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Overview of the Impact of Online Education in India

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Abstract

The world has been profoundly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Governments, businesses, and academic institutions were forced to embrace the already undergoing digital transformation in a very short time frame. Education is the cornerstone of any society, which is the most affected today. Social distancing is the only way of breaking the chain of coronavirus transmission. Hence, to achieve academic continuity during the pandemic, governments throughout the world had to encourage online education.

This study aims to understand the social, economic, and psychological impact of online education in India. In a country like India, where technology is limited to the privileged, imparting online education is cumbersome. Many underprivileged students, who hold the key to a major improvement in the socio-economic development of the country and bridge the gap of wealth inequality, are unable to attend online classes due to inefficient technology, unavailability of electronic devices like computers, smartphones and in many areas, disrupted power supply systems, expensive internet services, or lack of them altogether. The pandemic was also responsible for the postponement of multiple competitive exams, admissions, which further impacted the academic calendar. The impact of strict lockdowns and loss of livelihoods on students' education has also been discussed.

Keywords: academic, online, education, pandemic, inequality

Introduction

COVID-19 wreaked havoc on all elements of human life around the world, including education, research, sports, entertainment, transportation, worship, social gatherings/interactions, the economy, corporations, and politics. Indeed, the entire globe was in a state of panic as a result of the COVID-19 danger; the reality of the situation was difficult to bear, and the education sector was one of the hardest hits by the disease. Every student's schedule was ruined by the lockdown. Though it is a unique circumstance in educational history, COVID offered the students an opportunity to transition from a demanding classroom teaching paradigm to a new era of digital learning.

The academic institutions had to adapt to online education to continue imparting it. Online education is a broad term

that refers to teaching and learning through the internet using technological tools and platforms. Good internet connections, learning software, digital abilities, availability, and access to technology are all aspects that contribute to the success of online education. Platforms for universal education and online learning are critical resources. Distance education and the introduction of digital technologies that enable the effective and dependable delivery of lectures, virtual classroom sessions, and other instructional materials and activities via the internet are the foundations of online education. With the sudden shift away from the classroom in many parts of the world, some are wondering if online learning adoption would continue post-pandemic, and how such a shift might affect the global education industry.

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In this paper, attempts have been made to understand the impact of online education on students and teachers and the major changes it has brought to society. Issues like lack of infrastructure have created a literacy gap in society. This problem has also been highlighted.

Role of Infrastructure

Infrastructure plays a very important role in both online and offline learning. Today, a lot of municipal schools and government schools, and colleges lack basic infrastructure like labs, computer equipment, proper buildings, etc. However, a lot of private schools in the country are considered among the best in the world. This disparity of infrastructure also exists for online learning too. Hence, the scenario is explained by studying the lack of access to necessities for online education.

Power supply

According to a study [5], 96.7% of households in India enjoy a grid-connected power supply whereas 0.33% get power from off-grid sources. Unfortunately, 2.4% of Indian households remain unelectrified. The reality, however, can be understood by the following data. A nationwide survey conducted by the ministry of rural development found that [4]

1. 20% of Indian households receive less than 8 hours of electricity
2. Only 47% have access to electricity for more than 12 hours.

Power cuts are also one of the major problems providing a hindrance to online education. This problem is very frequent in rural areas. And the fact is that the percentage of the population living in rural areas in India, as per Census 2011, stands at 68.84%.

It is clear from the above-mentioned data that again, a disparity exists for accessing power throughout the country. The power supply is essential for online education for obvious reasons like charging the devices and powering the internet router. Hence, for a student with a limited power supply, attending online classes, internships, and exams are difficult. There is a high risk of a power outage during exams, interviews, and internships which would reflect poorly on the student's grades. Teachers face a similar problem as they too are native to the localities where the students live. Here, their need for power is even more as they need to access answer sheets, assignments and prepare for the lectures. The cost factor also becomes important here as many low-income households in rural as well as urban

areas cannot afford to pay high electricity bills. Combine this with the economic distress of lockdowns and the students are forced to leave education.

Internet access

A report by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), [6]

1. Internet penetration in urban population is 51%
2. Whereas internet penetration in rural population is 27%

A report on internet speed conducted by speed test says India's internet speed broadband is 36 Mbps whereas its mobile download speed is almost 10 Mbps. If we compare this with other countries India stands in 131st position, even below Sri Lanka Nepal, and Pakistan. High internet speed and proper connection are important for buffer-free streaming on online classes and exams. Again, a large disparity exists here due to poor internet penetration throughout the country.

Access to gadgets

Research by pew study found that only 24% of Indians have smartphones. Also, if in a family there is only a single phone and there are more than 1 child then here the problem arises as to which child will get the phone. The availability or even accessibility to devices like printers, scanners, etc plays an important role in education today. A student with access to these devices can print the learning anytime and study with ease. However, a student with no access to such devices must rely on the gadget where he/she attends lectures. Hence, the student can access the learning material only when the gadget is charged, if there is a limited power supply then the time of access reduces. Also, if a single gadget is shared by multiple users, the student then has even less time to study. This unequal access to resources will lead to a knowledge gap among students. This further reduces the chances for such students to have a successful career. Also, access to the quality of gadgets is important. For technical education, laptops are essential, however, powerful laptops are required to learn and use complex software like computing tools, CAD, programming environments, etc. Powerful laptops cost more, hence a poor student must buy a weaker laptop and make do with whatever learning he/she can obtain from it. Online education is not just limited to these three necessities. Attending online classes or internships can also be disturbed by a lack of privacy due to small houses. Many aspirational students live near railway tracks, airports, and



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