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Increasing use of digital platforms for online teaching-learning in COVID Era: Pros and cons

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Abstract

COVID-19 called for social distancing as a global pandemic. It has made it compulsory for people to sit indoors which may lead to mental stress. Therefore, online teaching can play an important role to keep people engaged and free of mental stress. In this pandemic situation, online teaching has emerged as the best solution. Teachers can use virtual classrooms to teach from home with all tools that are as effective as traditional online sessions. Pandemics often force the students to stay at home and obstruct the learning process for a long time. This article highlights the benefit of online teaching-learning in times of crisis like absence from work during pandemics. Some tools and techniques for online instructional education are therefore highlighted, which can ensure the continuity of education. Some new approaches to online teaching are presented by the Government of India. Online teaching-learning platform's merits and demerits are also discussed. Online teaching-learning system perceptions of students and educators during lock-up are indicated.

Keywords: Online teaching-learning, online platforms, perceptions of learners and educators

Introduction

In most governments across the world, the COVID-19 pandemic is temporarily shut down by educational institutes. With more and more states, provinces and even entire countries closing schools and over 91 percent of the world's students do not attend schools (UNESCO). Several other countries have introduced localized closures that affect the millions of other students. UNESCO supports countries to slow down the impact of school closures, especially in vulnerable and disadvantaged communities, and tries to facilitate education for all through remote education. The World Bank is also working actively with educational ministries in various countries to support efforts to use educational technologies to give students remote teaching opportunities while educators are shut down as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. "The pandemic of corona virus leads to unprecedented increase today," said Dr. Howard Taylor, Executive Director of the Global Partnership to End Violence. 'School shut-downs and strict containment measures mean more and more families rely on technology and digital solutions to keep children learning, entertained and externally connected, but not every child has the knowledge, skills and resources to maintain a safe and secure environment online' (UNICEF). This pandemic COVID-19 situation now enables teaching-learning to be implemented online and knowledge to be virtually transferred by multiple media. The best solution during this crisis is online teaching. On-line teaching is an internet-based teaching-learning environment. It is often called e-learning. An online educator makes up for the lack of physical participation in the virtual classroom by creating an environment in which all students are comfortable to participate (Joshua). It plays a major role in turning our lives into a digital world through flexible places, class schedules and high-quality content. At that time, it offers a path to human development through pandemic physical isolation. Online teaching is useful because it is accessible instantly and offers flexible programming. In this system learners are communicating via e-mail, WhatsApp, video conferencing, instant message, or with other tools with internet technology. However, in online teaching-learning video conferencing can effectively be used to improve community collaboration between learners which can to some extent replace teaching-learning in face-to-face classrooms. Students from rural areas had previously missed numerous opportunities for their urban and suburban peers. The quality of their learnings can dramatically be improved by linking those rural students to online learning with video conferences. This allows rural/disadvantaged pupils both to attend school from home and

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provide them with access to experts. Videoconferencing is an interactive model for the transmission of video, interactive voice and data between two or more groups/people. Videoconferencing can only be used for online education as one of its technological systems. More organisations, because it is an economically efficient way to provide a large number of people, have recognized the value of online learning. Not only can it reduce costs but it can also achieve significant results by improving performance. For the following reasons during lockout period for COVID-19, teaching-learning is encouraged online.

- One can acquire knowledge staying at home and can maintain social distancing.
- Outbreak of COVID-19 can be minimised due to social distancing
- It offers highly effective teaching-learning environments.
- It offers complementary interactive support that allows students to study 24/7 and work at their own pace.
- It offers flexible scheduling.
- It is available in any location, with an internet connection and students can attend using their devices (mobile, computers, tablets, etc.).
- Deals with real-time student monitoring as well as reporting.
- Improves the image of institution by offering technological solutions that solve real problems

Effectiveness, benefits and downsides of e-teaching-learning

E-learning can improve the educational process thanks to its complex characteristics and diverse features. However, teachers and students need to understand how to integrate it effectively into the educational and learning process, in order to influence collaboration and performance positively. According to Tham and Werner, the effectiveness of e-learning is determined by three elements: an institution which refers to teachers who know how to use the tools to enhance learning, how they interact with students and create a comfortable learning environment and how they can bring students closer to each other and capture their attention creatively. In the field of online learning, face-to-face comparative studies and online learning have provided results to support its educational effectiveness. Studies show that students have been able to assimilate information or even better than students who have learned traditionally with the application of e-learning, and that the online learning has demonstrated its effectiveness especially in the case of students who are shy, easily intimidated and slow learners who usually have no courage to speak and speak in school. Unlike personal learning, e-learning has become more popular primarily because of its flexibility in providing education and access to content and resources. This enables e-learning to improve its quality and the possibility of adapting courses to meet the needs of the learner. The learning process has a great importance in e-learning. Due to its versatility, e-learning removes space and time barriers, allows users to access a wide variety of information, enables collaboration, enables students to learn at their own pace, motivates them to interact, discuss and discuss views and ideas with other people. The fact that online learning is faster, saves time and money, because there are no trips, and the contents uploaded are consistent and can be easily updated, also says other studies. Al-Dosari

also found, studying the students and the teachers' perception of e-learning, that the most important advantages of online education are accessibility, focus on students, flexibility and collaboration.

Initiatives of India for online teaching-learning during lockdown

Educational institutes have been locked up in countries all over the world because of COVID-19. The country is facing major crises in many industries during the COVID-19 outbreak throughout the nation, but education is the worst hit sector, since most exams were canceled during the final evaluations. Students and teachers struggle with unbroken and seamless internet connection quality. At the same time, students' desired academic progress should not be compromised in the country. Through online education, education institutions should, therefore, adopt intelligent solutions to overcome the endemic crisis. In the course of the ongoing lockout, many Indian state governments also explore online learning platforms to access educational online resources. They look to develop ways to help students continue their education throughout the country during the COVID-19 lock-down. The goal is to continue the students' academic cycles effectively and not to allow lock-downs to influence their education. They plan to provide audio and video content and self-assessment exercises for students. Special sessions for students can be held to clarify important subjects. People of India have to pursue coordinated and collaborative action in combatting COVID-19 and also use their time productively in the current situation by adopting ICTs to help teach learning and contribute to the nation's intellectual wealth. In order to ensure that students don't miss the classes during the lock-up phase, online lessons were promoted throughout the various universities through the University Grants Commission (UGC). In the press on 13 April 2020 (DD News) the Chief of the UGC stated that two committees were established in the UGC to support online education during lockdowns of COVID-19. The second Committee works on students, teachers and the educational system, and one committee for the examination and academic calendar. The guidelines on universities may soon be issued by the UGC on the basis of the committee's suggestions and in consultation with the MHRD. In the nonfiction of 11 April 2020, UGC advised all high-school institutions to take precautionary measures to ensure that social distance is maintained, that they stay in contained homes/hostels and make use of time productively through their on-line education during the lockout period for COVID-19. Teachers, students and researchers at universities and colleges can access resources in the form of digital platforms in order to expand their knowledge. MHRD recommends the students to continue their education through the Online Learning Platforms in order to ensure that there are no pause in education, as before and that students have full access to classes. In addition to full-access to the course materials, the online learning platforms enable students to engage in online classes and to interact with teachers such as the teaching environment.

Emerging approaches of Govt. of India for online teaching-learning

The HRD Minister of the Union has shared several free, digital online educational platforms with the MHRD,

published by the MHRD on 21 March 2020, which allows learners to continue their education during COVID-19 school closures. The World Bank also tries out emerging approaches taken by various countries and stores all associated information that may be of help to others. The emerging approaches of India shared by World Bank are as listed below.

- The DIKSHA portal contains online teaching-learning content for students, teachers, and parents aligned to the curriculum, including video lessons, worksheets, textbooks and assessments. Under the guidance of its national board of education (CBSE) and NCERT, the content has been created by more than 250 teachers who teach in multiple languages. QR codes in textbooks encourage students to go beyond the book. The app is available to use offline.
- E-Pathshala is an online teaching-learning app by NCERT for classes 1 to 12 in multiple languages. The app houses books, videos, audio, etc. aimed at students, educators and parents in multiple languages including Hindi, Urdu, and English.
- The National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER) portal provides a host of resources for students and teachers in multiple languages including books, interactive modules and videos including a host of STEM-based games. Content is mapped to the curriculum for classes 1 – 12, including aligned resources for teachers.
- Swayam hosts 1900 complete courses, including teaching videos, weekly assignments, exams and credit transfers, aimed both at school (class 9 to 12) and higher education (undergraduate and postgraduate) levels. Subjects are aligned to the curriculum and include engineering, humanities, social sciences, and law and management courses including robotics.
- Swayam Prabha is a group of 32 Direct to Home (DTH) channels devoted to telecasting of educational programs round the clock and accessible all across the country. The channels air courses for school education (class 9-12), higher education (undergraduate, postgraduate) as well as for out-of-school children, vocational education and teacher training. Subjects include arts, science, commerce, performing arts, social sciences, humanities, engineering, technology, law, medicine, and agriculture. Schedules for the television broadcast as well as archived programs are available on the website.

Free online platforms that support live-video communication

There are many live-video communication platforms are available in web, but some of the free online platforms are as listed below which can be used by learners of all categories:

- Zoom- Cloud platform for video and audio conferencing, collaboration, chat and webinars.
- Google Meet- Video calls integrated with other Google's G-Suite tools. Video meeting recordings, Screen sharing, Join calls using Google Calendar
- Skype- Video and audio calls with talk, chat and collaboration features.
- Facebook Live- is a great fit for businesses, influencers, or individuals who are looking to broadcast demos, videos, or showcase their company culture while streaming live, followers on Facebook can comment

and chat live, schedule videos ahead of time to gain excitement.

- YouTube Live-is a platform for demonstrating a product with live interaction, hosting an educational session to teach audience with screen sharing or using a whiteboard, having features with Location tags and advanced scheduling.
- Uber Conference- Unlimited Video and audio calls with talk, chat and collaboration features
- Free Conference is ideal for smaller teams or meetings, feature include Screen sharing, Document sharing, Text sharing etc.
- Dingtalk- Communication platform that supports video conferencing, task and calendar management, attendance tracking and instant messaging.
- Lark- Collaboration suite of interconnected tools, including chat, calendar, creation and cloud storage, in Japanese, Korean, Italian and English.
- Teams- Chat, meet, call and collaboration features integrated with Microsoft Office software.
- True Conf Online- HD video with Collaboration tools (screen sharing, remote desktop control, recorded calls, file transfer and shared virtual whiteboard).
- Slack Video Calls- is good for teams looking for a supplementary video calling solution for small teams; features include individual calls and messenger services.
- Life-size Go- No restrictions on meeting length, preferred for small group conversations.

Perception of learners on online teaching-learning during lockdown

- Felt happy due to utilisation of time in attending online classes during the lockdown period. Initially, faced some difficulty in joining online classes but got acquainted later on.
- Feeling lonely and unable to share feelings with peers. Observed poor audio/video quality in some locality due to poor network.
- Some emergency service personnel like police, doctor and nurses etc. who do not get much time to interact in online classes make use the recordings of online classes to pursue their study during the lockdown have shown their satisfaction.
- Requesting to facilitate practical based classes through virtual laboratories.
- Requesting to upload all recordings of online classes in website for further reference of the learners as well as educators as per their requirements. Using the online recordings of classes/meetings learners are able to revise the concepts again and again to clarify their doubts for better understanding the subject.
- Online teaching should be delivered in local/regional languages so that everybody could interact comfortably.
- Improved required technical skills due to online teaching-Learning programme and requesting for provision of online examination during lockdown period.
- Online teaching-learning is felt to be less effective, less systematic and less organized than the conventional system of education. So, face to face classes for the same courses may conduct again after the end of lockdown.
- Very effective for women and physically handicapped

learners who can learn at home.

- Do not receive prior information on online class or induction meeting schedule and cannot attend.
- Feeling unhappy for not having required technically knowledge to join online teaching-learning and unable to afford required technical gadgets with high speed internet for online teaching-learning.

Perception of educators for online teaching-learning during lockdown

- Feel pleased about time used during the lockdown period when performing online classes. Initially, the online lessons were difficult but later became familiar and the classes were conducted smoothly.
- Ensure prior information on online classes or schedules for inductive meetings would help educators prepare subjects for the efficient delivery of online classes or inductive meetings more effectively.
- Any online course records should be uploaded on the website for the learners and educators to be referenced as required.
- The lockdown has been unexpectedly declared, meaning that most institutions cannot determine the pay rates of online classroom teachers. The host institutions should thus clarify the financial issue concerning remuneration and expenditure for the Internet data package.
- As students are at various places in on-line classrooms, monitoring their activities in real time becomes difficult for an educator. During the online classes it is also difficult to draw your attention to the subject.
- Online classes have very poor attendance and less student interaction. Poor video and audio quality sometimes hamper the smooth operation of online classes.

Conclusion

Online learning is today's most common distance learning method. During the COVID-19 lock-down period, online teaching is the best way of ensuring that learners are engaged and safe through social separation. The Government of India has initiated various online teaching-learning platforms, recognized by UNESCO and the World Bank, to continue with educational activities during the lockout period. Online teaching-learning methods employ various online applications to distribute teaching materials and to help educators and students interact. With the help of the various technologies available for online education, educators can provide a more interactive distance learning experience through the provision of synchronous, real-time video conferencing. Online learning is considered to be the future teaching process, and this platform has the potential to change the teaching-learning pedagogy of the modern world overall. All stakeholders of education must nevertheless be trained on the online learning platform in the necessary steps. The policy of providing free internet and free digital devices for all students should be adopted by government and educational institutions to encourage online teaching, through which people are locked down and secure from the onset. Online education-learning is at this time of lock-down the best learning method by the outbreak of COVID-19, and an online teaching-learning impact on a lock-down period can now be studied further in-depthly.

Suggestions

Some useful steps for smooth functioning of Online teaching-Learning are as suggested below:

1. Enhanced security and safeguarding platforms should be ensured online, in particular for virtual learning tools. Devices must have up-to-date software and anti-virus programs otherwise personal data security may be jeopardized as digital devices may be hacked.
2. High-speed Internet connectivity should be provided to ensure that everybody, including disadvantaged and low income students, has smooth access.
3. The new UNICEF guideline and partners for ensuring safe children in online lessons should be followed by everyone.
4. Schools should monitor children's good online behaviors during online classrooms.
5. Parents should ensure child devices have the latest antivirus and software updates. You should work with children in order to establish rules on how the Internet can be used, when and where. They should also discuss how and with whom they communicate online with their children.
6. Social networking platforms should enhance online platforms, especially using virtual learning tools by implementing more security measures.
7. Government should take necessary steps to train all stakeholders of education to address such lock-out crises during pandemics on the online educational platform. Government awareness of on-line learning should be developed through child security measures and actions taken to raise awareness of cyber security.
8. Online learning is not affordable for everyone, including the society's poor and disadvantaged. Government/educational institutions should therefore take necessary steps to minimize the gap between privileged and unprivileged students.
9. Web-based interactions such as e-mail, discussion panels and chat rooms must be known to learners and educators prior to joining online classes.
10. The policy of providing all learners with free internet and free digital gadgets should also be adopted in government and education institutions, in order to promote on-line teaching, which would involve the lock-down and prevent pandemics.

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