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IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic in India is part of the worldwide pandemic of coronavirus disease. Coronavirus disease is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. The whole world is fearful due to the alarming spreading infection of the corona virus. The whole world has suffered from irreparable loss due to the pandemic. Almost all the fields are badly shaken due to the pandemic. Its impact can be seen at personal, social, economic, cultural and political levels. This paper is an attempt to focus on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on higher education in India. The pandemic has a far-reaching impact on higher education. The students are confused and thinking about their examinations and results. The higher education sector has several issues and challenges caused to do the pandemic. The issues like examinations, results, new admissions, fees, entrance tests, interviews, skill-based education and training programmes, career opportunities, placements etc. are challenging and need to be addressed.

Key words: COVID 19, Pandemic, Coronavirus, Higher Education Sector, Skill-Based Education

Most of the countries in the world are badly affected by VOVID-19. The whole globe is in danger as the corona virus is seen spreading everywhere and no vaccine is invented yet. How to survive in this pandemic is the most crucial and challenging question? The pandemic has changed the mindset of human being. The whole world is trying its level best to find out the solution. Coronavirus has changed the personal, social, economic and cultural life of individuals. The government is trying its level best for the safety and security of the citizens. The rising lockdown period has made life more difficult and challenging. The lockdown and social distancing have changed the lifestyle of the people. Each and every sector is badly affected by corona. It has affected the economy of the world. All the countries are facing the problems caused by corona. Everyone is trying to cope up with the situation by making certain changes in their outlook and style of living. Education has certain priority in our life as it is essential for the personal development. Schools, colleges, institutions and universities have been closed down due to spreading COVID-19. The delayed examinations have raised several possible challenges which students will have to face in future. It is for the first time. The present generation is facing the problem of how to complete education without going to colleges and universities. It has made everyone aware about the importance of digital platform in higher education.

UGC handbook indicates that, Indian Higher education (HE) system is the second largest in the world. Higher education in India has experienced an unprecedented expansion over the past decades. According to the All India Survey for Higher Education Report (MHRD, 2018) released on 27th July, 2018, India has 903 universities, including Institutions of National Importance, 39050 Colleges and 10011 stand-alone institutions in 2017-18. Indian higher education institutions have enrolled 36.6 million students with a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 25.8 percent as of 2017-18. The Higher Education system comprises of the Central Universities, State Universities, Institutions of National Importance, deemed to be Universities, State Private Universities Constituent Colleges, Autonomous colleges and Affiliated colleges. The Department of Higher Education, MHRD, is responsible for the overall development of the basic infrastructure of Higher Education sector, both in terms of policy and planning. It is their initiative to look after expansion of access and qualitative improvement in the Higher Education, through world class Universities, Colleges and other Institutions. The mission of MHRD is to promote the quality of Higher Education by investing in infrastructure and faculty, promoting academic reforms, improving governance and institutional restructuring. Moreover, MHRD initiates policies and programmes for strengthening research and innovations and encourage institutions – public or private to engage in stretching the frontiers of knowledge. Therefore, it is difficult to implement one common policy for all diverse institutions working in different provinces.

The conventional Indian education system follows face-to-face teaching where the physical presence of the students and teachers has a certain importance. There are some universities and private colleges which offer online classes to its students. But many higher education institutes in India are not equipped with such facilities. The lack of advanced IT facilities may affect the entire academic year of the students. Therefore, we must use new edge technologies of learning and teaching used in the advanced countries for better understanding and improving our educational standard.

The students are disturbed because all the examinations have been postponed. Even the lockdown period is also increasing. Therefore, new notifications regarding the examinations have been given from time to time. Some decisions regarding the pattern of examination, mode of the examination, weightage of marks, time schedule, grading system etc, are the current issues of discussion. Universities have decided to promote the first- and second-year students. It has created confusion among the students and they fear their future. Even this pandemic effect is going to affect the next years admission related several factors. The examinations are being postponed and the universities have decided to conduct the examinations of the last year degree students and the other students will be promoted in the next year with certain rules. This situation has created several problems for the students. They have doubts in the mind about their merit and degree certificate. Many back-log students are thinking about the several problems which they have to face in future. Many students have planned their careers and eager to face entrance examinations. There is always rush for the admission in the top-class reputed colleges, institutes and universities. Such reputed higher educational institutions offer good placement facilities, but due to lockdown students fear that they may miss the opportunities. The coaching classes and colleges have been locked down and students need guidance of the teachers. Students who stays in cities and have financial

support and managing their studies with the help of digital platform. Computers, tabs, laptops, multimedia cell phones have helped the students to get guidance from the available sources with the help of internet. But many students residing in hilly, rural and tribal areas have several challenges before them. They are not well-equipped with technology tools. Moreover, internet access is not available to them.

The government has emphasised the use of technology. The central government and state government is publishing information to provide digital access to the students. The lockdown period has accelerated adoption of digital technology. The educational institutions, colleges and universities are using online platform of learning and teaching. Virtual classrooms and online courses are being used due to lockdown. This is the most appropriate time to experiment and deploy new tools to make education delivery meaningful to the students who are not able to go to colleges due to lockdown. MHRD and NCERT are taking effort to provide online teaching to students. SWAYAM, E-Pathshala and MOOC courses are used by the students to gain knowledge in their respective areas of interest. Not only students but teachers are also taking efforts to use technology. Many teachers have been seen conducting zoom meeting with the students. Even many teachers have started their YouTube channels and conducting online lecture series. Many colleges are conducting online quizzes and google classroom, on different topics to enrich the knowledge of their students.

To meet the needs of the present times there is need to improve the online services. The development in IT infrastructure is necessary to provide online education in colleges and universities. The use of technology in learning, teaching and recruitment will lead to a new era where the best quality resources will be available throughout the globe. The new learning policy will emerge emphasising digital technologies. The government must provide high speed internet facilities to universities and colleges so that they can use digital platform. The pandemic has shown us our limitations. The blended approach of learning and teaching is essential in higher education. Therefore, it is our duty get acquainted with digital technology to make the teaching and learning comprehensive and globally acceptable. The online and off-line modes need to be used along with conventional methods of teaching for our survival in the future.

The role of teacher is also changing, he/she must improve his/her knowledge of technology for being global. Many courses and training programmes are available for the teachers. The government is also emphasising the use of technology. The pandemic crisis has changed our approach towards higher education. The teachers are aware that technology will play a vital role in future. The advanced countries are making use of internet widely. E-learning has become a common practice for them. We also need to emphasise on E-learning. Teachers involvement in digital material production is the necessity of the present times. The government's efforts for the development of the teachers and the involvement of teachers will definitely improve the present status of higher education in the colleges. We can hope that in the post pandemic situation the majority of the colleges, universities and institutions will come forwards to run various online courses by preparing their own digital content to provide employability and a bright future for the students.

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