



Implication and challenges of the online mode of learning in the Covid-19 pandemic

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Abstract

Covid-19 has jolted the global economy with a pervasive impact on almost all the sectors, including education. Online learning which came as a panacea for the crisis is increasingly seen as a new paradigm in education. Although online education cannot replace classroom education due to the personalized nature of attention and face to face interactions, it can be an effective supplement to the brick-and-mortar model of education. However, we need to reconstruct and restructure the current pedagogy to seamlessly integrate online learning into mainstream education. It not only needs to take cognizance of different learning pace of students and develop customized solutions for them but the concerns of increased screen time, anxiety and stress triggered due to the unavailability of the resources required for this mode of learning also need to be addressed.

Keywords: panacea, anxiety, resources, pedagogy, integration, cognizance

Introduction

The current health crisis i.e. Covid-19, which has resulted in almost half of the humanity being confined to their houses in unprecedented situations of anxiety, stress and survival, is one of the most significant crises of contemporary history. It has had an extremely high impact on the political, economic and social systems of all the countries and in turn on the education systems, involving people of all ages. According to a report presented by UNESCO, the pandemic will adversely affect over 290 million students across 22 countries due to the closure of schools in the wake of lockdown. Closure of academic institutions has a catastrophic impact on the world of academics and on the society, as a whole. Millions of students across the globe have been driven out of their school/college/university spaces. However extended school closures would not only weaken the fundamentals of the students but it would also lead to the loss of human capital as well as economic opportunities in the long run. Its impact will be more profound in countries like India, where education is already grappling with low learning outcomes and a high dropout rate. Educational units are trying hard to find options to deal with this challenging situation. Along with other social, economic and psychological effects of it, the pandemic has transformed the century's old 'chalk-talk' teaching method to the one driven by technology. This significant change in the mode of the delivery of education has forced the policy makers to find out ways to ensure inclusive e- learning solutions while tackling with the digital divide.

While discussing the ways out to deal with the current crises, the present paper aims at highlighting the challenges that the educators and the students are facing in the online mode of education.

The choices we make in our fight against Covid-19 have profound psychological consequences for all of us. Through this paper I also want to share the psychological and social implications of this mode of learning, which might otherwise

remain unnoticed, especially, in a scenario, when this is the only option left for imparting education.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the research paper are as under:

1. To study either online learning is Panacea in coming era.
2. To Highlight problems of the online mode of learning
3. To study about problem of implication online mode of learning.

Online Learning as a Panacea

There are several arguments associated which have proved e-learning as an effective mode of learning. First of all is the accessibility of this mode- online mode of learning is easily accessible and can even reach to rural and urban areas. It is considered to be relatively a cheaper mode of education- in terms of the lower cost of transportation, accommodation and the overall cost of institution based learning. Flexibility is another important aspect of online learning, as a learner can schedule or plan his/her time for the completion of online course according to his/her convenience.

Through this mode students are free to learn anytime and anywhere and hence they can develop the necessary new skills as per their needs and requirements in the process which leads to lifelong learning. This severe outbreak of Corona virus disease has made us add one more argument in favor of this mode of learning that online learning serves as a panacea in the time of crises. Furthermore, online teaching can make the teaching learning process more student-centered and innovative. In the current scenario, online mode of learning is no longer an option but it has turned into a necessity. While understanding the need of the hour many universities around the world have fully digitalized their operations. In other words online learning is emerging as a *victor ludorum* amidst this crisis.

Challenges of the New Mode of Learning

In order to adapt to the changes in a short period, there is too much of stress on the educational institutions. The reputation of the institutions is on the stake and under scrutiny. Since the shift from face to face lectures to online classes is the only possible solution and how well an institute maintains the quality of education through a new mode amidst this crisis, would exhibit the adapting qualities of that particular educational institute. It is not at all possible for any educational institute to transform its entire college curriculum into an online resource overnight. Converting the teaching material into online notes within a short time has been a challenge for the teachers. (Veena, 2020) ^[7]

Distance, scale and personalized teaching and learning are the three biggest challenges for online teaching. Innovative solutions by institutions can only help us deal with this pandemic. In a scenario when people are struggling for their survival (even for their two times meals) finding ways to get education through a new mode tends to take a back seat. Nevertheless, engaging the young minds in creative pursuit is as much a necessity as providing them a healthy, nutritious and an immunity building meal. In times when online mode of learning has become a necessity, talking about its implications and challenges may seem to be a futile exercise but it is not completely irrelevant. Rather efforts should be made to make more and more people aware of the social and psychological implications of this mode of learning so that steps can be taken to mitigate these effects, which otherwise may prove to be hazardous for the wellbeing of the society as a whole. Online mode of learning, as is mentioned earlier, is considered to be easily accessible but in reality things have proved to be contradictory.

In a survey conducted by Maharashtra State Council of Education Research and Training i. e. MSCERT, in collaboration with UNICEF, it is found that only 50% of the students, studying in govt. and aided schools, across Maharashtra from classes 1 to VIII have access to online learning. Around 59% have access to smart phones and 57% have internet connectivity. The survey has also revealed that 72.2% parents who are not able to access online mode of learning for their children do not have access to smart phones. Accessibility to laptops or desktops is negligible, which is only 0.8%. There is further significant difference in access to online learning on the basis of –the location of the students i.e. urban/rural and the children with special needs. These are the facts and findings about the state which is not at all considered as backward or underdeveloped. There are many parts of our country in which people are still struggling for their basic necessities and owning a smart phone with an internet connection for the purpose of online learning is still a distant dream. Only one device shared by the entire family, lack of digital skills on the part of the parents to access the reading material, issues regarding recharge of phone/internet facility, connectivity problem, especially, in remote blocks, children getting distracted on devices (playing video games on cell phones), material not being available in their medium of instruction (Urdu, Gujarati or Tamil etc.), including the lack of the environment for conducive learning at home (the size of the house/location of the house/many members in the family etc.), are found to be the barriers in accessing online learning. Attending online classes requires a quiet space or room where in you can focus completely on your learning, which becomes really difficult to manage in a small house and with younger siblings. (Madeline 2020) Apart

from this the difficulties associated with modern technology range from downloading errors, issues with installation, log in problems and problems with audio and video and so on. As a result of these distractions and possibly having additional responsibilities, time management, which is an important aspect of online learning, becomes more challenging for the teachers as well as the students

Implications of Online Mode of Learning

The main impact of online mode of learning is the psychological implications on the students, teachers and even parents too, the screen time has increased manifold. Long hours spent in front of desktops or laptops, and less physical movement have had adverse effects on the body and mind both and have undoubtedly contributed to emotional and psychological disorders like – anxiety, stress, boredom, insomnia and mood swings etc. Parents who have to take care of more than one child and that too at different developmental stages, the struggle is even more. It becomes not only difficult for them to provide an independent device to each one of them but they are also unable to help them in using it as they have to pay attention to their own work too. In that case the child lags behind and may even become the victim of depression. The psychological wellbeing of the children is definitely a concern in the current situation. Some subjects are much harder to transfer online. The screen used in this mode of learning actually creates an emotional remove which makes it difficult to have back and forth dialogue between multiple people, and at times the teacher may fail to involve all the students in the discussion, which may lead to communication gap between teacher and students.

According to by Philip Yaffe in his article, “The 7% Rule: Fact, Fiction or Misunderstanding” that 93% of the communication is non-verbal. The online mode of learning that makes students communicate through gadgets only, tends to miss out on this 93% of non-verbal communication as the only communication possible in this mode is through the words- written or spoken. Online classes require significantly more motivation and attention. In this educational setting, creativity, which is one of the most important aspects of learning, is at stake. Actually, it is the unexpected and unplanned interactions in the class room setting which fuel creativity. In a traditional classroom environment a student learns to deliver critique through uncomfortable eye contact or to negotiate a room full of voices and opinions that create friction with his own voice, which is quite missing in this new mode of learning. The absence of these interactions coupled with restrictions on physical meetings, make students lose their interest. Another research shows that the boredom displays low self – control. (Mugon, Struk and Danckert, 2018) ^[3] Therefore someone who gets quickly bored while studying at home has low self-control and such students are unable to arrange, guide, regulate and direct their behavior in a positive direction. The findings show that anxiety for the future, in the middle and the lower economic groups i.e. economically vulnerable families, is more significant than the fear in the middle and upper economic groups. Students are more anxious about their parents’ income as the stability of the income is an issue and hence they are not able to focus on their learning and are unable to arrange for the money to purchase internet quota for their online classes. The significant imbalance of economic, cultural and educational resources between rural and urban area is also

the cause of concern and anxiety. Students living in the rural areas are not able to generate revenue and are unable to do some additional work to supplement their income and hence they are completely dependent on their parents for the resources. Thus teaching and learning activities too have become factors which are contributing to the stress these days. Finding new ways of teaching, new assessment methods, uncertainties and lack of equipment's and learning new skills, all these are adding to the anxiety among the teachers. Educators lack adequate tools, training and resources and are unable to create an inclusive and innovative learning environment for the learners. Assessment and evaluation of students' performance is another issue of concern for the educators. It becomes difficult for the teachers to monitor how the students are taking their online exams as there are no ways to ensure that students are not cheating during these tests. The lab tests, practical and performance tests are difficult to conduct online. Just as economic recessions cause great inequalities, one of the most tangible consequences of this pandemic is to create or risk creating a wide gap between the learners. Apart from strong internet connections and equipment's, learning online requires stronger motivation than learning face to face and some home environments do not favor this mental availability. We also cannot ignore the potentially excluded, migrants and students with disabilities. In order to include all of them to the main stream we will have to create situations and environment for universal access to education at all stages of life. Inadequate information, lack of in-person contact with classmates, friends, teachers and relatives, bored, stressed, afraid of being exposed to viruses, hoaxes and worsening financial conditions have led to anxiety and depression among the learners. Lack of personal space of home and family financial lose have more problematic and enduring effects on them. Thus this pandemic carries not only the risk of death from a viral infection but also the psychological stress for the people throughout the world. (Xiao, 2020) ^[8]

Suggestions and Recommendations

To suggest that education begins and ends with a screen would be to deny the social aspects of learning. General skills, emotional intelligence and creativity are equally important. New forms of education will need to be invented. The role of the learner and the teacher will have to be re-defined in the new mode of learning. In short new learning environment, which requires resources and investment, needs to be devised for the delivery of high quality and inclusive education in the current scenario. It is not just a matter of couple of months but the situation seems getting worse each day so if the students who are not been able to attend their online classes would probably miss out on their education for almost a whole year. This may lead to a big gap in their academic progress, a gap which would not only be difficult to fill but would also lead to frustration and anxiety among the deprived youth. Such anxiety if not taken care of on time may prove to be dangerous for the peace and harmony of the society. Therefore, the policies regarding the entrance exams, competitive exams etc. should be reconsidered and a big chunk of students who could not continue with their education for one or the other reasons, through this new mode, should not be left out. Inclusive learning solutions for the most vulnerable and marginalized need to be developed. The current pedagogical methods should be integrated with e - learning modes to build a unified learning system so that the

detrimental effects of this mode of learning can be curbed and only then it may prove to be a panacea in its true sense.

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