic device access training. State governments and private organisations should come up with solutions to the problem of digital education. The government and stakeholders should address some major issues associated with distance learning strategies, such as the availability and access to digital devices with internet connectivity, the need for safe learning spaces, developing capabilities for teachers, families, and students to operate and navigate digital devices, and engaging lesson plans for disabled students and other marginalised groups.

Conclusions:

To summarise, the COVID19 pandemic has shown us that change is inescapable. It has acted as a spur for educational institutions to grow and use platforms using previously unknown technologies. It was labelled a pandemic by the World Health Organization. This crisis put pressure on education systems all around the world, including India, and prompted educators to switch to an online teaching format overnight. To counteract the effects of COVID-19, the Indian government has taken numerous attempts to promote online learning through digital projects. However, the government faced a difficult problem in making a rapid move to online learning without prior planning, especially in a country like India, where the backbone for online learning was not ready and the curriculum was not planned for such a format. As a result, the government must address the educational flaws that were exposed during the COVID-19 crisis.

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