THE SCENARIO OF ONLINE EDUCATION IN INDIA: THE NEW NORMAL

J. Dashora[1], K.Chandrakumar[2] and K.Saxena[3]

[1]School of Management Studies, Sangam University, Bhilwara, Rajasthan, India
[2]UGC-JRF Centre of Linguistics, School of Languages, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Dehli, India
[3]IQAC, Faculty of Management Studies, MohanlalSukhadia University, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India

ABSTRACT

This research study emphasizes the transformation of the education cycle due to COVID-19 pandemic. The entire world is facing a challenging situation due to the Novel Coronavirus attack. This virus comes under the Coronavirus family. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic many countries are facing lockdown since February. The infection is spreading rapidly. According to WHO, immediate relief is still a long way as the vaccine has not been discovered. The pandemic has created havoc in India as well and has deteriorated the condition further with an extended lockdown. Some say that this calls for a lifestyle change with "New Normal" in place. There is a dire need to inculcate a "New Normal" in the education sector as well. In India during this life-threatening period where social distancing and isolation are the key preventive measures, face to face interaction with students is not possible. Teachers can talk, can see the students through various meeting platform but cannot meet them. The attempt has been made in this paperto understand the New Normal in the education system. The complete cycle of higher education from admission to placementhas been covered in this paper. The University Grant Commission (UGC) and the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) have released various guidelines from time to- time to make the education system uninterruptedly during this precarious situation to save the future of students as well as to make them stress-free.

Keywords: Education cycle, New Normal, Higher education, COVID-19, Lockdown, Coronavirus.

1. Introduction

 The COVID -19 is the name of a deadly virus that has engulfed the entire world. Novel Coronavirus (**2019-nCoV**) is a novel strain that was not recognized as yet. Corona virus transfers from animals to humans (zoonotic) (World Health Organization report). It knocked the Indian door in February and on 24th March nationwidelockdown was declared in India as a preventive measure against the virus. As per the researchers, **Gollwitzer et al. (2020)** the interest of the general public on lockdown extension and its intensity is important to take the right decision. The number of infected people is continuously increasing in India (as of 25th May 2020 the cases have crossed 1 lakh 35 thousand). Social distancing and Isolation are adopted as major preventive measures to be safe in this pandemic situation. According to**Chatterjee et al. (2020)** describe the way by which the economy can function safely through work from the home initiative. There would be a 360° shift in the way people have been interacting with fellow citizens. The mindset of people will be changed after this long lockdown. The phenomenon where people adapt themselves to the changing or changed situation is known as *The New Normal*.

The prosperity of any country is fully dependent on its sound education system. As the Indian education system has its own identity at all levels worldwide. Due to the pandemic, face to face interaction with students is not possible. The Internet is playing the lead role where education is possible only through an online meeting platform. Various meeting software such as Zoom, Meet, etc. provides the virtual classroom environment for students. The availability of virtual labs for practical subjects in Science, Engineering, Agriculture, Computer Science and Geo-informatics subjects is possible through various software. University Grant Commission (UGC) and the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) have released various guidelines from time to time to make the education system sustainable and uninterruptedly during this precarious situation to save the future of students as well as to make them stress-free.

An attempt has been made by the researchers in this article is to:

• Discuss the entire cycle of the education system.
• Discuss the Guidelines of MHRD and UGC for the smooth functioning of the education system in India during the lockdown.
• Discuss the challenges facingduring online education and examination.

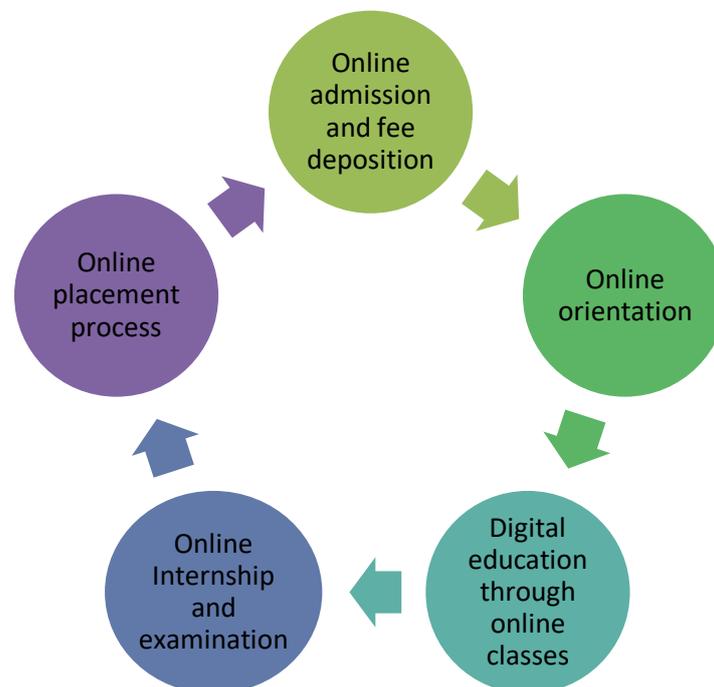## 2. The New Normal Scenario Of Higher Education

The situation where people adapt themselves according to the current environment is known as New Normal. Life is not "Normal" like pre-COVID-19. After the COVID-19 pandemic, people will have to live in a different lifestyle where social distancing is a major lifestyle shift.

In all the sectors including education the online mode of working is the only remedy. The time has come to show the ability and creativity by *Do It Yourself* (DIY) concept where the students need to learn by working on their skills themselves. Although online education helps the students tolearn theoretical and practical aspects through classes and virtual labstudents should implement practically it on their own.Due to the increasing use of laptops and smartphones a new learner-centric concept, the Heutagogyhas developed where a learner can define their objectives, route, procedures, and outputs. In this method, the learner is in the center instead of the teacher and syllabus. Heutagogy is defining as self-determined learning that stresses on developing the learner's self-sufficiency, capacity, and capability. The main object of this method is lifelong learning (Retrievedfrom https://www.schoology.com/blog/heutagogy-explained-self-determined-learning-education)

Figure-1 is presenting the circular way of the entire education process.

Figure-1 Entire Education Cycle–The NewNormal way

Source: Researchers own creation

The above figure (1) exhibits the complete education process from Admission to Placement.

The description of the entire cycle of the education system about The New Normal scenario-

2.1 Online admission and fee deposition: In the present time where face to face interaction with students is not imaginable.Admission for new sessions can be made possible through online campaigning and advertising through social media, e-papers, and e-magazines. Conduct online counseling to solve students' queries regarding courses and career opportunities. Facilitate the students for fee deposition at the time of admission via various platforms such as PAYTM, NEFT, and Google Pay, etc.

2.2 Online orientation: Orientation is compulsoryfor all students to complete the

process of enrollment.University must develop a robust website for the orientation program. The blend of various videos andsoftware can also introduce into orientation and trainingprogram. A virtual tour of the campus also provides to the newcomers. Introduce the students about various online education apps such as Dragon Microphone, Sound Note,Simple Mind, Study Blue, etc. Universities also try to make the students familiar with the course and curriculum through the online portal.

2.3. Digital education through online classes:

India is facing a critical situation where the COVID-19 pandemic reaches its extreme level in the past few weeks. Since 24th March India is facing Lockdown. As the first corona infected case found in India, all state governments decided to lock the educational institutes to curb the infection. This situation is regularly affecting many areas including education. Among all sectors the education sector was highly affected. The entire academic planning has disturbed. Students were losing their precious time to study due to enforced lockdown as a preventive measure.

Following Table no. 1 is showing the various projects initiated by MHRD (Retrieved from https://mhrd.gov.in/ict-initiatives)

The prolonged lockdown forces the entire education system to evolve. Online education was the only way to conserve the continuity of education. According to **Raj (2020)** research study, online education is only remedy during lockdown to save the future of hundreds of universities and thousands of college-going students.So the thought "BHARAT PADHEGA ONLINE" means "India will study online", was implemented. Faculties are using various meeting apps for visual interaction with students such as ZOOM or Google hangouts, Meet, Cisco WebEx, etc. to conduct smooth online classes. Online platform for education facilitates social distancing among students. To save the student's future and help those to overcome stress the MHRD and UGC release their suitable guidelines from time to time.

2.3.1. ICT based platform for students by MHRD

The current situation is forcing the officials to frame some valuable guidelines MHRD started many projects which help teachers, students and researchers in their study.

Table 1: MHRD initiative for ICT based learning (Audio-Visual digital content)

S.No.	E- Resources	Guidelines for students and researchers	Guidelines for Institutions
1	SWAYAM:Enormous Open courses available online.	Able to receive credit through these courses	- Inspire the extra eligible faculty tocontribute to online course development - Give consent to receive the credits awarded under This course -Content avail from local chapters of SWAYAM
2	SWAYAMPRABHA: e-content of courses available on TV	Can watch rich-quality academic programstwenty-four hours all seven days.	Make arrangements for viewing these content available on TV
E- content: access for digital -journals and digital-books			
1	e-PG Pathshala: Gateway for e-books up to PG	Get free books and curriculum-based e-content	Host e-books
2	Shodhganga: A reservoir of Indian Theses	Access Research Theses of scholars of Indian Institutes	Get research theses of your scholars to get listed on Shodhganga
3	e-ShodhSindhu: e-journals	To open and access the complete e-text	To open and access the complete e-text

	EnhancedPractical learning		
1	e-Yantra: E-content for future-oriented engineering.	Get practical knowledge on implanted systems	In association with IIT Bombay create e- Yantra Laboratories.
2	FOSSEE: Open Source and FreeEducation Software	- Easy accessibility and helperfor use of such software-A user becomes FOSSEE companion	Labs should be active in Open Source
3	Spoken Tutorial: Tutorial available for Information Technology courses.	Independent learning inInformation Technology courses.	Inspireprominentfaculty members to provide subject content for independent learning
4	Virtual Labs: Design Web-enabled tests or experiments Foronline practical.	Practice for syllabus based experiments.	Design experiments based on the curriculum for Virtual labs.

Source: https://mhrd.gov.in/ict-initiatives

Above all online platforms are helping students to gain knowledge. The students are availing the same quality of education at home with comfort and ease. The assignment, worksheets, videos, notes aregiven to students and evaluate by the faculties online.

Plenty of online courses and workshops are conducting by reputed organizations through an online platform to enrich the knowledge of students. In this line, the World Health Organization (WHO) also initiated an online coronavirus certificate course for everyone. Aim of this course to make aware everyone about the effect of coronavirus on health and economy.

It is a very positive sign that the entire scenario has changed and the traditional methods of teaching are easily replaced by online methods. The transformation of the education system took a new shape. Faculty members who were not familiar and equipped with online teaching methods also get acquainted with it. The prime purpose of education is to accessibility for all. Education helps to build the future of the students. If there is no internet connectivity then online teaching is not possible. Substitute the traditional teaching method with online teaching methods is not possible until people learn and use digital skills on their interest as well as proper internet access available throughout the country.

Every household has color television in rural areas so in the future there is a possibility to provide education most cheaply and efficiently through television instead of the internet. UGC also extended the six months for Ph.D. and M. Phil. Research scholars. A link provided by MHRD for a virtual laboratory to facilitate the engineering, Science, and any other technical courses students. Nirmala Sitharaman on 18th May 2020 said that online education has been taken up in a new way in India and that "The direct telecast mode used by schools would get 12 new channels for school students." Similar steps are being taken up by several universities in India too. There are various Open source courses in India and abroad, available free of cost for students. Another novel way of teaching interactive courses is by podcasts which is a big hit amongst urban higher education students.

2.4. Online Internship and Examination: As per the guidelines of AICTE and UGC (Retrieved from https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/9488252_Letter---Internships.pdf)the internship should be a strictly online basis and project-based. Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, it would not be possible for the students to go physically outside and take a normal internship. The internship could be completed through an online platform from home. Guidelines retrieve by

- Students can also continue running projects as internships so there is no need to search new data and the Internship Program can be clubbed with assignments.

- Students can postpone starting their internship and condensed the time of the internship.

2.4.1. Examination guidelines given by UGG on the recommendation of the expert

from https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/4276446_UGC -Guidelines-on-Examinations-and-Academic-Calendar.pdf)

- Adopt simplified methods of examination including MCQ, exam through Open book pattern, Open choice assignments, and assessment based on presentation.
- Use innovative methods of examination including a reduction in exam time but quality should maintain. Universities should keep sound evaluation system.
- University can conduct Terminal, Mid-semester and End semester examination as per their available facility, maintaining social distance and also retain the policy of equal opportunity available to all the students.
- If the situation becomes critical in the coming days then the pattern of evaluation is 50% marks of internal assessment and 50% marks based on previous semester performance of students. If there is no semester system only yearly pattern then 100% marks evaluation based on internal assessment
- Carry forward system for failure students remain as such, improvement in grades through special exams.
- All students and scholars should be treated as "deemed to be present" so there is no issue for a minimum requirement of attendance.
- Review and secondary data based projects should be accepted by universities.
- Practical examination and viva-voce may be conducted through meeting apps (Skype etc.) and in the case of PH.D. viva- voce proper record should be maintained.
- Every University should begin a cell where students' grievances should be handled properly. The grievance should be exam and academic-related.

2.5. Online placement process: It is an important process of the education cycle where students are ready to fulfill their

committee- The examination will be conducted online for the smooth functioning of the academic calendar. UGC guidelines embrace flexible and easy methods to conduct a pending examination. Information (Retrieved dreams. Online placement training provides real-time experience to students. Pre-placement training such as personality development, technical training, MOOC interview training, Self-concept note, Group discussion among students Psychometric and self-assessment tests deliver online to prepare students well for the interview. Many software such asPrepBytes, PlacementReady (Provide video-based training, online access, self-assessment quiz, MOOC test based on a specific company, monitoring of students about their performance)and Placement Management Software have step by step process for placement training which facilitates the students for online placement.

3. Major Challenges In Conducting The Online Education And Examination

The following are some of the challenges which both the faculties and students have to encounter in the New Normal period of online education.

- **Improper accessibility and connectivity of internet:-**Many research reports showing that in rural areas less availability of computer devices (excluding smartphones), internet connection and lack of basic digital knowledge among people. Researcher **Raj (2020)**explained in his research about the unavailability of internet connection and students do not have computers and laptops. In India, a limited percentage (36%) of people can access the internet (the India Internet report, 2019 by IAMAI and Nielsen). Now it is clear that due to the unavailability of internet connectivity in the rural area as well as remote areas. Usually, there is an electricity problem also. Students are unable to get an education and appear in examination through online platforms. There is no restriction to complete a given task on time so no seriousness towards the completion of the task. The percentage of students in the virtual class is very less.

Content delivery does not reach to all the students.

- **Non- existence of proper communication:-** Sometimes all students are unable to attend the online classes. A proper communication platform via a university web portal should be available to

- **Inappropriate ICT training:** All faculty members do not have basic computer and internet knowledge so they are not able to conduct online classes. Sending PPTs, videos, assignments Worksheets, Questionnaires through the internet is not possible. The entire responsibility of the institute to prepare virtual classrooms and through video conferencing train all the faculty members for ICT.

- **Pedagogical issue:-**Although the online classes have many advantages but not all students are comfortable with English, written as well as spoken. During online content delivery, the educational material is not that much reachable. These issues were diminishing in offline teaching where teachers can use the bilingual method of communication. The students have

the students through which they can resolve their problems and maintain continuous communication with them.

- **Inadequate technical and digital knowledge:** It is a usual problem where inadequate digital knowledge of students and parents responsible for interruption. different levels of understanding so one method of teaching is not fit for all through online teaching.

- **Improper technical setup:-** In some universities there is no proper technical equipment available to make the online classes and examination system smooth.

- **Lack of sound facilities for online exams:-** Not a single university has a perfect system by which they can watch student's unwanted activities during the examination. Even universities do not have the proper equipment to maintain a digital environment to perform all online activities.

Universities and higher education institution should have an ERP system which can integrate all the above-discussed operations of online education.

3. Conclusion

To overcome this pandemic situation and maintain a continuity of education it is a precise initiative to go for online teaching. Many online education platforms and apps are available to make this dream come true. India has great potential for online education as it is already have power in the field of Internet and Communication Technology (ICT). Especially

in the higher education system where students are near about to get placed, it is very necessary to provide them uninterrupted education. Many hurdles, difficulties and challenges are being faced by the teachers, students and parents in this New Normal period. The need of the hour is that these challenges should be surmounted to make the future of students bright.

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