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PSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUES IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC

EDITED BY

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PSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUES IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Chapter 11

Effects of Online Teaching Methods during COVID-19 Pandemic

**Prerna Sharma¹, Dr. Deepika Srivastav¹,
Dr. Dweep Chand Singh²**

ABSTRACT

COVID 19 pandemic affected adversely general life including educational institutions since 2020. Schools and colleges were closed worldwide. According to an estimate, 1.2 billion children are out of teaching rooms to the 'Zoom' (UNESCO, 2020). Education delivery mode has changed dramatically and there is the distinctive rise in e-learning, where teaching is undertaken remotely via digital platform. This sudden shift from real classroom to virtual classroom has compelled most of people wondering how the online learning would persist and be effective after the pandemic is over. Concepts, methods, advantages and disadvantages of online teaching being used during pandemic period have been discussed here in futuristic perspectives.

Keywords: *Online teaching, Online Classroom*

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INTRODUCTION

The world has seen a drastic change in its overall functioning in just a year due to world-wide spread of a novel coronavirus (nCoV) called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2), leading to unprecedented challenges by collapsing public health, food system, agriculture, employment and labour, education system, economic system, social structure and so on (WHO, 2020). World Health Organization (WHO) on 30th January 2020 declared this Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) as Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC; WHO situation report-11, 2020). The first SARS-CoV-2 case was reported on 30th January 2020 (Upadhyay, 2020) in India. From that day onwards, the transmission of the virus expanded exponentially. It was very difficult to handle for the authorities, ultimately leading to a complete lockdown in India to break the transmission chain of the virus (Jha et al., 2020). The unforeseen lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic has somewhat impacted almost every sector. Along similar lines, the Education sector has also faced enormous challenges due to the interruption of the regular and physical face-to-face mode of teaching and learning. Rapidly adapting to the unforeseen challenges education sector shifted to a more up-to-date method by implementing remote teaching (Garg et al., 2020; Lathabhavan & Griffiths, 2020).

The COVID-19 Pandemic

On 11th March 2020, the Director-General of the World Health Organisation (WHO) characterised and identified the COVID-19 as a Pandemic and remarked that “Pandemic is not a word to use lightly or carelessly. It is a word that, if misused, can cause unreasonable fear or unjustified acceptance that the fight is over, leading to unnecessary suffering and death. (WHO, 2020)”. So, to understand the word “pandemic”, it is important to understand “epidemic”. The Dictionary of Epidemiology (Porta, 2014) defined *Epidemic* as “the occurrence in a community or region of cases of an illness, specific health-related behaviour, or other health-

related events more than normal expectancy". In contrast, the pandemic is defined as "an epidemic occurring over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries, and usually affecting many people". Let us understand this with the COVID-19 example: Infection with SARS-CoV-2 leads to severe pneumonia with varying symptoms like fever, discomfort and lethargy, dry cough, loss of taste or smell, progressing to respiratory distress and organ failure (Upadhyay et al., 2020a; Sood et al., 2020). So, at the end of December 2019 and Starting of January 2020, an obscure emergence of many pneumonia cases was reported in Wuhan, Hubei province, China. In starting cases of pneumonia were limited to Hubei Province in China, so it was called an Epidemic of pneumonia of unknown aetiology (Zhou et al., 2020). However, in very few days, the horizon of cases broadened around the world very rapidly and according to WHO situation report-97 (2020), as of 20th May 2020, the SARS-CoV-2 has infected close to 50 lakh individuals. WHO declared this as a COVID-19 pandemic as it was caused by a novel coronavirus that emerged and spread around the world, and most of the people did not have immunity to this new novel coronavirus. So, in other words, a pandemic is identified by the geographic reach of illness or disease rather than severity.

Online Education during Lockdown

The Government of India imposed a complete lockdown at all services except essential services (like pharmacies, banks, hospitals, grocery services) to break the transmission chain and minimise the spread of COVID-19 on 24th March 2020. Lockdown is an emergency measure taken by a government or relevant authorities by restricting the movement of people leading to the stay-at-home condition. The complete lockdown continued for consecutive 68 days, and the unlock phase started from 1st June 2020. Like all other sectors, the Education sector has also faced challenges due to the complete closure of all academic institutions in lockdown. Out of all sectors, academic institutions, specifically schools, are closed from the first day of lockdown to date in most of the states of

India. To deal with this unprecedented situation, widespread use of remote teachings has been introduced via online learning methods and television (Wang et al., 2020; Varalakshmi and Arunachalam, 2020).

According to UNESCO's report published in 2020, approximately 1.5 billion learners could not attend educational institutes in this COVID-19 pandemic situation. In a recent report, The Indian Express reported that the number of students enrolled for sessions 2021-22 in private schools had been reduced to 17.31 lakh as of 28th June 2021 against 29.83 lakh last year. Approximately 12.5 lakh students of private schools have dropped out in just a year. With the closure of physical mode, a sudden and unexpected rush has been seen towards remote learning or eLearning or any other similar name to fill the much-needed gap of imparting education. The Education sector was utilising the advancements in Information Technology to explore for making the learning-teaching process useful and attractive (Sharma and Sharma, 2015), but this exploration and utilisation have increased multiple folds in the pandemic hit era. Educational institutes have moved to eLearning practices from the conventional physical way of education (Kumar et al., 2020). eLearning uses the latest Information and Communication Technology (ICT), enabling teachers and students to interact and collaborate over smartphones or computers sitting in the comfort of their homes. Apart from this, eLearning has opened new learning ways, eliminating the school time binding, need-based access to learning material, lectures, anywhere and anytime. The COVID-19 crisis has compelled teachers and students to embrace the digital experience as the goal of the new age teaching-learning process (Lederman, 2020). Platforms like Zoom, Google Hangouts, and Microsoft Teams are most commonly used. However, some institutions have experimented with Google suite, YouTube Videos and SeeSaw to make online classes more interactive and engaging than offline ones (Yadav, 2020).

The Government of India has also provided various cost-effective and ubiquitous platforms for learners of all groups like

DIKSHA (**Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing**) and **NROER** (**National Repository of Open Educational Resources**). **DIKSHA** platform provides videos lectures, worksheets, course reading, and assessment through eLearning mode for students, teachers, and parents catering to educational program's needs. **NROER** also provides content and understudies, including books, modules, recordings, and lectures. **NROER** also provides a number of **STEM** (**Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics**) based games for the learners. The **Study Web of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM)** is a massive open online course (**MOOC**) platform that provides online courses in different streams and disciplines, including Engineering, Social Sciences, and Law. Apart from this, a group of 32 DTH channels named **Swayam Prabha** is also used by Government, to provide high-quality educational programmes to help students in their studies throughout the week. These DTH channels can be easily accessed through Doordarshan's Free setup box and antenna and cover even the farthest and deepest part of the country (Mishra et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2020). Ministry of Human Resource and Development also runs an **e-PG Pathshala** program that provides high-quality interactive resources in 70 subjects across all disciplines (Mishra et al., 2020). The University Grants Commission (**UGC**) has also made it mandatory for all universities to cover 25% of the curriculum through online mode and 75% through face-to-face mode (**UGC**, 2020).

Impact of Online Teaching

Online teaching has its charm as it breaks down the barriers posed by traditional methods. It is not a new method. It was surviving under the traditional method. The earliest and first-ever complete online course was made available early 1980s. However, it was the COVID-19 pandemic that pushed the world from the traditional method to a new ambitious web-based online method. Learners today do not learn the same way that students in earlier generations did. The new generation of the new era utilises the modernised approach in

learning which helps them unlock their full potential in their unique way.

The newer online teaching method does not force the students to follow a single stereotypical approach to learning that too in a structured setting. Students can learn anytime, anywhere. Online teaching also does not pressurise students, and it allows students to learn the same content at their own pace leading to popularisation of the same.

Problems Associated with Online Teaching

Factors related to online teaching, which may act as a boom for few learners, can be a cause of struggle too for some students. Lack of access to technology and the internet is the biggest barrier to online teaching, especially in developing countries like India. After technology, proficiency in the use of technology to access online teaching is also a big concern. Some students can perform better in a structured environment than an unstructured one, leading to poor performance and struggle in academics. Lack of face-to-face interaction can also be a cause of struggle for many students. Teachers can not directly attend to the student resulting in a lack of support to those who need more support possible in physical mode. Disengagement and lack of participation may lead to unproductive classes.

Apart from educational impacts, online teaching also affects the development of learners. In childhood, children learn a lot by modelling and imitating their peers, whereas, in adolescence, emotional and social skills are learned through peer interactions. The emotional impact of online teaching is also a matter of concern. The uncertainty and disruptions in life and academics caused by the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with other factors may pose a threat to learners and their mental health. COVID-19 pandemic has also transformed homes completely. Work from home and online teaching settings has converted dining tables to computer tables and bedrooms to classrooms. These drastic changes also have affected family dynamics both in positive and negative ways. Apart from this,

Educators with no prior experience in online teaching, proficiency in the use and utilisation of technology also posed threats and may compromise the quality of learning. The challenge for Indian settings is at ground level implementation, where more than 15 lakh schools and more than 50,000 high-level educational institutes are present (Garg et al., 2020).

Advantages

- **Elasticity in managing class and wider outreach**

Online learning emerges as the only solution in this new crisis. It gives opportunity to learn from distant mode. Online education in Chinese universities has increased greatly after the Covid-19 outbreak. There was an overnight shift to normal classroom to e-classroom, teachers must shift their entire pedagogical approach to tackle new crisis in the education industries and adapt to these changing situations. During this time of pandemic, the concern is not about whether online teaching-learning methods can provide quality education; it is rather how academic institutions will be able to adopt online learning in such a massive manner and for such long duration (Carey, 2020).

The Innovation in the technology helped the instructors in a great deal. It enhances their skills to deal with technology. The products by Google and Windows which tends to be useful under such problematic situations; they are (a) Gmail and Outlook, which are used for communication and submission of assignments (b) Google Forms, for using the online survey or collecting the data (c) Calendars, for organizing the classes and the scheduling meetings (d) G-Drive and One drive, for saving a large size document such as online and freely available study materials like Books, Research Papers etc. (e) Google Classroom and Ms Teams , for organizing and scheduling classes, seminar etc. These tools had successfully replaced face-to-face classes (Basilaia et al., 2020).

The smart control of the class enables the teacher to unmute and mute mics and videos of the leaner who is creating disturbance during the class. With this they can assure that everyone is attentive and paying attention to the class. The wider outreach is only possible with online teaching as those learners who face difficulty in asking question face to face, they can ask through Whatsapp/Hangouts/ Telegram etc. Convenience of the Instructor, especially for the Female teachers they can spend time more with family which they can save from travelling.

- **Student Oriented learning**

The learner can comfortably attend the lectures online from anywhere either at home or somewhere else, without facing the hassle to reach the institutions on time. Student just need to login in the web portal to start the class where the teacher or instructor articulates their curriculum activities as well as classroom lesson.

Students have leverage to complete their assignments and lessons and upload them on the web portal like google classrooms and Ms Teams. Teachers can also upload the teaching learning material on the portal from where students can download and use for their studies. There is a recording feature available in both apps, so that learner can see the recording in case they have missed anything due to fluctuation of the internet connection or any other reason they can revisit the lecture again. They can study with their own pace and can stop worrying about being behind the whole class.

Disadvantages

- **Improper Infrastructure**

"Laptop can't replace the blackboards teaching and learning". The teaching and learning both are limited laptop screens, for teachers also it has become difficulty to teach each concept on laptop screen. For students it is very monotonous to sit and watch the screen for whole day. As the shift was very quick the

teachers were out of school infrastructure and have to take class from their home on their laptop/mobile. Especially students living in the remote areas underprivilege children and children who are attending low budget schools facing the issue of accessibility with regard to online platform of learning.

- **Lack of practical learning**

As the learning is online the teachers are not able to perform the practical with learners. Even the most modern technology will not replace future physicians or teachers of "live" practice. For example, subjects like Medical Science, Psychology which require practical demonstration, administration and learning both are difficult process.

- **Assessment and Online Exams**

It is difficult to assess the knowledge learnt through online learning, the assessment and online exams process is a tedious task for the teacher as authenticity of information is an issue.

- **Authenticity of Online Certificate**

Since there are lot of university which are offering online courses and providing certificate based upon that, there is a question that arises how authentic these courses are and will a comparison can developed in their knowledge assimilation.

- **Screen Time increases**

As most of the learning is online, the learner needs to spend ample time in front of the digital device, the amount of screen time also increased which led various problem with sustaining concentration.

- **Physiological and Mental health issues**

As the learner is spending most of the time in sitting at one place, their physical strengthen also get into stake. Moreover, in a household setting where there are no separate rooms, the living can condition led to various mental health issues.

- **Affect wholistic development of child**

The normal classroom setup provides ample for opportunity to interact with peers which also enhances their socialization skills, and which help to develop their analytical thinking and

peer learning. With this, the concept of new normal is being altered (Kim, 2020).

Recommendations

- **Training of the teachers and Learners**

Proper training which could include the use of technology efficiently and amalgamation of technological advancement with the teaching skills would be helpful and this will enhance their approach in teaching learning process. Similarly, for the learners training should be given to utilise the best suited technology and resources at fullest.

- **New content as the current needs**

There is a need to develop new content which is best suited for the online learning and also can maintain the integrity of the particular course.

- **Proper Utilization of the time**

The time saved with the online learning can be used to enhance the learning to a great deal. They can be part of many the extracurricular activities at the same time without travelling for them from one place to other.

- **Recommendation for parents**

Even though staying home from school/ College might feel like a holiday, Parents need to remind their kids that they are not on vacation. Assignments, grades, requirements, and tests like state exams, are not going away just because classes have moved online.

The impact of online classroom is varied among different population, for some instances it is beneficial and in other way it loses that personal touch too with the learner. Hence, advance in the technology is always act as catalyst to learning but not in every case, sometimes one to one interaction or online classes adds that interest where the online one is lacking. Therefore, during the pandemic it was necessary to continue the teaching learning process and online teaching acts as a boon in these difficult times.

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