

Effect of Online Education on Learning Styles, Social Life and Mental Health of Students & Trainees during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Review of Literature Findings

Nitya Dhawan*, Biswabhusan Behera**, Dr. Mamta Gaur***

*(Apprentice Trainee, GAIL (India) Limited, New Delhi,
Email :nitya.dhawan@gmail.com)

** (DGM (HR), GAIL (India) Limited & Research Scholar, Galgotias University, Greater Noida,
Email:bbb222@rediffmail.com)

*** (Professor, School of Business, Galgotias University, Greater Noida,
Email:mamtagaur@galgotiasuniversity.edu.in)

Abstract:

The Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization, has impacted all sectors including the education sector. The shifting of education to online learning mode as a measure for containing the spread of the virus, have shaken the entire education system from elementary to tertiary level, not just in India but worldwide. This study aims to understand college students' day-to-day living, learning styles and mental health while accessing online modes of education during this unprecedented crisis and gauge the experiences and challenges these students face. The paper also explores how college students are adjusting to the online education system and how they handle their social lives. This study further addresses the elements pertinent to online learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic and the prevailing resources of educational institutions that would facilitate a desirable shift from formal in-person education to online education with the help of virtual classes and other methods ever-changing educational landscape. The paper gives a holistic depiction of the present online teaching-learning styles during the pandemic to prevent academic disturbances and ensure smooth learning.

Keywords: *Mental Health, Pandemic, COVID-19, Social Life, Online Teaching-learning Modes, Online Education, India*

I. INTRODUCTION:

The COVID-19, caused by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Corona Virus 2 (SARS CoV-2), originated in Wuhan, China and is a highly contagious infectious disease or illness (Remuzzi & Remuzzi, 2020). It was identified as a pandemic because of the intensity of its spread affecting across the continents. The pandemic and the resultant lockdown, travel restrictions, physical distancing, isolation, quarantining and border closures have devastatingly impacted all the sectors of the country, including the education

sector. According to International Labour Organization (ILO), there can be a loss of 195 million jobs as a result of this unprecedented crisis (UNDP, 2020).

Measures taken to control the spread of the virus have resulted in schools and universities moving towards the online mode of education for an indefinite period (Martinez, 2020). Already about 264 million children and adolescents are not in school (UNESCO, 2017), and this pandemic can make the situation worst. Many schools and universities have taken up virtual teaching-learning solutions to reach 32 crore students (UNESCO,

2020) in the country and maintain a continuity of learning.

This sudden and unplanned shift to e-learning with inadequate bandwidth, little training and even a lesser amount of preparation could be harmful to the lasting growth of students. Other than that, students' lifestyles, functioning, well-being and motivational levels could also be severely impacted. While some students found online learning enriching, others were unhappy with the shift, missed the companionship of their peers, and reported other negative attitudes, such as a lack of motivation towards online learning (Quacquarelli & Symonds, 2020). Some students even stated that they were experiencing trouble focusing on their studies while staying home due to unpleasant family relations (Killian, 2020).

Furthermore, university students are feeling tremendous mental stress coupled with uncertainties about the future, such as placements, type of work opportunities after graduation, higher education, and internship opportunities. This research paper aims to understand the challenges and experiences of students at the university level and how they adjust to online education. The study further draws the need to rethink and revamp the everchanging educational landscape and be better trained and prepared for the future. The research further points out shortcomings in the delivery of online classes and the potential ways to mitigate these deficiencies. Based on the findings and analysis of policy initiatives and the existing digital infrastructure in India, the paper further provides an all-around depiction of the present online teaching-learning styles during the current health crisis to prevent academic disturbances and to ensure that the learning continues smoothly.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Online/Virtual mode of education

In the day and age of technology, various innovations have made distance education quite effortless to use (McBrien, Cheng, & Jones, 2009).

Online/ open/ web-based/ computer-mediated/ blended learning refers to studying using a computer having a network connection with the option of taking in information from anywhere, anytime and at one's own pace (Cojocariu, Lazar, Nedeff, & Lazar, 2014). Online education can be labelled as a way of making learning student-centric, unique and more flexible. (Singh & Thurman, 2019) describe online learning as a method of acquiring knowledge in synchronous or asynchronous environments using handheld devices or laptops. Students can be at any place and still be able to interact and learn with other students and teachers. Some of the features of a synchronous learning environment are structured live sessions, real-time communication among educators and learners, and there is the likelihood of immediate feedback, whereas asynchronous learning environments are not structured, learning does not take place via live lectures and is available in other learning forums, there is even a lack of instant feedback (Littlefield, 2018). Social interaction with fellow peers and teachers is possible for students making use of synchronous learning styles (McBrien, Cheng, & Jones, 2009). At the time of health emergencies, we need such platforms for video conferencing with a minimum of 40-50 learners, stable internet, classes should be a dialogue and not a monologue by the teachers, discussion and suggestions from students should always be welcomed, classes available in cell phones and not just laptops coupled with features of re-watching the live lectures in recorded form, instant feedback along with the ability to delegate the assignment to students to check their progress (Basilaia, Dgebuadze, Kantaria, & Chokhonelidze, 2020).

COVID-19 and Online Education

Prior to the outbreak of a deadly virus, most knowledge dissemination in academic institutions in India was based on conventional methods such as learning through face-to-face teacher-student interaction. However, the pandemic has brought a flurry of changes in the academic structure. (Dhawan, 2020) pointed out specific strengths of

virtual learning such as flexibility of time and location, ability to accommodate a broad range of learners, plethora of choice of courses and subjects and the most beneficial element to a learner is the feature of Immediate feedback. Technology can provide several creative and robust solutions during such health emergencies and enable individuals to continue working and communicating without in-person contact. It calls for many system changes in organisations as they embrace technology for day-to-day functioning (Mark & Semaan, 2008). Some weaknesses were the lack of direct communication and human touch between the teacher and the learner. Technological issues often hamper or slow down the process of learning (Favale, Soro, Trevisan, Drago, & Mellia, 2020). The other deficiencies of e-learning are learner's capability & confidence level. It is very subjective as learners vary, and not every student has good time management capabilities, some tend to procrastinate if not constantly monitored, and most of all distractions, frustration, anxiety and confusion while attending online classes and lack of personal/physical care. Virtual academic experience offers innovation and digital development opportunities due to flexible programs, improved problem-solving, critical thinking and adaptability skills, and the flexibility of the age of users & developers of the inventive pedagogical approach. Considering the opportunities, the challenges of this new method of education such as inequitable delivery of ICT Infrastructure, poor quality of education, digital illiteracy in many remote parts of the country, the digital divide and the high cost of technology and Obsolescence.

Perception of College Students towards online education

Some issues with the modern applications that students usually use to attend online classes would be a fault with downloading, problems with installation, tedious login procedures, and audio & video slip-ups. Other concerns of students regarding remote learning include the monotonous and dull nature of classes. The most surprising

thing is that online classes offer so much time and flexibility to the learner that he/she never gets on to work on it. Many students procrastinate when it comes to getting on to competing for their roles and responsibilities as a student. The highly theoretical nature of lectures, lack of attention span, deficiency of two-way, reciprocal interaction, and students' poor motivation to engage in self-practice are other reasons why students lack interest towards virtual learning. (Song, Singleton, Hill, & Koh, 2004) describes other obstacles such as a lack of community feeling, trouble in following instructions, etc. (Parkes, Stein, & Reading, 2014) deciphered that there existed a lack of family and social life balance among students at the time of using online mode of education and lack of prior planning and learning was also a significant defect of such distance learning environments.

Online Education and Mental Health

According to a study conducted by (Hoxha & Duraku, 2020) majority of college students experienced moderate levels of perceived stress and mild psychological and somatic anxiety because of the shift to an online mode of teaching-learning during the outbreak of a deadly disease. The probable reason behind the perceived stress was the student's skills, time management, procrastination, and student life. The level of psychological anxiety was understood based on perceived stress, and the perceived amount of stress was further understood by student life. The researchers also discovered that students found virtual attending classes as a way to drive their attention away from the ongoing pandemic, and encouragement from their teachers helped them to adjust adequately to the e-learning method. Although, poor attention span, space constraints at home, lack of motivation to be present at online classes and study, a distraction from family members and the overall burden of assignments were some of the difficulties experienced by college students.

Plausible Solutions to the challenges associated with e-learning

We can go on talking about the various inadequacies of online education, but there is no denying that online education has indeed been a panacea at such unprecedented times. Even with the many problems, virtual learning tools have ensured the continuity of learning. Some ways to alleviate these challenges would be through prerecording lectures, prior content verification, and always being prepared for any contingency. Online discourses should be made interactive and enriching and should be ever-evolving. Teachers & Trainers should monitor their students' progress by setting deadlines and timely reminders. At all times, online education systems should ensure the human touch. Personal attention must be given to all the students, and the teachers should be open to any doubt or clarification to ensure that every student adapts well to this new learning system. Constant communication through social media apps must be ensured. Educators must frequently spend time making courses students-centric and creative (Partlow & Gibbs, 2003). Constant feedback from students, asking questions and opening up the minds of the learner reflects on the level of efficiency of the online mode of education (Keeton, 2004). Institutions must constantly reinvent their pedagogy and concentrate on collaborative, case, and project-based learning via online discourses (Kim & Bonk, 2006). Academic establishments must find a new technological solution and revamp the education dissemination mechanism to fit the constantly changing needs and ensure digital literacy.

III. CONCLUSION:

It is the need of the hour for educational institutions to be prepared to constantly evolve and change the method of knowledge dissemination depending on the situation. Even the teachers should not be stuck in the traditional methods of tutoring and find new and innovative solutions to the problems. But still, we can't be oblivious to the glaring gaps in the digital infrastructure in India

and the many students who miss out on these technological innovations because of the lack of availability of resources and money to avail of such facilities. This digital divide might further increase education inequality in the country. It is the responsibility of the government to bridge this gap. While this is easier said than done, we are still far from achieving digital literacy among the masses.

“The key lesson learned is to embrace e-learning technology before disaster strikes!” (Todorova & Bjorn-Andersen, 2011). We need to be vigilant enough to adapt to changes and switch to a newer method, such as remote/online learning, in situations of health emergencies such as Covid-19. Resources like Information Technology infrastructure, learning tools, Massive Open Online Courses, e-books, e-notes, etc., are highly important in such circumstances. (Huang et al., 2020). Professors must focus on elements such as motivation, relationship building, mental health, and content creation as the mode of instruction in online discourses (Martin, 2020). Case studies, debates, discussions, games and fun activities, Lectures, experiential learning, and brainstorming settings can help reduce the stress and anxiety of online classes.

Finally, regular quality checks and improvements are key to the success of the delivery of online classes in such unprecedented times.

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