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The Changing Landscape Of Higher Education: E-Learning, Gamification, And COVID-19

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Abstract

COVID-19 has resulted in schools shut down all across the world. As a result, education has changed dramatically, with the distinctive rise of e-learning whereby teaching is undertaken remotely and on digital platforms. It has impacted teaching, learning, and research throughout the world. This paper introduces you, to how education technology is integrated into education during this pandemic and it describes the advantages and challenges of e-learning. Rise in the new concept of gamification and blended learning in post-COVID scenarios.

Technology has become a tool in the teaching and learning process. Since studies have shown that children extensively use their senses to learn, making learning fun and effective through the use of technology is crucial and COVID-19 enhances gamification in the teaching-learning process. We need technology in every classroom and every student and teacher's hand, because it is the pen and paper of our time, and it is the lens through which we experience much of our world and it is the best way to understand diversity in learning styles to face. It helps the students to face the real world. Students and teachers benefit from e-books, and digital textbooks that are always updated, helpful, creative, and cheaper. Sharing of knowledge is possible and distance is no more a barrier now and learning is enhanced without hindrance. It enabled learners to learn different subjects of interest. Classroom technology has transformed teachers into advisers, encouragers, and facilitators in higher education.

The major aim of introducing and implementing the New Education Policy -2020 is to enhance the quality of education equally for all and to move in the direction of strengthening India as a global superpower. Integrating technology in education opens resources for all equally and may lead to quality of education.

Keywords- Digital platforms - pandemic- gamification

The Changing Landscape of Higher Education: E-learning, Gamification, and COVID-19

J Mohana Valli

"**If we teach today, as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow." - John Dewey**

Back in my teaching days, I embraced Educational Technology with the hope of making learning fun and engaging. Unfortunately, radio signals were fickle, batteries ran out, and power cuts plagued my efforts. Later, computers and the internet emerged, but their high cost and perceived disruption in the classroom kept them largely out of reach. Then came COVID-19, a catalyst for a dramatic shift. Once an unreliable or unwelcome guest, technology became the backbone of education. From blackboards to interactive whiteboards, technology reshaped the learning landscape, transforming not just the way we teach and learn, but also the very essence of research and the role of the teacher.

Importance of ICT in the Classroom:

We need technology in every classroom and every student and teacher's hand, because it is the pen and paper of our time. It is the lens through which we experience much of our world and it is the best way to understand diversity in learning styles to face. It helps the students to face the real world. Students and teachers benefit from e-books, and digital textbooks that are always updated, helpful, creative, and cheaper. Knowledge-sharing is facilitated, distance is no longer a barrier, and learning is enhanced without hindrance. It enabled learners to learn different subjects of interest. Classroom technology has transformed teachers into advisors, encouragers, and facilitators in higher education. Classroom technology has transformed teachers, encouragers, and facilitators in higher education.

Any growth requires a temporary loss of security - Madeline Hunter.

This COVID-19 pandemic is a transition period we have been shifting from conventional learning to blended learning. We feel it is difficult to accept the change and try to find out negativity though, it's a positive gesture.

This paper focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on teaching, learning, and research in higher education.

Main facts and pieces of evidence:

The Covid-19 pandemic is more than a health crisis. The lockdown resulted in disrupting and affecting every aspect of life including family life, education, finances, business, and agriculture.
The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a dramatic loss of human life worldwide and presents an unprecedented challenge to public health, food systems, and the world of work. The economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic is devastating: tens of millions of people are at risk of falling into extreme poverty, while the number of undernourished people, currently estimated at nearly 690 million, could increase by up to 132 million by the end of the year.1
According to Indian Express web news, The country has so far reported 213 cases of the Omicron variant of coronavirus, according to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The Omicron variant of COVID-19 is "at least three times more transmissible " than the Delta variant, Maharashtra on Tuesday recorded 11 new infections of the Omicron variant which took the tally of such cases in the state to 54. Omicron cases in the capital have increased to 57. Delhi and Maharashtra continue to contribute the highest number of new Omicron cases to the country's total caseload. Meanwhile, India recorded 6,317 new cases of Covid-19 and 318 deaths as of 22.12.21. The Country's active caseload presently stands at 78,190 the lowest in 575 days. Since Omicronis more transmissible than the Delta variant, the government on Tuesday directed states to impose strict restrictions in districts reporting a high positivity rate, including the imposition of night curfew, strict regulation of large gatherings, and containment measures.2
There was a palpable panic all around the world and it may persist for a few more years as coronavirus has been mutating from time to time. Ultimately, this may lead to the shutdown of the education sector throughout

the world, resulting in the rise of e-learning, whereby teaching and learning are undertaken remotely and on digital platforms.

Even before COVID-19, there was already high growth and adoption in education technology, with global edtech investments reaching US$ 18.66 billion in 2019 and the overall market for online education projected to reach $350 Billion by 2025. Whether it is language apps, virtual tutoring, video conferencing tools, or online learning software, there has been a significant surge in usage since COVID-19. In response to significant demand, many online learning platforms are offering free access to their services, including platforms like BYJU'S, a Bangalore-based educational technology and online tutoring firm founded in 2011, which is now the world's most highly valued edtech company. Since announcing free live classes on its Think and Learn app, BYJU'S has seen a 200% increase in the number of new students using its product, according to Mrinal Mohit, the company's Chief Operating Officer.3
Most of the countries in the world extensively use various online platforms at various levels of education.

The Impact of COVID-19 on teaching, learning, and research in Higher Education:

The sudden shift away from the classroom to the digital platform due to the pandemic impacted higher education in different ways. It was an unplanned and rapid move to online learning and teaching with no training, insufficient bandwidth, and little preparation. Resulting in a poor user experience that is unconducive to sustained growth, others believe that a new hybrid model of education will emerge, with significant benefits. " I believe that the integration of information technology in education will be further accelerated and that online education will eventually become an integral component of school education, " says Wang Tao, Vice President of Tencent Cloud and Vice President of Tencent Education. Many are already touting the benefits: Dr. Amjad, a Professor at The University of Jordan who has been using Lark to teach his students says, " It has changed the way of teaching. It enables me to reach out to my students more efficiently and effectively through chat groups, video meetings, voting, and also document sharing, especially during this pandemic. My students also find it easier to communicate on Lark. I will stick to Lark even after coronavirus, I believe traditional offline learning and e-learning can go hand in hand."

This is what happens in higher education. The teachers are trying to integrate technology into the teaching and learning process during this post-COVID period. Blended learning has become more significant. Blended instruction is a term that describes the incorporation of online instructional tools into the face-to-face instructional environment - creating a 'blend' of online and offline instructional strategies. Technology gives students immediate access to an abundance of quality information. For those who do have access to the right technology, there is evidence that learning online can be more effective in several ways.

Gamification of Learning :

The gamification of learning is an educational approach that seeks to motivate students by using video game design and game elements in learning environments. The goal is to maximize enjoyment and engagement by capturing the interest of learners and inspiring them to continue learning. Gamification, broadly defined, is the process of defining the elements that comprise games, making those games fun, and motivating players to continue playing, then using those same elements in a non-game context to influence behaviour.
Some of the potential benefits of successful gamification initiatives in the classroom include:

1. Giving students ownership of their learning
2. Opportunities for identity work through taking on alternate selves
3. Freedom to fail and try again without negative repercussions
4. Chances to increase fun and joy in the classroom
5. Opportunities for differentiated instruction
6. Making learning visible
7. Providing a manageable set of subtasks and tasks
8. Inspiring students to discover intrinsic motivators for learning. 6

In this context, it is a theory in education that learners learn best when they are also having fun. For instance, let's take Zoom rooms on the Zoom platform for online classes. One can create rooms to discuss and people can have discussions over there and create activities to participate in online to learn and students may learn while having fun. We can use interesting icebreakers at the beginning of the class to motivate students. A lot of language games and videos enhance learning through games. Gamification accelerated due to COVID-19 as it has changed the mode of teaching and learning.

Impact of COVID-19 on research:

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected a variety of researchers, students, and academics. Institutions of higher education have faced new barriers as a result. Some of the impacts of the pandemic have been positive, providing opportunities for growth for individuals and the scientific community. For example, many conferences pivoted to a virtual format and drastically reduced the cost of registration and attendance, allowing for greater and more inclusive participation. Many journals removed financial barriers to accessing articles about COVID-19 so the information would reach a wider audience. Online publications, webinars, and conferences have been accelerated. Sharing of knowledge is simple and trouble-free. Distance is no longer a barrier.

The Challenges of Online Learning:

Despite the benefits, some challenges remain to overcome. Some students, especially those of rural backgrounds without reliable internet access and technology, struggle to participate in digital learning. Even the teachers without proper training and knowledge struggle to teach effectively:
This gap is seen across countries and between income brackets within countries. For example, whilst 95% of students in Switzerland, Norway, and Austria have a computer to use for their school work, only 34% in Indonesia do, according to OECD data. In the US, there is a significant gap between those from privileged and disadvantaged backgrounds.4

Conclusion:

While concerns exist about online learning's effectiveness, particularly in higher education and those with limited access, research suggests it can be remarkably beneficial for specific age groups and individuals when implemented optimally. The flexibility, diverse resources, and personalized learning paths offered by online platforms can significantly outperform traditional classroom settings. However, maximizing these benefits requires a deliberate effort to move beyond simple Zoom and Google Meets and replicate physical classrooms. The key lies in crafting structured online learning environments that integrate interactive platforms, personalized learning pathways, and collaborative activities that foster inclusion, individual-specific learning, and critical thinking skills. By embracing these principles and ensuring equitable access to technology, we can unlock the true potential of online learning to empower students and revolutionize Higher Education for the better.