



Emerging Role and Issues of Online Education System in India

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Abstract: Conventional means of education were undeniably effective, but the online education system has also several benefits; in addition, it is the demand of the present time, where the schools/institutes/universities are closed for an uncertain period. In the current COVID pandemic situation, the online mode of education has been practicing to ensure continuity of education in our country. However, the lack of infrastructure and resources has been affecting the coverage of education facilities, especially among the rural and deprived population. It also acts as a barrier in ensuring inclusive education during this unpropitious situation. On the other hand, the online education system can improve the education rate among girls and physically challenged people. Online education can break the boundaries of time and space; furthermore, it provides a bundle of opportunities to explore artistic, scientific, and technological skills. By using online mode, the quality and transparency of the education system can also be enhanced. Overall, the online education system has its own challenges and opportunities. This paper aims to cover all the emerging issues and scopes of the online education system in India.

Keywords: Online education, COVID-19, Issues, opportunities, Positive aspect, India

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Background

In ancient times, education was based on expertise, experience, and functional skills learned from practical life, and each child was taught to lead a dignified social and personal life. It was the day-to-day knowledge and practice of one person that transformed into evidence-based education for all. It instills a high level of courage, dedication, tolerance, humility, a sense of serving and helping

others. The Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, and Bhagavad Gita were referred to and implemented to reach the solution or choose the right path. Scholars and Veterans from various streams have been imparting empirical education efficiently and effectively. At that time, India was called as 'Sone ki Chidiya'.

The effectiveness of traditional means can never be denied. However, online learning is an effective alternative to conventional means for imparting teaching skills and knowledge. Our country has been going through many changes with time, which leads to gradual modification in our education system. The current scenario of COVID-19 has almost entirely reshaped the global education system. It directs us towards the emergence of new technologies to fill the wide gap created between the actual and targeted education rates due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Widespread internet penetration is a prerequisite for the rapid spread of technologies. Fortunately, the new generation is effectively adapting to the digital world and reshaping themselves accordingly. Turning this challenging time into opportunities, we must convert every home into an education center itself with the help of a digital learning system. The struggle faced due to the non-availability of schools/institutions, educators, physical classrooms, and educative resources can be mitigated by promoting the digital classroom promptly.

Government Initiatives and E-class

Looking at the positive sight, the adverse situation arose due to the COVID-19 pandemic can be utilized to develop our existing capabilities to the fullest and build new ones to meet the necessity of the present condition. A pioneering initiative, Aarogya Setu was launched to track the status of the COVID-19 infected person of our country and alert the user accordingly. This user-friendly app is a step towards uniting the people of India to fight together against COVID-19 and follow the safe path of Digital India for the health and well-being of Indians. To ensure the momentum of the education sector, another government initiative, "Bharat Padhe Online" was launched, aimed to accelerate online education during the current pandemic situation of our country.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) had also launched a week-long campaign to gather the best minds of enthusiasts by providing an opportunity to the students/teachers/academicians to share their suggestions directly with the Hon'ble HRD Minister. As per the PIB press release, the campaign was started on 10th April 2020 and closed on 16th April 2020; received 3700 suggestions via Twitter and e-mail in just three days and was trending

in Twitter's top ten, reflects the cadence of the campaign's popularity and citizens' demand. As per government guidelines, most CBSE schools have started online classes and submitted e-content for most of the subjects on the DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing) platform of the MHRD. Teachers are trying to engage the students in various online activities, assignments, projects, and webinars to maximize the students' creativity. The MHRD has provided digital learning materials and opportunities through the SWAYAM portal.

This pandemic period can be best utilized by using digital means of education such as e-content/videos available on several online platforms, for instance, SWAYAM, e-Pathshala, NPTEL, Sodhaganga, etc. Nowadays, many established online platforms like Google Classroom, Byju's Classes, Unacademy, Vedantu, etc. that are rendering effective online education to children and youngsters. Swayam Prabha is a government-run program to provide free education through 32 high-quality educational DTH (Direct to Home) channels of MHRD across the country on a 24X7 basis. These channels have been broadcasting educational and curriculum-based programs on television at no recurring cost, and through these educational channels, a teacher can educate thousands of children simultaneously.

Current Issues and Drivers of Ignorance

As per the Annual Report (2016-17), the MHRD has outlined five objectives to strengthen the education system. These objectives include planned development to improve access and quality of educational institutions all over the country, promotion of gender equality, and social inclusion of disadvantaged groups such as SC/ST, minorities, and economically weaker sections of society. In the current COVID-19 situation, the lack of infrastructure and resources in our country is one of the main impediments to the accessibility of online education to the underprivileged population. Technical resources like smartphones, tabs, laptops, or desktops are also not economical for them; in addition, the internet facility also incurs a cost. The cherry on the cake is the non-availability of the essential requirement for an online education system i.e. lack of internet facility and poor network in rural and hilly areas. Comprehensive grounding of infrastructure is a necessary condition for providing uninterrupted internet and broadcasting services, especially in rural and hilly areas of India. In order to analyze the developmental issues of the online education system, it is necessary to understand the different problems faced by the teachers, wards, and their parents.

Children have been using various mobile apps to take advantage of the education facility. Despite the harsh weather of summer or winter, in villages and remote areas, the children have to sit on the terrace in search of the network. Understanding the weather conditions, teachers suggested using the recording option to listen the recorded class at their convenience. Moreover, the need of two-way communication is undeniable to mark the attendance, check assignments/homework, and clear their doubts in real-time.

Children are less interested in online education, and network issues make it vexatious; in addition, it does not fulfill the necessity of physical laboratory and practical work. In online education, it is difficult to maintain discipline along with the strength of attendance (Gallani, 2020). The awareness about education among the children in the villages has already been seen less. Despite the mid-day meal facility, taking the children to the school was becoming a daunting task. Ensuring children's education through online mode has become comparatively challenging as we cannot confirm whether children are actually participating and utilizing online education facilities. The drop-out rate has also been increasing as parents do not want to spend their time and money in vain. Keeping these obstacles in mind, teachers have been striving to find new pedagogy and simulation-based learning methods (Keengwe & Kidd, 2010).

In poor states, children do not have any offline or online resources for their education as many parents do not have smartphones. Furthermore, the need for smartphones depends on the number of children in the household because one phone can support one child's education at a time. They do not have access to e-content as per the current government rule. The e-content being sent to them is in the Hindi language, and parents can understand their regional language only. In deprived families, many parents and children do not understand the importance of education, and they are not even aware of e-content. There are many such houses in these villages where people cannot buy a television. Hence, they can not even use the DTH channel for education. There is no other support system available for imparting knowledge in the schools of rural India (Navaneeth and Siddiqui, 2020). During this pandemic, the government has been providing money directly to the children's bank account for buying books, clothes, sanitary pads, mid-day meals, etc., while funds have not been received timely in their bank accounts. The irony is that the poorest sections of society see children's schools as a mere source of income. Instead of buying books for their children, poor parents use the money for other purposes.

From the health and wellness perspective, the online education system can cause health-related problems in children, such as prolonged exposure

to screen can affect the children's eyes adversely. Periodic training should be given to children and parents to maintain the distance of the mobile screen from the eyes, use of earphones/headphones to mitigate its adverse impact on health.

National Policy on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in School Education (2012), by the Ministry of Human Resource Development: To formulate, catalyze, support, and maintain ICT and ICT-enabled activities and processes to improve access, quality, and efficiency of the school system. Many projects have been started in different states to fulfill the commitment of continuing education even in the adverse situation arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic. It seems that these name-shake projects are unable to consider and address the grassroots constraints of rural India and leave aside the issue of educational equality and inclusion. It shows that vigorous effort is needed to increase the education rate, not in numbers but in reality. To enhance education in these underprivileged areas, we can distribute some activity-based books and stationery kits with the help of COVID frontline workers or by using vans by following all safety measures. Radio can also be a good option (which is also available on basic phones) to ensure access to knowledge to these disadvantaged families. Priority should be given to the regional language to make them aware of the value of education and coronavirus. It is a God-given situation where we can examine the points of our ignorance at the individual and societal levels.

Positive Aspects and Creativity

The most important aspect of our National Education Policy, NCERT, CBSE, and other educational bodies is the advancement of practical skills and employment generation. The tendency to score high marks is being replaced by presentable and practical skills, where the world is now looking for collaborators, communicators, thinkers, analysts, leaders with creativity and excellence. We should emphasize the use of knowledge rather than just acquiring knowledge. The gap between the education provided by the institution and the education required in real life is widening. The majority of the youth are not doing their desired work. It acts as a hindrance to the development of both society and the nation. It is the best time to unite our hands to achieve the vision of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat'. Teachers, parents, and children can work together to expand and improve the online education system in India.

It is a golden opportunity for the teachers to upgrade themselves and the education system of India. Rather than teaching and learning, the focus

should be on learning outcomes. Online education, self-creation practical course videos, e-content, and expertise in pedagogy can act as a game-changer method for teaching during this time. An additional advantage of this online teaching-learning process is that by video recording, a learner can watch the classes anytime, anywhere, and repeatedly as per equipment availability and their convenience (Muthuprasad *et al.* 2021). In addition, we can save the cost of paper with the help of e-content and e-book; hence, also protect the environment.

Even in adverse environmental situations, children can be taught using online education. Despite extreme summer or winter, children can study throughout the year with the help of online education. During the summer or winter vacation in the plain or hilly area, children's skills can be enhanced by organizing various educational activities.

The importance of online education also enhances because parents who do not want to send their girls out of the house; can also provide education to their daughter indoors only. Online education will prove to be helpful in promoting the education rate among girls, despite the stereotypes in society. It can also act as a support for physically challenged people, who are unable to walk or travel. Online education also saves traffic expenses because children do not need to go anywhere to get an education. The transparency of the education system can be increased through online mode because it is accessible to everyone, even the parents can watch the teachers while teaching their ward.

The parents can encourage and provide emotional support to the ward for developing the habit of self-study and performing activities by showing online available videos for artistic skills. Parents can also take the initiative to involve children in online activities to develop their communication skills and sharpen their literary talent. Siblings should be promoted to help each other to perform these activities. Patriotic shows like Sambidhan, debate shows, and parliamentary activities broadcasted on Lok Sabha TV and Rajya Sabha TV can develop leadership quality and team spirit among the youth. DD Kishan shows are also a promotion-deserving channel that can create the interest in children toward the present national issues and draw the attention of next-generation for generating sustainable solutions for long-term food security. Some mythological shows like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Upanishad Ganga were re-telecasted on Doordarshan, were profoundly applauded by the viewers. Such religious shows can be used to improve the moral education of the people. It can enlighten our core and radiate enthusiasm even during adverse social situations.

Many online business courses are readily available on various websites for learning other languages, data analytics, robotics, machine learning, web designing, interior designing, fashion designing, etc. Nowadays, children are exploring online activities classes for music, dance, drama, singing, sports, art, drawing, painting, writing poetry and stories, and many more. Taking pictures or videos of important information/facts and posting or sharing it are intriguing ways of channeling knowledge and skills. During the COVID-19 situation, we got enough time that is nothing less than a boon to pursue our dreams and take a deep dive into hobbies and interests.

Many videos are floating online for touting physical exercises, meditation, and yoga that are beneficial to keep ourselves fit, strong and improve our immunity. It is also propitious to enhance our memory power, peace, and concentration of mind. A peaceful mind can address a problem better with high creativity and patience. A new idea can click in our minds for creating new products and services even while doing household chores. Various online education platforms can function as the source of knowledge, and our own home can act as a laboratory. It is the golden time to develop your creativity and artistic skills by being with your whole family. Locked inside the walls due to COVID-19 can also show us another door to innovation and put us in the queue of inventors. We can turn the 21st century into an era of the digital revolution on a global scale.

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