Education in the Time of Covid-19: How Teacher and Students are Coping

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Abstract - **The novel corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19), originated in Wuhan city of China, has spread rapidly around the world, sending billions of people into lockdown. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus epidemic a pandemic. In light of rising concern about the current COVID-19 pandemic, a growing number of universities across the world have either postponed or canceled all campus events such as workshops, conferences, sports and other activities. Universities are taking intensive measures to prevent and protect all students and teachers and other staffs from highly infectious disease. Faculty members are already in the process of transitioning to online teaching platforms.**

Index Terms - **Coronavirus, COVID-19, epidemic, pandemic.**

INTRODUCTION

The novel corona virus disease (COVID-19) emerged at the end of December 2019 in Wuhan city China. The initial outbreak of COVID-19 in Wuhan spread rapidly, affecting Wuhan other parts of China. The authorities in Wuhan took unprecedented steps and locked down the city on January 23,2020, to lower the risk of further disease transmission. Later on, same measures were taken in other places in China. Within a few weeks, cases of COVID-19 were detected in several other countries and soon, it became a global threat. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the corona virus epidemic a pandemic (World Health Organization [WHO],2020). As of March 29, the virus had spread to more than 177 countries and infected more than 722,435 patients, resulting in more than 33,997 deaths. Regions severely affected major outbreaks include China, Europe, Iran, South Korea, and the United States (Khachef HH, Chahrour MA, Sammouri J, Salhab HA, Eldeen Makki B,2020). On March 13, the WHO stated that Europe had become the new epicenter of the pandemic (WHO,2020).

China took aggressive action and succeeded in reducing new cases. Unfortunately, this reduction was not the case in other parts of the World, including Iran, Italy, the US, India, other European countries (Remuzzi A, Remuzzi G, 2020). To respond to COVID-19, many countries have now introduced travel restrictions (both inward and outward) with intention to prevent the spread of the epidemic. Public health experts and government officials are taking several measures, including social distancing, self-isolation, or quarantine; strengthening health facilities to control the disease; and asking people to work at home (Bedford J, Enria D, Giesecke J, et al. 2020). Several countries have announced the closure of gyms, museums, movie theaters, swimming pools, and places with large gatherings, inclusive of educational institutions, to fight this invisible enemy. Preliminary evidence indicated that only elderly people were getting affected and children are less susceptible to the virus. However, doctors reported few cases of virus among children (Liu W, Zhang Q, Chen J, et al.2020). The virus should be kept away from the pediatric population because it is difficult to stop a sick child to play with friends and siblings and to hug his / her mother and family members. Efforts to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus among the younger and adult populations has promoted widespread closure of schools, colleges, universities, and other educational institutions in many countries (sahu P, 2020).

The COVID- 19 pandemic has forced the Government to take drastic measures that affect how people interact with each other. In many countries around the world, individuals are required to reduce physical contact to others outside one's household (social distancing; Anderson, Heesterbeek, Klinkenberg, & Hollingsworth, 2020). Additional measures include curfews, quarantines, and closing of non-essential stores, religious places, schools and universities.

COVID-19 has forced universities across India, and the World indeed, to suspend physical classrooms and shift to online classes. The nationwide COVID-19 lockdown has forced K-12 schools and universities to close and send their students to home which, in turn, has impacted over 91% of the world's student population. The closure has placed unprecedented challenges on governments, institutions, teachers, parents and care givers around the world. As many universities declared a suspension of classroom teaching and switched to online teaching, the lives of students have changed drastically. While social distancing measures may successfully slow down the spread of the infection and relieve the public health system (Glass, Glass, Beyeler, & Min, 2006), they may eventually increase the social isolation of students and affect their mental health. Being under a lot of pressure to perform academically, students are prone to developing mental health problems (Mikolajczyk et al.,2008)

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, so do the risks we face. The COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped at national boarders. It has affected people regardless of nationality, level of education, income or gender. But the same has not been true for its consequences, which have hit the most vulnerable hardest. Education is no exception. Students from privileged backgrounds, supported by their parents and eager and able to learning opportunities. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds often remained shut out when their schools shut down. This crisis has exposed the many inadequacies and inequities in our education systems – from access to the broadband and computers needed for online education, and supportive environments needed to focus on learning, up to the misalignment between resources and needs.

 The lockdowns in response to COVID-19 have interrupted conventional schooling with nationwide school closures in most countries. While the educational community have made concerted efforts to maintain learning continuity during this period, children and students have had to rely more on their own resources to continue learning remotely through the Internet, television or radio. Teachers also had to adopt to new pedagogical concepts and modes of delivery of teaching, for which they may not have been trained. In particular, learners in the most marginalized groups, who don't have access to digital learning resources or lack the resilience and engagement to learn on their own, are at risk of falling behind. Covid-19 has forced universities across India, and the world indeed, to suspend physical classrooms and shift to online classes. In India, while this transition has been smooth for most private universities, the public ones are still adapting. There have also been debates on the nature of classes, and the future of examination and evaluation- whether they could be conducted online or not. While faculty grapples with new ways of managing this sudden transition to online education, students are left clinging on to their mobile phones and computer screens. If the lockdowns were to continue for some times, how would higher education be affected? what are some of the deeper issues that requires introspection? And what does this mean for the students going forward?

First response: Going digital

As soon as the Covid-19 crisis broke out in India, the larger universities like Delhi University (DU) and Jawaharlal Neheru University (JNU) announced the suspension of classes until March 31. While others waited to see what would happen next, they started exploring online classes. The IITs also shifted to conducting online classes and sharing study materials and audio files with students over the internet.

Transition to digital

Online education is conducted in two ways. The first is through the use of recorded classes, which, when opened out to public, are referred to as Massive Open Online Course (MOOCs). The second one is via live online classes conducted as webinars or Zoom sessions. Universities require high-speed internet and education delivery platforms or learning management systems, besides stable IT infrastructure and faculty members who are comfortable teaching online. Students also need high-speed internet and computers/mobiles to attend these sessions or watch pre-recorded classes.

The world as we know it has changed in the blink of an eye. Schools closed overnight, students were liberated from schools (but confined to their homes), and parents had to grapple with keeping children productive at home. In the stress of lockdown, handwashing and tracking the global spread of virus, no one has paid heed to the sudden stress on that often-neglected group – teachers. With schools remaining closed for an extended duration came the reality of

online teaching. Suddenly, it was no longer a buzzword or a fancy edtech term. Now everyone has to do it. The problem is few know how. There has been a huge surge in search phrases like "how to teach online", "best online teaching platforms", and "online teaching techniques".

Ground reality: Teachers who are intimidated by technology now have to take the bull by its horns. For many who are proficient at planning and teaching in the traditional classroom, planning for an online setting requires some re-learning. Finding the right online teaching platform is just the first step. Learning how to use the various features correctly is important. But using a platform and its features to teach effectively and ensure that all students are indeed learning is paramount. But more than anything, online classrooms have brought up the issues of classroom management. If teachers thought they had enough trouble keeping their classrooms in order earlier, that is nothing compared to the woes of remote classrooms. It is very sad to hear long-term educators asking for help with managing students online.

There are many platforms created to enable online education in India. These are supported by the ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), and the department of technical education. There also are initiatives like e-PG Pathshala (e-content), SWAYAM (Online courses for teachers), and NEAT (enhancing employability). Other online platforms aim to increase connectivity with institutions, and accessibility to content. They include the National Project on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL), National Knowledge Network (NKN), and National Academic Depository (NAD), among others.

Technology enables; it can limit, too

Dines singh, former vice-chancellor of DU, strongly advocates higher education utilizing the full power of technology. According to him, technology can enable different teaching methodologies, and also allow teaching a large number of people across the country. "In a country like India, we don't have enough teachers or easy access to good institutions- we should, therefore, adopt a focused, systematic program of using the power of technology to enable learning," he says. Singh says there may be some merits to face-to-face teaching, but maintains it is not necessary, given the number of online tools and innovative methods of teaching available to enable learning. However, while technology is enabling, it can also be limiting, especially in India, where basic access is a challenge. Not every student has a computer or fast streaming internet at home. This leads to issues with attendance and participation in online sessions.

Not just about classes

Many feels that online education is not as easy as speaking into microphone at one end and connecting a laptop or phone and listening in on the other. There are other challenges with this form of education which are faced at both ends of the spectrum- students as well as faculty.

Going forward

What does online education mean for the future? Author Mukul Kesavan, who teaches history at Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia University, highlights the problem of inequality, underlining that only some of his students are able to attend online lectures. "one way to get arounds is if you can create class emails and reading lists, and send recording of lectures. But this is not an experiment that can be sustained in the long term without excluding everyone coming from towns or villages where there is an obvious problem of technology access." He adds that the advantages of online education is for universities like Delhi's Indira Gandhi National Open University (Ignou), which offers distance teaching and is able to effectively utilises can enforce Zoom teaching, if classes are taken to nodal places, and the institution takes the responsibility to connect students there, this can work well. But the downside is that, if done badly, it will be another legitimisation of bed, meaningless online education." Higher education is seldom about exams, classes, or grades. Rather, it is about an experience that prepares a student to become a functioning member of the work force, with requisite knowledge, skills, and life experiences. Students have complained about lack of clarity going forward and what the plan of action would entail, especially with respect to examinations, results, internship, and placements. While most institution of higher education are trying their best in this situation, nobody knows what will happen next.

Most educators across institutions agree that there is a need to invest in creating standardized online

education platforms, and not using apps and Google hangouts only; and to train both students and teachers. Others highlight the necessity to introspect on the nature of these platforms and how students are taught using different online tools and methods, while keeping accessibility and equity challenges in mind. There is also the need to understand all this across academic disciplines and institutions. The way ahead can be charted only if we take into account the diverse views of experts and incorporate all the lessons learnt from the summer of 2020.

Online education for teachers
Advantages:
- Allows innovative methods of teaching with the help of technology and online tools.
- Allows reaching out to a large number of students across geographies.
- Especially useful for distance learning.

Disadvantages:
- Online teaching takes time and practice
- There is little consensus on how students can be evaluated in a fair manner.
- Inability to have a face-to-face connect with students and facilitate free conversations, discussion, and mentoring.
- Inability to reach all students because of technological limitations.
- Lack of knowledge about online teaching.

Online education for students
Advantages:
- The ability to learn using different online tools and methods.
- No disruption in learning because of the pandemic.
- Listening to recorded and live conversations and working at their own speed.

Disadvantages:
- Lack of free-flowing conversations, debates, and discussion.
- Technological difficulties related to weak devices or access to the internet.
- Getting used to learning and being evaluated online.

- Studying while living at home, with family and other distractions.

Risk and opportunities for education in the face of COVID-19
With every crisis comes deep challenges and opportunities for transformation- past education crisis have shown that it is possible to build back better. The various risks and challenges are:
1.Distance learning will reinforce teaching and learning approaches that we know do not work well.
Many countries are shifting to distance learning approaches, whether through distributing physical packets of materials for students or through using technology to facilitate online learning. And there are real risks because many of these approaches can be very solitary and didactic when the teacher just asking students to sit and quietly watch videos, read documents online, or click through presentations-that is really dull. The worst form of learning is to sit passively and listen, and this may be the form that most students will receive during school closures. It serves no one well, especially those who are the furthest behind.

2.Educators will be overwhelmed and unsupported to do their jobs well.
Teachers had little or no notice about their schools closing and shifting to online learning- this can be challenging for anybody. They have shared that they are overwhelmed with all sorts of material and products, and we are seeing educators begin to push back and request help filtering through all the resources to find those are quality. At the same time, teachers are just like the rest of us in that they are experiencing this strange new world as mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. They are trying to deal with their individual lives and take care of their kids and find new ways to make sure that learning continues.

3.The protection and safety of children will be harder to safeguard.
Schools have safeguard measures in place to ensure that predators toward children, such as pedophiles, cannot access young people. Now, once you move to online learning in a home environment, you cannot safeguard against this. People have to be mindful about the design of online learning so that bad

individuals do not get to children outside of their home.

4.School closures will widen the equity gaps.
Over the last decade or so, progress has been made in the number of students who have access to devices and connectivity, making this move to online learning possible. At the same time, not every child has access to digital devices or internet connectivity at home, and we need to ensure those kids get access to learning resources as well. This means that learning resources need to be available on every kind of device and it means, for kids who do not have access, we still need to find a way to reach them.

5.Poor experiences with ed-tech during the pandemic will make it harder to get buy-in later for good use of ed-tech.
We know that some students who use ed-tech during the pandemic will have a poor experience because they are not used to it. Some people will say," during the virus we tried the ed-tech enabled learning approaches, it was terrible, and look at my test scores." Yes, this will happen. People's test scores will be impacted. People will become unhappy because the mental health effects of being isolated will be profound. We must be prepared for that. Those poor experiences are really important to learn what does and does not work.

Opportunities to Leverage
1.Blended learning approaches will be tried, tested, and increasingly used.
We know that the more engaging learning styles are ones that are more interactive, and that face-to-face learning is better than 100 percent online learning. We also know blended learning can draw on the best of both worlds and create a better learning experience than one hundred percent face to face learning.

2.Teachers and schools will receive more respect, appreciation, and support for their important role in society.
It will be easier to understand that schools are not just buildings where students go to learn, and that teachers are irreplaceable. There is something magic about that in person connection, that bond between teachers and their students. Having that face-to-face connection with learners and being able to support them across their unique skills- that is very hard to replicate in a distance learning environment. Also, many students access critical resources at school, such as meals, clothing, and mental health support that may not be as widely available at home.

3.Quality teaching and learning materials will be better curated and more widely used.
Educators are looking to other educators as well as trusted sources to help curate high-quality online learning tools. At National Geographic, we have curated collections for k-12 learners in our resource library. We have created a new landing page that allows educators, parents, and caregivers to access our free materials quickly, and inspire young people. But it is not just teachers struggling – it's parents and other caregivers who are trying to bring learning to life.

4.Teacher collaboration will grow and help improve learning.
As a profession, we come out of this crisis stronger by collaborating and working together. There are many platforms for teachers, including coronavirus – related resources and there are other platforms too, such as Teachers pay Teachers and Khan academy, where teachers can see what others have done. A teacher could say, "well rather than record a video with the instructional element I need, I might be able to find someone who has done that really well already." One of the most important things teachers can do now is draw on what others are doing: from community online, share the burden, and make things a bit easier.

5.This crisis will help us come together across boundaries.
We would be remiss if we did not take away a greater sense of empathy for each other- the idea that we can work through anything together- from this crisis. I think it is an opportunity for the education sector to unite, forge connections across countries and continents, and truly share what works in a global way.

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