Impact of COVID-19 on Education: Policy Responses and Recommendations

Sumon Roy
Assistant Professor
Department of Economics
Siliguri College

Abstract

This paper highlights the **impacts** of the covid-19 pandemic on the education sector, both for the different actors and for the educational institutions including the system as a whole.

No one would have predicted that a virus-like Covid-19 would come and it will alter the lifestyle of people. Due to Covid-19, many changes came to our life and world and it took some time for everyone to adopt the 'new normal'. Impact of Covid-19 is everywhere, which resulted in the closure of all the educational institutions.

Apart from immediate visible impacts, there are **medium and long term impacts** which are very significant but invisible. This chapter also tried to review the **actions taken by** the governments and educational institutions to continue the teaching-learning process during the covid-19-pandemic. This chapter discusses some **observations and policy recommendations** before the restarting normal education mode. The **short-term impacts** of the crisis on education are easily recognized, but its **long lasting impact** is hard to predict as we do not have past experiences of this kind of crises. The **immediate impact** on the **students** is the temporary pause of face to face teaching, (and we don't know, how long it will last), on normal daily life, costs and financial burdens, learning continuity and mobility. **Teachers** are also affected significantly professionally. **Temporary Non-teaching staff** would have to face the possible financial curtailment due to the cancellation of fees or reduction in student enrollment. The impact of disruption of face-to-face activities is highly erratic and depends, on the ability to remain active in their academic activities and, on their financial sustainability. However, **public educational institutions** will reopen in full blown economic recession and major cuts in public budget in education are expected, like 2008 financial crisis. It is very possible to anticipate that the crises will lead to definitive closures of some **private institutions**.

Keywords: covid-19, virtual education, digital divide, Industry 4.0, inclusion and equity.

Introduction

The COVID-19 induced pandemic led to the **closure of universities, colleges and schools** round the world, expecting that **public health officials'** advice of social distancing could help to flatten the infection rate and shrink total sufferers from the disease. Across the world, the spread of corona-virus has led to profound changes in social interaction and organization, and therefore the education institutions (sector) haven't been immune. Pandemic precautions called **"social distancing" or "physical distancing"** has attempted to decrease interpersonal contact and thus minimize the type of community transmission that might develop quickly in crowded social networks just like the school, college and university campus.

At the outset, most governments have decided to close the schools temporarily to reduce the impact of Covid-19. After reopening for a few grades, the number of infection rates increased and then closed again.

Education, as a result, has mostly relocated online. The World Economic Forum reports a rush in the use of language apps, virtual tutoring, video conferencing tools, and online learning software in the last couple of years. India is also witnessing an e-learning flourishing. Using Zoom, WhatsApp and Skype has become the norm for students, parents and teachers. Yet, this unexpected conversion to online hardly compensates for the absence of the classroom involvement.

Though schools are closed, students are attending their classes through online classrooms, radio programs, etc. Though it is a good thing happening on the other side, there are lots of

Email id's:- aiirjpramod@gmail.com Or aayushijournal@gmail.com
Chief Editor: - Pramod P. Tandale (Mob.08999250451) website :- www.aiirjournal.com

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students who didn't own the resources to attend the online classes suffering a lot. Many students are struggling to get the gadgets prerequisite to attend online classes.

As the educational institutes are closed, students are missing out on social contact, which is necessary for learning and all round development. Therefore, they are deprived of opportunities for multidimensional growth. Because of **rapid and unplanned transition** to online learning particularly in LDCs like India, the challenges, ahead of us, are very critical. New ways of delivery and assessments of learning outcomes is to be developed which opens immense opportunities for this unexpected, sudden and rapid transformation in the field of curriculum development, evaluation and pedagogy. One general trend in education systems round the globe is that the '**emergency e-Learning' protocols**, making the rapid transition from face-to-face classes to on-line learning systems. More than ever we see the significance of supporting robust research and development systems, in education and public health as well.

Impact on Education

The frightening and severe impact of Covid -19 pandemic has shaken the whole world to its core. Further, most of the Governments including India have temporarily closed educational institutions to contain the spread of pandemic. These nationwide closures are affecting over 91% of the worlds' student population. Apart from students, teachers, and families, school closure have far-reaching economic and societal consequences. The impact is more acute for disadvantaged children and their families, due to halted learning, compromised nutrition, childcare problems, and the economic cost to families who lost their work due to nationwide lockdown. (Verma and Prakash, 2020).

Steps Taken By Educational Institutions

Because of the COVID-19 outbreak educational institutions has to take and adopt several digital technologies. Record video lectures upload on YouTube or similar platforms for students to watch and listen at their own time and pace. Teachers are providing notes and content related to the courses through email, WhatsApp, etc. Lectures can be delivered on digital platforms at scheduled slots when students join to attend the "classes". There are many platforms available including MS-TEAM, Google meet, CISCO Webex, Team link, ZOOM etc. and it is possible to see and interact with each other.

Ideally, the platform must have the following facilities to have a face-to-face classroom environment.

1. Provision to see each other.
2. Presentation of slides, document or content.
3. Use of white/black board.
4. Discussion opportunity.
5. Marking attendance.
6. Conduct of examination, assignment, evaluation and assessment.

Limitation Of E-Learning

Online teaching increased screen time for children, few parents who aren't comfortable with technology themselves; classes get disturbed due to Internet issues. In nuclear families, mainly, parents might have to miss work to take care of their children. Some of them could be medical professionals, who are urgently needed to alleviate the pandemic.

Teachers are under pressure, too. Everyone has an exclusive style of teaching. Over a period of time, they would have built an empathy with the students through observing their body language in class, their communication with classmates. Now, they will see them on computer monitor and there might be a lot of disturbances, chaos, and noise in the background. Teachers who are all experts in Blackboard, Chalk, books, and classroom teaching are really new to this digital teaching arena, but they are adopting the new online mode and handling it to help the students in the current crisis situation. But on the negative side, many teachers are in search for an alternative job to support their families.

Many unsettled teachers who are expert in the traditional classroom teaching require training and re-learning in this changed situation. First step is to find right platform for online teaching and second step is how to use that platform correctly. But using a platform and its features to teach effectively and ensure that all students are actually learning is very important. Classroom management, maintain discipline, disruption by student, keep the student attentive, appropriate length of class, ensuring effectiveness of teaching are some issues of online

teaching or remote classrooms which are to be dealt with by the teachers. There are other very important issues of online classes like the right online teaching techniques and strategies to keep the students engaged, which platform to use, how to keep uninvited students, and trouble, out of the online classrooms. This is just a beginning and schools have also to give serious thought to planning and conducting online assessments and evaluating students online. Readiness for online teaching is critical and schools are at various stages in this journey. So, while oldsters are worrying about having the right hardware and set-up at home, school management and teachers are sorting out larger, critical and important issues.

The work from home (WFH) culture is flourishing in India after the outbreak of the pandemic. Since social distancing is prescribed to limit the spread of COVID 19, companies are faced with a unique challenge of ensuring business normally. Therefore, both businessmen or start-ups and the educational institutions have opted for different digital platforms to provide learning to their students. But, only few urban educational institutions can provide those facilities. Thus what about the learners in rural areas? So the main questions remains, what will be the future of the disadvantaged deprived underprivileged section of the society?

Challenges and Concerns

Apart from already existing opportunity gaps there are differences among students in support from oldsters, differences within the capacity of colleges/schools to support students for remote learning and differences in students' resilience, motivation, spirit and skill of learning online and independently. There's a possible tradeoff between well-being and increased screen time of online learning. We have to work out the right balance between these two. Many oldsters aren't comfortable with technology themselves. Classes frequently get disturbed due to Internet issues. In small nuclear families, oldsters might have to miss work to pay concentration of their children. Many of them could also be healthcare professionals, who are urgently needed to tone down the pandemic. It'll also necessary to provide professional and expert

guidance to oldsters and students about the safe use of online tools, social networking, television etc. These are not only the concerns to be addressed. The primary and foremost is that the non-availability of desktop/laptop to participate into the online classes. The second concern is that the transparency in conducting examination/assessment online.

Educated parents are supporting their children throughout the pandemic, but we must understand that there are lots of illiterate parents and they are feeling helplessness to help their children in their education at home. In India lot of students who came to school just because they can get food. The great mid-day meal scheme has helped many children from under privileged family. Because of the shutting of the schools, lots of students are suffering from not having enough nutritional food for their survival. Most of the school-going children are involved in child labour to support their families as a result of drop-out. There is a possibility that the education of female children and transgender children will be affected, as their parents may see, the financial and opportunity costs of doing so.

There are difficulties as exams have to be postponed. There is always a delay or cancellation of examinations, which leads to confusion for many students. Examinations cannot be conducted in time online. Developing a useful and well-defined online course, supports the instructor and learner means devoting the appropriate time and forming the applicable course elements into the e-learning environment. Technology can offer a good substitute to the conventional education system, mitigate and compensate for the obstacles and inconvenience caused due to pandemic to the teachers, students and the education system as a whole. Learning is a continuous and ever-evolving process. The educational institutions in India, from schools to universities, can capitalize this adversity as an opportunity in disguise and plan digital education a key component of the learning process for all learners in the future. This pandemic has not only affected the students but also the financially weak institutions and schools, resulting in close-down the same.

Everything was happened so swiftly that it was not possible to plan, calculate the potential risks and opportunities which brought about by the

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sudden unprecedented spread of this Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore under these circumstances it is imperative to study or measure the impact and what has come to light and what is likely to happen in near future in the field of education. The sudden unplanned shift to online learning without any ready-made infrastructure and proper curriculum has created the risk of becoming passive learners who may lose interest due to lack of visible attention.

Toward a post-pandemic pedagogy

It is not possible to predict what the educational landscape will look like after the COVID-19, in part because of the magnitude of the community transmission threat posed by campus interactions (e.g., Weeden & Cornwell, 2020). Indeed, discussions are going on at many institutions about extension of emergency e-Learning in order to avoid the second or subsequent wave of COVID-19. The normalization of emergency e-Learning would mean the normalization of a form of education that perpetuates structural inequalities of class, race, and support (Farhadi, 2019) that schools should allow students to break free from. Highlighting the risk of normalizing emergency e-Learning is not the same as condemning all forms of online learning. Indeed, one might argue that there is a different type of emancipation that e-Learning offer.

Separating the digital divide, the portability of e-Learning may increase access to education in rural communities. Those who are unable to avail a traditional full-time face-to-face school due to personal or financial problems, the flexibility of asynchronous digital e-Learning may provide wider access. And even within traditional education institutions, hybrid or blended forms may help improve the quality of face-to-face teaching by moving content delivery online and focusing in-person sessions on active learning (e.g., Bowen, 2012). Especially in the United States, optional e-Learning might curb the burden of exorbitant tuition fees that makes higher education inaccessible for many individuals.

Opportunities: Silver lining to this crisis?

This sudden change also brings new opportunities that will convert the education system worldwide and lead to a *planned reform in education*. Teachers are becoming more technology savvy through training. Educational institutions will be using blended learning where both offline and online model will become a model. It is a great opportunity for companies that are developing learning management systems to be used by school, colleges and universities. The learning management systems will create more openness and transparency in academics. There is a new opportunity of collaborative teaching and learning of faculty members from different organizations. Collaborations can benefit each other.

Non-face-to-face governance mechanisms might be the permanent governance formulas which are swift and efficient, due to technology. The new forms of communication and governance will minimize the number of face-to-face meetings without affecting the quality of decisions or being able to reach consensus among the different actors. Also, it is clear that the circulation of documents can be limited to digital circuits, also reducing the need for printing. In both cases, the direct economic savings, including the reduction of trips and the environmental impact, are undoubtedly not insignificant.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As the impact of the pandemic on education was sudden, rapid and unexpected there was no emergency plan other than to suspension of face-to-face classes to maintain physical distance. It is important to think a way out of this crisis at the same time to ensure the highest degree of *inclusion and equity*. Specially, in the region with already unresolved challenges like growth without equality, inequities in access and achievement, it faced and the progressive loss of public financing. Yet, this sudden switch to online barely compensates for the absence of the classroom experience. Students, teachers and oldsters even have to adjust quickly to new routines. We have to modify and reinvent our model very quickly in support and combined effort of the students, oldsters and educational institutions.

It should be proposed to rent and provide computing devices within the cloud so the learning may be hassle free. It's also appropriate for AICTE to alter within the policy of insisting on a minimum number of computers in the institution. Several

innovative techniques can be used to assess learning outcome levels. The open book examination system (of short duration) and reports/projects and/or assignment (requiring longer duration) could make the evaluation transparent and develop the comprehension and skills of the students required by Industry 4.0.

We need to make sure the access to device and internet connectivity for the students who don't have them. If it's unattainable, the supplementary modalities like television, radio, podcasts, DVDs etc. should be provided to students. So, there should be two strategies, short-term and medium-term. In the short-term it is not be possible to ascertain or create infrastructure and provide device to everyone. So it's better to rely on low cost technologies like radio and/or educational television. But it's necessary to invest to develop these infrastructures and to do that educational budget has got to be enhanced considering an essential investment under this pandemic situation. The Government needs to subsidize phone data and phones for the deprived people in rural areas. There should be an aggressive drive to do this as quickly as possible.

Although the schedule for the reopening of HEIs may seem unsure or indefinite, this is an opportunity to plan the way out of the crisis, within an appropriate reference framework. *For UNESCO,* this reference framework must be based on the following principles:

1. Ensuring the right to higher education of all within a frame of equal opportunities and non-discrimination should be the first priority.
2. without leaving a student behind.
3. evaluation of existing regulatory structures and policies,
4. Preparations for the resumption of face-to-face classes
5. the recommencement of face-to-face activities of HEIs must be considered as an opportunity to rethink and, redesign the teaching-learning processes,
6. Governments and HEIs should establish coordination for joint progress in generating greater resilience in the higher education sector for future crises,

The governments should:
1. Include higher education in stimulus packages/plans for both economic and social recovery
2. Build a national consensus for a strategy for fostering recovery and innovation in education.
3. Provide an unambiguous regulatory atmosphere for the reopening of classrooms that ensure a sense of security
4. Commit to international cooperation

For their part, **academic institutions should**:
1. Expect an prolong suspension, focusing on ensuring training continuity and guaranteeing equity, creating governance mechanisms, monitoring, and support
2. plan pedagogical measures to evaluate and generate mechanisms to support learning among disadvantaged students.
3. record the pedagogical changes introduced and their impacts
4. Learn from mistakes and scale - up digitization, hybridization and omnipresent learning
5. Promote internal evidence on the renewal of the teaching- learning model

However, Covid-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown provides a chance to rethink to alter the traditional mode of conventional education system. Educational institutes should capitalize this chance to renovate itself by updating Curriculum, collaborating with other institutions, skill development and faculty improvement programme, centering on internationalizing higher education. This is the time to merge the traditional education system to digital education in India. This may allow inclusive education by facilitating learning across different geographies in India.

Ahead of crisis-related research, there are other areas that require the capabilities of higher education to produce new knowledge and develop renewed capabilities. One of them is education. During the crisis, it is not possible to quantify the learning from the pedagogical to the economic, psychosocial, etc. Undoubtedly, in the future it will be possible to take advantage of the acquaintance

gathered in the crisis. It would help us to build up an early warning system to foresee and mitigate the impact of crises such as this on education and student learning, teachers and the systems themselves. Undoubtedly, a great deal of research will also be generated regarding the effects of this crisis in areas such as environmental sustainability, industry, the economy and others. The implications of school closures in the country are not just about education; they are manifold. An unprecedented social disaster can be avoided if more entities — Government and private — go for short-term and long-term futures of the children in this digital divide. Meanwhile, millions from Government schools and colleges, especially in rural areas, will not even have access to education due to the lockdown. 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 poorest households cannot afford a smartphone or a computer.

There are both positive and negative matters happening around us amid the Covid-19.

Technology paves the way for education, thus helping the students and teachers to connect virtually through online classrooms, webinars, digital exams, and so on. We are acquainted with and habituated to use of technology if teaching-learning. But the reality is that it is not available to many students all over the country.

We know that everything is happening for the security and benefit of the students so that they can stay safe at home without getting affected by the life-threatening virus. We were not ready for this, but it came, so we have to go through this, but we have to update and upgrade the infrastructure and should think of ways to undertake the situation and providing education to every child amid the pandemic and learn lesson from this experience which will be helpful in the future to aid the forthcoming generation.

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