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Impact of the COVID-19 on Higher Education: Optometry of Indian Students and Faculties towards Online Teaching Learning Practice

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ABSTRACT: The outbreak of COVID-19 raised numerous questions on the interactions between the occurrence of new infections, the environment, climate and health. Face-to-face higher education institutions moved towards an urgent and unplanned online teaching. After having closed one of the processes that has had the most significant impact on universities, the time has come to reflect and draw conclusions that will serve to face these institutions' future. The mindset of students and faculties towards online teaching learning practice. In this response, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of Covid-19 on the higher education and its teaching-learning approach.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the fundamental rights of humanity. As presented in the United Nations' (2019) fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), everyone must have access to an inclusive, equitable quality education because education enables socioeconomic mobility upward and is a key to escaping poverty. COVID-19 disease has had a devastating effect on the educational activity that could have very harmful consequences for future generations, never before so many Youngers were out of the educational centers at the same time, causing more significant gaps between who have enough economic support and access to the technologies and those who are more vulnerable and marginalized**.** Furthermore, education of more than 1.6 billion students across 191 countries has been severely disrupted by the closure of the academic institutions. In the present situation, Covid-19 has an increasing impact on the global higher education sectors . Institutions and their faculties have rushed to convert their teaching-learning approach, including their curriculum, to an online environment . It was a test of organizational agility and initially it was focused on transitioning content to an online educational environment, and not necessarily on online pedagogy . Moreover, it is also a demonstration of the socially advanced and non-advanced learners, and also that of the adversely affected in terms of poorly resourced institutions where limited resources, skills, technology and internet facilities had a major impact on their academic response .

1.1 Review of literature

After, the outbreak of pandemic, the main requirement was they have to be trained themselves to support their natural talents. Besides, the needy thing was to have growth mindset of all the educational stakeholders reaching to the conclusion that the best way to be encouraged via online education system. It was a kind of growth mind set to overcome the current health and economic crisis led by pandemic 2020.

The Digital Divide in India

Attending online classes requires long hours of internet, peaceful space and one device/ phone dedicated to each student in a family, might not be affordable for everyone. In a country like India, as all students do not belong to the same socio-economic background and have to take care of domestic chores, family members and children, managing with limited space in the house, managing with a limited budget and poor connectivity in rural areas etc. may cause them to deal with discomfort, frustration and shame. Thus, according to Sarkar (2020), online classes have added to the already existing feelings of vulnerability among students. According to the Key Indicators of Household Social Consumption on Education in India report, based on the 2017-18 National Sample Survey, less than 15% of rural Indian households have Internet (as opposed to 42% urban Indian households). A mere 13% of people surveyed (aged above five) in rural areas — just 8.5% of females — could use the Internet. The

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poorest households cannot afford a smartphone or a computer (The Indian Express, June 8, 2020). The digital divide has not only led to the exclusion of students from poor and marginalized backgrounds from digital learning but also pushed many underprivileged students towards depression and death. For instance, In the Indian state of Kerala, a 14 girl committed suicide as she was unable to join online classes (The Hindu, June 11, 2020). A 16-year-old boy (class 10 student), from a very poor family, took his life because he did not have a smartphone to attend online classes and examinations organized by his school in the Chirang district of Assam in India (The Hindustan Times, June 24, 2020) . A 10th standard girl student, committed suicide at Bali in 7 West Bengal because she had not been able to attend online classes and was afraid of failing her exams (Dalit Camera, June19, 2020). Thus, the pandemic has exposed the deeply rooted inequality and hierarchy between the rich and poor in the Indian education system. It can be argued that the digital divide negatively affects the enrollment in higher education institutes and lack of digital access further pushes out students from colleges and universities in India.

Understanding the Digital Divide:

The purpose of understanding the concept of the digital divide is to understand how accessing the internet and the impact of the use of the internet is deeply rooted in the social conditions of a students' day to day life. There are two major perspectives on the issues of the digital divide. One being the socio-economic aspects which take into consideration age, race, education, and gender. For example, Tien and Fu (2008) examine the divide by doing research on the major socio-economic factor that affects the utilization of computers by the students of Taiwan who are undergraduates. Keil (2005) points out another perspective which

considers a divide in the form of the digital generation gap (Rye, 2008). The second perspective involves spatial variations. This kind of research can focus on rural-urban dimensions. For instance, Raju (2004) mentions that a majority of the population in rural areas are excluded from the fast digital development in India (Rye, 2008). According to Wilson (2006) financial, physical, content, cognitive, design, production, political and institutional access are eight different aspects of the digital divide. Livingstone (2004) points out another approach, which focuses on the concept of digital literacy- handling and understanding of the same. Warschauer (2003) argues that accessing online information does not have to do much with the Internet, but definitely has to do with the cultural, economic, political and linguistic contexts that give shape to the meaning of the internet in people's lives. The inequality does not exist in the digital but it exists in the social and this concept contains the inherent constraint of the material orientation (Warschauer, 2003; Rye, 2008). The focus is on how one uses the technology. There is a digital divide between those students who have access and have not accessed to the new technology. Between these two groups, there is a gap which divides the privilege from the underprivileged and the poor from the rich. Thus, there is a need to bridge the gap and enable the underprivileged to join the group of the privileged and rich.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses various methods of research in order to analyze the access of online education amongst Students in and after the covid-19 pandemic. This study is quantitative and qualitative in nature with the usage of both explorative and descriptive approaches. Opinions of respondents that were taken during discussion via video conferences are incorporated in the study. Some responses were calculated in percentages vividly. This study has explored the knowledge, practice and adoption of online education system in and after Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.

III. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HIGHER EDUCATION

An economic recession could impact HEIs in various ways like decrease in employment opportunities for university graduates who are likely to enter the job market in the next few months, possible delays or inability of students in paying tuition fees and education-related other expenses, 4 and government's inability to meet commitments to public-funded institutions as per the requirements. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) estimates that Covid-19 may cause the global economy to shrink by nearly 1% by the end of 2020, while the International Labor Organization (ILO) projects an increase in global unemployment of between 5.3 million and 24.7 million, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) projects a 13% to 32% global trade decline this year (Tripathi & Amann, 2020). The changes in student behavior towards the mode and preference of particular degree programs might become a significant impact after the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the

impact would vary from context to context, the overall impact on higher education is likely to be quite significant (Tripathi & Amann, 2020). The International Association of Universities (IAU, 2020) survey also indicates that the Covid-19 has had an impact on international student mobility at 89% of HEIs. The type of impact is diverse and varies from institution to institution, but everywhere it has been negative.

As far as research is concerned, 80% of HEIs reported that research has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic at their institutions. The most common impact of Covid-19 has been the cancelling of international travel (at 83% of HEIs) and the cancellation or postponement of scientific conferences (81% of HEIs). Moreover, scientific projects are at risk of not being completed at a bit more than half of HEIs (52%). The IAU Global Survey also reveals that almost 80% of the respondents believe that Covid-19 will have an impact on the enrolment numbers for the new academic year. Almost half (46%) believe that the impact will affect both international and local students. Some HEIs, especially private ones, reported that this impact would have negative financial consequences (IAU, 2020). The sudden shift to the online mode of education With Covid-19, we are seeing how yesterday's disruptors can become today's lifeguards. While traditional institutions once viewed online education as a threat, it has come to their rescue (Kandri, 2020). However, lecturers are still struggling to maintain the same depth of engagement with students they could have in a classroom setting. Any particular method of working becomes successful and adopted widely only when the method is effective and efficient in bringing about a change for the better. The effective ways of teaching, conducting assessments and ensuring teaching-learning to be interesting, engaging and context-specific are crucial for online mode of education. Some of the partnerships sparked between universities, online education companies and 5 tech providers may continue beyond the pandemic (Kandri, 2020). However, remote learning is just a first step and experimental in the long journey to offering online education as it includes ensuring effective student engagement tools and teacher training.

IV. CONCLUSION

Urvashi Sahni, a fellow at the Center for Universal Education, said, "Technology has the potential to achieve universal quality education and improve learning outcomes. But in order to unleash its potential, the digital divide (and the embedded gender divide) must be addressed". (The Indian Express, June 8, 2020) As online classes have been used as an alternative to regular classes under the circumstances of the Covid19 pandemic, internet and technology services should be considered as a necessity and not a luxury. Access to online libraries, books, journals should be created to promote learning that is happening remotely. Sarkar (2020) maintains that adequate facilities must be developed for differently-abled students. There is a need to work collaboratively with other universities and edutech companies to bring about innovative solutions in making digital learning hassle-free and effective. According to Judith Boettcher, an expert in online teaching, "we learn as social beings in a social context" (Miller, 2016). In a face-to-face environment, students get an opportunity to interact with the facilitator and other peers. In such an environment, meetings with teachers, classroom debates and discussions promote social connectedness among teachers and students. Students are affected by the absence and presence of their peers and teachers and thus, online learning needs to accommodate the aspects of social connectedness in their program design. According to Miller (2016), encouraging of cooperation and faculty-student connections are two of the principles of Chickering and Gramson and these are connected to the idea of interpersonal connectedness. The only alternative left after the Covid-19 pandemic is moving to an online mode of teachinglearning. Thus, educationists, academic leaders and others are constantly trying to find out whether the students are actually intellectually engaging with the course and its materials when they are at 10 home or at any other place away from the university campus and when there is no scope for facto-face learning (Miller, 2016). The Bloom's taxonomy[1] acts as a tool to assess the intellectual complexity of the learning activities of the student and thus, gives an opportunity to focus on the cognitive processes that the students should engage in (Miller, 2016). Teaching-learning to continue on an online platform requires students to understand how the course will be carried out online, including discussions from textbooks, class activities, home works and submissions and assessments. Thus, there is a need to make the students understand the structure and requirement of the course when carried out on a digital platform (Miller, 2016). There is a need to work on creating social presence during the online course. Some tools can be used to make the presence felt by the participants of the online course such as asking student's personal information, encouraging interaction exchange between students, supporting video communications so that the facial

expressions of the students and their voices are also clearly heard and seen (Miller, 2016). Moreover, Miller (2016) argues that there is a need to exchange social cues and generate the feeling that there is authentic interaction between the members in the virtual platform. The success of the online course is definitely dependent on this other than making the online class pleasant.

- [1]Bloom's Taxonomy was created by Benjamin Bloom in 1956, which is a set of hierarchical models used to define and distinguish different levels of human cognition i.e., thinking, learning, and understanding and to inform or guide the development of assessments, curriculum and instructional methods such as questioning strategies.

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