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Euphoria and Woes of On-Line Learning Experiences from Pandemic: A Sociological Analysis

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Abstract

Covid-19 and its consequent lockdown have had far-reaching impacts in the country like India, which has a heterogeneous population. The hands of such a pandemic touched all walks of life and the field. Education is one such field that is being witnessed drastic changes in its modus operandi. We believe that education is the potential wherewithal for change and development. The conventional form, brick and mortar, of teaching in schools and colleges have received a severe blow owing to the breakout of covid-19. The Clamping of lockdown in the year 2020, forced educational institutions worldwide to shift classes on-line and incorporate digital learning and assessment techniques into the curriculum. The covid-19 imposed lockdown gives a new fillip to on-line education or virtual learning or e-learning. This paper describes the woes and euphoria of on-line education in the Indian context.

Keywords: On-line Education, COVID-19, Virtual Learning, Pedagogy

Introduction

European Commission (2001) mentioned that e-learning uses multimedia technologies with the internet to increase the learning quality. Abbad et al. (2009) defined e-learning as any learning that is enabled electronically. Park & Wentling (2000) described e-learning the attainment and use of knowledge through electronic means. UNESCO highlights that the outbreak of COVID-19 began; 1.37 billion students in 138 countries are affected by the closure of schools and universities. About 60.2 million school teachers and university lecturers are away from the classrooms (Shail Srivastava, 2021). Being a culturally pluralistic country and has diversified socio-economic fabrics. Covid-19 has far reached changes in every sphere of life. Covid-19 consequent lockdown warranted to close the traditional brick-and-mortar schools and paved the way to have a new platform of learning .i.e., on-line education. Hybrid learning or on-line learning or blended learning has become new normal due to covid-19 pandemic. Social distancing is one of the preventive measures of coronavirus pandemic. Maintaining this safety protocol is difficult in schools and colleges where thousands of students assemble to pursue learning activities. Education can become transformative when teachers and students synthesize information across subjects and experiences, critically weigh significantly different perspectives, and incorporate various inquiries (Anna Sun and Xiufang Chen, 2016). The advent of covid-19 shackled normal life and pushed us to find alternatives, especially in education Corona virus is not only a biological phenomenon but also a social and economic phenomenon.

The pandemic has underscored the significance of digitization across the country and given a fillip to on-line learning as classroom teaching was suspended (Shelly Anand, 2021).

Education is the one area where we can witness success in various ways during a covid-19 pandemic. Like other countries, in India serious steps were initiated. The Educational institutions Schools, Colleges, and Universities were closed to arrest the spread of disease and on-line learning was introduced and became the order of the day. (Ashok Thakur and S.S. Mantha, 2021). On-line classes have become inevitable and culture during the Corona times, our Prime Minister said in his Independence Day speech which shows the gravity of on-line education.

Review of Pertinent Literature on On-Line Education

Karber (2001) mentioned that on-line education has developed immensely over the past ten years. He attributed the accessibility and usage of internet for the new on-line learning. The innovation in technology has made teaching possible outside the conventional mortar and brick classroom for teachers and easy access of materials for learners.

Bozkurt and Sharma (2020) focused on on-line environments that enable teachers to teach and interact with their students providing a variety of learning possibilities in a remote scenario. The study by Heather Kauffmann (2015) identified factors predictive success and satisfaction with on-line learning by students. Kauffmann found that the outcomes of the on-line programmes are comparable to traditional face-to-face programmes.

In 2019 review of 35 studies into on-line learning by Jacqueline Wong et al. (2019) found the links between on-line and self-regulated learning. Self-regulated learning offers the use of prompts or feedback and deployment of strategies, leading to better achievement in on-line learning. Bernard et al. (2014), in their meta-study of blended learning, highlighted that the students in blended learning showed slight achievement than their counterparts who followed traditional classroom teaching.

Saghafi, Franz and Crowther highlighted that both face-to-face learning and on-line learnings have their uses and limitation. Therefore, they conclude that both settings work reciprocally for the benefit of students if a comprehensive setup for blended learning is adopted. In Gonzales-Gomez et al.'s (2016) study, students felt face to face learning is good for science and laboratory works and on-line lessons and instructions give more the flexibility to learn theoretical and practical aspects of lab work at any time after the class sessions. Ivan Yuhanna (2020) observed on-line learning (also known as electronic learning or e-learning) is the result of teaching delivered electronically using computer-based media, which helps to frequent access materials through web sources. E-learning not only accesses information (e.g. putting up web pages) but also helps learners with specific results (eg achieving goals). Twigg (2002) maintained that the e-learning approach is learner centred and is interactive, repeatable, and customized. Tao et al. (2006) viewed on-line learning is based on electronic networks which provides individualized support and facilitates to schedule learning according to their comfort. It also facilitates to have interaction with learners and teachers effectively than traditional one.

Theoretical Frameworks

Teaching is a profession which not only transfers knowledge but also prepares the generations by mentoring and modelling. Schools are the only places where the inculcation of knowledge alone is not enough. Besides, the value of society is being infused in the minds of learners consciously and unconsciously. Sociologist Emile Durkheim one of the founding fathers of sociology, made a great remark on schools are one of the socialization agencies that teach children how to mingle with peers and prepare to face adult roles with an economic focus. (Durkheim 1898). Of course, schools have taken this responsibility and teach students to obey the law and respect the same which will help a student not only navigate the school environment but later the work environment by abiding authority.

Methodology

The study was conducted among the twenty-six post graduate students who have experience of both real-time and on-line classes. The name of the institution was not revealed here to maintain research ethics. The real-time classes for these students were suddenly suspended owing to lock down clamped by the government to curtail the spread of covid-19. After resumption of off line classes, focus group discussions were conducted among them to tap the necessary inputs regarding the experiences of on-line learning. a Descriptive research design was employed and asked them to narrate qualitatively describing the woes and euphoria of on-line learning.

Results and Discussions

The widespread Covid-19 drastically altered the pattern in life of a cross-sectional communities. People are struggled hard to meet their daily needs and panic about venturing out. Amid the stringent safety protocols, on-line learning happened. The students reported the woes of on-line learning as follows.

Issues of Mentoring

The students reported that the on-line class lacks mentoring. Since they experienced both forms of teaching and learning, the traditional brick-and-mortar classroom offered a myriad of experiences. The interaction between the students made them feel at ease in many aspects. The teacher or instructor quickly identified the grief of students in the real-time classes. Based on issues, the deprived student will get solace. The sharing will ease their burden. Career counselling also prime missing factors that make them more worried.

Team Building

The students very much felt as they were deprived from the learning the nuances of social arts like get along with others, the leadership qualities like exercising command and obeying if they also added that real-time classes facilitate understanding hidden calibres and potential of team works and group existences.

Learning and Understanding

The students reported that the offline classes helped them understanding the subject better. The verbal and physical cues during the teaching made it very easy. Moreover, the interaction between fellow students alleviates the fear regarding careers.

Socio-Economic Factors

India has unequal socio-economic segments with different lifestyle and livelihood issues. Suddenly imposed lockdown had multiple impacts on society. The prime issues are the loss of livelihood. The pandemic and failure of livelihood seem the situation between the devil and the deep blue sea. It is unusual to assume every section of society is prepared to switch over to on-line learning, which requires competent electronic gadgets. Affordability to have a smartphone, desktops, laptops and internet package is a dream for rural and tribal students to pursue on-line learning.

Gender And On-Line Education

India is a patriarchal society where women are downplay their role. Preference will always be given to men folk, and on the other hand, women folk are considered a liability. Shail Srivastava (2021) quoted a survey in Bihar that out of 733 children, only 28% of the girls had smartphones compared to 36% of the boys. And in the majority of the cases, these smartphones belonged to male adults, often lesser accessible to girls than boys. The students also highlighted that domestic chore was assigned to girl students during the classes since audio and video was muted.

Challenge of Technology

Technology helps to go the learning without any interruptions. More schools and colleges are being switched over to on-line teaching and learning process. The technical know-how about the web browsers on the part of students, mainly rural, is significantly less. Even in some cases, teachers are also suffered from a lack of technical knowledge to handle on-line education.

Increased Screen Time

The Covid-19 imposed lockdown restricts venture out of the common populace in order to curtail the spread of a pandemic. Children are more precious human capital, and no one take a chance on their safety. So, most parents prefer to keep their children at the home and not let them out for play and other social gatherings. In this regard, television and mobile phones are the only resort for entertainment. Since learning is being switched over to on-line platforms, screen time is increased, which affects both their physique and mind, the respondents said.

Euphoria Of On-Line Education

More Flexible

The inquiry revealed that on-line learning is more flexible. Unlike real-time classes, it doesn't require getting ready formally. The students, as respondents, indicated that the muted audio and video gave them some sort of liberty and thereby reduced their curiosity about learning.

Cost- Effective

The responses collected from the students revealed that the advantages of these kinds of platforms reduce the cost associated with learning. The problem of commuting was eschewed thereby; the expense of travel and time were spared, the students added.

Conclusion

Learning is a continuous process. the platform of learning is changing according to the milieu. In India, we have a system of correspondence or thapal form of learning. Even Swayam or MOOC (massive open on-line course) courses are already introduced in the regular offline classes. But the sudden outbreak of Covid-19 drastically altered, including the traditional teaching- learning method. The polarized socio- economic nature of India and poor network connections imposed certain hardships to switch over to online learning. Traditional classroom teaching doesn't have any parallel, the study revealed.

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