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IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON TEACHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in human history, affecting nearly 32 crore learners across the country. Closures of schools, institutions and other learning spaces have impacted badly on students. This has brought far-reaching changes in all aspects of our lives. Social distancing and restrictive movement policies have significantly disturbed traditional educational practices. Thus, schools have been converted into the digital space. Consequently, teachers started using different virtual platforms, social media and online meeting platforms without proper training, and institutional support. During the epidemic, education is going through different problems and unprecedented concerns. Multiple positive or negative impacts can be seen due to lockdowns which forced us to think about how we can strengthen the education system. This pandemic also exposed how we were under prepared to deal with such an emerging crisis in education. The need of the hour is to innovate and implement alternative educational system and assessment strategies. The COVID-19 pandemic has provided us with an opportunity to pave the way for introducing digital learning. This paper highlights the trends that has emerged during the pandemic and the impact of Covid-19 on education in general and teacher education in particular. Also, various concerns related to online education are illustrated and suggestions for government, stakeholders, and teachers are also given.

Keywords – Covid-19, Teacher Education

I. INTRODUCTION

When the Covid-19 first struck Wuhan at the beginning of 2020, rest of the world remained unaware that COVID-19 would spread to every country and affect the way of our living, working, teaching, & learning (1) The COVID-19 epidemic has had a variety of effects on education, particularly teacher education. Due to the closing of colleges and schools, instructors and students had to quickly adjust to online instruction. The same applies to teacher education. In order to meet the expectations of students, requirements of teacher education and the operating environments that both universities and schools had to operate in, it was necessary to create learning environments for student teachers completing their teacher education preparation (2). As the teacher educators and student teachers were not prepared to deal with such an emerging crisis in education. In this context, among other issues, it is important to look at how teacher education had adapted to the restriction in interaction and moved to new ways of teaching and learning in the preparation of future teachers for a world of teaching. The reality resulted from the COVID-19 crisis raised questions about the nature of teaching and ways of supporting the learning of student teachers, but it also challenged teacher education to think ways of educating teachers for scenarios that are unpredictable and unknown.

On March 24, 2020, India first declared a complete lockdown of the entire nation for 21 days, leaving 1.3 billion people across the country locked in, stranded and confused. The lockdown meant an abrupt closure of inter-city and inter-state transportation, offices, workspaces, educational and social institutions of all kinds. The impact is far reaching and had affected learning for two academic years. Several schools, colleges and universities had discontinued face-to-face teaching. There was a pressing need to innovate and implement alternative educational and assessment strategies. The COVID-19 pandemic had provided with an opportunity to pave the way for introducing digital learning (3). The Indian government has put in a lot of effort to provide education online by providing numerous free digital platforms to cater to the educational needs of learners of different age groups. But, inaccessibility of the internet to all and unpreparedness of educational institutions. Despite that research highlighted the weakness of online teaching

infrastructure, the limited exposure of teachers to online teaching, the information gap, non-conducive environment for learning at home, equity and academic excellence in terms of higher education of education emerged to be the major challenges (4). Moreover, socioeconomic disparities that exist in the real world have become more pronounced in the digital and virtual world that, even in major cities like Delhi. Beyond the evident differences between public and private schools, the research revealed that many teachers are proficient at using technology. They still struggled to teach online because they lack specialised training and are generally unacquainted with particular online pedagogical challenges (5).

OBJECTIVES:

The present study is aimed to achieve following objectives;

- 1- Enlighten various measures taken by Govt. of India for education in general and teacher education during this pandemic.
- 2- Enlist the challenges teachers and students were facing in online teaching.
- 3- Highlight various benefits of COVID-19 on teaching and learning process.
- 4- Put some effective suggestions for continuing education during the pandemic situation

2. DIGITAL INITIATIVES BY THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

The Indian government's goal for Digital India seemed to be a crucial tool for tackling the issues and challenges of the scenario, as every sector was impacted by a pandemic and crisis, notably the education sector. The pandemic has increased the need for digital tools in teaching. The Indian Ministry of Education has taken a lot of measures to educate the students during the lockdown. To assist students in keeping continue their studies at home, a large number of websites, TV channels, and radio programmes have been launched. There are several social media platforms were being used for online teaching and learning, as well as for teacher and student training, such as WhatsApp, YouTube Live, and others. The MHRD's digital education programmes for COVID-19 (6) are listed below:

Diksha: Diksha portal and application contains e-content for teachers and students according to the various state board curriculum for classes 1 to 12. This e-content includes textbooks, video, and worksheets and also evaluation modules in various languages and created by more than 250 teachers across the nation under the guidance of CBSE and NCERT. The application can be easily downloaded from the Google play store and can be used online and offline as well.

Vidya Daan: It is a national program of DIKSHA to ensure quality education for school students from various states/UTs of India. Individuals, educationists, subject experts from government and non-government organisations may donate/contribute e-learning resources (lesson plan, videos, quiz, etc.) for school education, to ensure quality learning under the Creative Commons license framework.

E-Pathshala: It is an e-Learning app initiated by NCERT for classes 1 to 12 in various languages. The app houses books, videos, audio, etc. aimed at students, educators, and parents in multiple languages including Hindi, Urdu, and English. In this web portal, NCERT has deployed 1886 audios, 2000 videos, 696 e-Books, and 504 Flip Books for classes 1 to 12 in different languages. Mobile Apps are also available.

National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER): This portal provides several resources for both students and teachers in many languages and includes books, videos, interactive modules, and STEM-based games aligned to the curriculum for classes 1-12. It has a total of 14527 files including 401 collections, 2779 documents, 1345 interactive, 1664 audios, 2586 images, and 6153 videos in multiple languages. NROER is a storehouse of e-content of NCERT and other collaborative partners, available for all grades and various academic subjects. All the content can be accessed via NCERT's official YouTube channel.

SWAYAM: SWAYAM is the national online education platform hosting more than 1800 MOOCs covering both schools (classes 9 to 12) and higher education in all subjects. A credit transfer is a unique feature for SWAYAM courses. During the pandemic, 92 massive open online courses for grades 9 to 12 are uploaded on the SWAYAM portal and it is a matter of pride that approx 1.5 crore students have enrolled in these courses. They can access all the course modules - text, videos, and assessment questions, etc.

Swayam Prabha: Swayam Prabha DTH channels are meant to reach and facilitate those who do not have some kind of internet facilities or digital devices. 32 channels are started to telecast quality educational programmes by efficient teachers under the guidance of MHRD. Channels are set aside for school education and higher education separately to the telecast of live interactive sessions. The Department of School Education and Literacy is also tied up with various private DTH operators like Tata Sky & Airtel. Soon, the number of TV channels for school education will increase from 5 to 12 to transform into 'one class, one channel'.

MANODARPAN for psychosocial support: MANODARPAN covers a wide range of activities to provide psychosocial support to students, teachers and families for Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing during the COVID outbreak and beyond.

E-textbooks: The e-textbooks can be accessed using e-Pathshala web portal and mobile app (Android, iOS, Windows). More than 600 digital books including 377 e-textbooks (grades 1 to 12) and 3,500 pieces of audio and video content of NCERT are available in the public domain in various languages (Hindi, English, Sanskrit and Urdu).

3. CHALLENGES:

When the Covid-19 outbreak hit us over two year and a half ago, the abrupt nationwide shutdown transformed the educational landscape overnight. Students and teachers struggled with the dynamic shift from physically attending educational institutions to attending classes digitally. It was challenging for everyone to adopt and adjust when the traditional model of instruction was replaced by a more unusual one. It wasn't easy for the teachers to switch to a new way of teaching with little to no preparation, but they persisted.

A Learning Spiral online survey 2021(7) revealed that while teachers had difficulties delivering instruction using digital tools, students have difficulties obtaining education online. A startling 84 percent of teachers said they had trouble using digital tools to give instruction, with internet-related problems including signal problems and data costs affecting nearly half of them. In UP and Chhattisgarh, where 80 percent and 67 percent of instructors, respectively, lack the needed gadgets to conduct education online, the situation was particularly dire with only two out of every five teachers were having these devices. Less than 20% of teachers reported having orientation on providing instruction digitally, which is directly related to the difficulties.

Survey conducted by UNNICEF (8), found that teachers encountered a number of difficulties when teaching remotely, and many of them believe that teaching remotely offers little advantages over teaching in school. Moreover, it has been found that teachers' top challenges faced while teaching from home were inability to reach students and lack of class discipline online. Some considered lack of e-skills and additional expenditure as barriers to effective remote teaching. Data packages are costly in comparison to the income of the people in many developing countries, thus making accessibility and affordability was inadequate to every student. The affordability and accessibility for all the learners of varied economic background is identified as a challenge.

In India provision of digital tools and reliable infrastructure has been the greatest challenge for students to continue their learning across the country (UNICEF). This implied that while students from families with higher standards of living could easily make the switch to remote learning, students from disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to fail due to inefficiency and a lack of adaptation, either because they were unable to access the technological tools or because their uneducated parents were unable to help them navigate tech-savvy applications.

It can be concluded that the inadequate phone, internet, and electrical infrastructure in the wider system is a hindrance to the digitalization of the educational system. Even teachers from "smart schools" complained that frequent power failures or a poor wifi connection made it necessary for them to use mobile data plans to continue teaching. A supportive and competent support structure is required for a teacher to be successful (UNICEF)

4. BENEFITS:

Along with challenges, online teaching offers numerous benefits too. According to Li and Irby (9) virtual environment always gives flexibility and easy access to learning, students and teachers can have courses from anywhere at any time. Online teaching and learning give broader access to get in touch with people globally. E-Lectures can be attended to, watched repeatedly until they get that fully. During synchronous class students have an edge to post questions and ask about the problem freely which promotes discussion, interaction, and feedback. The announcement section also promotes to get in touch with students and teachers. Teachers can post a homework assignment, and students will have no excuse for not knowing what to turn in.

The removal of social and physical restrictions and barriers was made possible by online teaching and learning. Online courses are the perfect solution to the issues that people have with getting high-quality education at their convenient place and time. (10). Online Education offers the opportunity for practitioners to expand and upgrade their skill set whilst working concurrently. Moreover, it allows the teachers to keep up to date with new trends and innovations. Many educational organizations offered their tools and solutions for free to help and support teaching and learning in a more interactive and engaging environment. Online learning has provided the opportunity to teach and learn in innovative ways unlike the teaching and learning experiences in the normal classroom setting.

This pandemic has the potential to drastically improve schooling. Throughout history, the profession has been conservative and resistant to change. After using slate for several decades, it switched to blackboard and chalk for a century. Google's vast knowledge is now just a mouse click away from students, making it far superior to any genuine teachers. Coronavirus offered Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and Google Classroom to schools for every grade student. The online teaching learning process turns a mobile screen into a classroom where teachers and students may communicate with one another in a fully interactive online learning environment. It has forged a strong connection between teachers and parents than ever before. (11)

It can be stated that these platforms can provide the students more resources and coaching even after face-to-face instruction has resumed. Teachers must come up with innovative ideas to help get around the drawbacks of online learning. To enhance online teaching strategies, teachers should actively work together locally. As instructors, parents, and children share similar experiences, there are unparalleled chances for collaboration, innovative solutions, and a readiness to learn from others and try new methods. (12).

5. SUGGESTIONS:

The COVID-19 surge has been crucial in helping us think, plan, and set up our educational system for a new situation. Teachers were not accustomed to the new instructional setting when the pandemic first began. They were compelled to teach online via a platform. In this view, the insufficient abilities of teachers needed for digital pedagogy prevented the educational goals from being met to their full potential. Teachers undoubtedly performed their duties to the best of their abilities. To satisfy the needs of 21st century education, which can improve education globally, the teacher education curriculum must be revised and reformatted. The government, politicians, academics, and young people must collaborate with an open mind concentrating on the important areas that need to be changed in the education system in general and teacher education in particular (13).

Technology can improve learning outcomes and provide a complete, high-quality education. But in order to use its power, the digital divide must be addressed. The remotest and poorest populations must have access to digital capabilities, the necessary infrastructure, and accessibility. In the information age, access to technology and the Internet is a crucial issue. This shouldn't be a privilege anymore (14). Furthermore, to successfully adopt future online or blended learning and to be well-equipped to handle any such crises in the future, teachers must redesign their educational pedagogies while overcoming all constraints.

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