



Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education with Special Reference to Tripura

Poly Bhowmick
Assistant Professor
Department of Hindi
Ramthakur College
Agartala, Tripura, India

Abstract:

The COVID-19 Pandemic known as the Corona virus Pandemic is an on-going global pandemic. It has demonstrated the interconnected nature of our world. During the pandemic no one is safe until everyone. The outbreak was first identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019. W.H.O declared the outbreak a public Health Emergency of International concern on 30th January, 2020 and a pandemic on 11th March, 2020.

The current pandemic is not only affecting the health of the citizens in the country but is also seen hindering industries and shaking them to their roots. Simultaneously, the pandemic has significantly disrupted the Higher Education sector as well, which is a critical determinant of a country's economic future.

According to the report of Ministry of Human Resource Development, there are 993 universities, 39,931 colleges and 10,725 Stand Alone institutions listed on their portal, which contribute to education. These institutions further reflect the student density of India. As the total enrolments in Higher Education every year are nearly 37.4 million. The national lockdown and the ascending health crisis were striking the education of the students as well, with their colleges and universities being shut. Making a conscious choice to grow even in the time of crisis, the Higher Education decided to digitalise the sector.

The educational reform in India in the COVID-19 era seems to be a live example of "how 'need' or 'necessity' is the mother of invention", in this scenario. Allowing educational institutions to adopt online learning and infuse a virtual study culture, the pandemic is already steering the educational sector forward with technological innovation and advancements.

Keywords: COVID-19, Higher Education, Impact, Pandemic, Lockdown

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I. Introduction

The Coronavirus or COVID-19 is an on-going global pandemic. It first came to light on December 31, 2019 when China reported to the WHO that a string of pneumonia like cases in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province. It spread fast across the globe from Wuhan affecting people without distinction.

Due to the coronavirus outbreak, countries across the world have relied on complete or partial lockdown as a mitigative step to control the spread of infection.

Societies are measured in part in relation to how they rise to the occasion of collective crises and learn from them. The current Corona virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is such a crisis and raises various problems that are insufficiently addressed to date, such as the impact of international travel on global health, some of them reflective of underlying social, education and other challenges across the world. In addition to medical and technological problems, social as well as psychological problems and underlying philosophical challenges have to be better addressed to further improve the approach to this pandemic and arguably to future pandemics and other global crises.

II. The Impact on Higher Education

This current pandemic is not only affecting the health of the citizens in the country but is also seen hindering industries and shaking them to their roots. The more immediate impact was on the global economy as business and industries across the world came to a grinding halt. Simultaneously, the pandemic has significantly

disrupted the Higher Education sector as well, which is a critical determinant of a country's economic future. The conventional Indian education system follows face-to-face or physical teaching, even though the trend of audio-visual aids in classrooms was introduced a decade ago. The rate at which Coronavirus has spread to different regions in India has faced the Central and State Governments to shutdown educational institutions and schools as a precautionary measure resulting in the disruption of studies. This problem is prevalent everywhere.



Figure1: Ramthakur College, Agartala, Tripura.

The Covid-19 pandemic has posed a serious challenge to the process of imparting higher education. It is time that educationists and regulatory authorities put their heads together and deliberate on the education system to be pursued and work out strategies, spell out the rules and regulations to be followed in future.

According to the report of MHRD, there are 993 universities, 39,931 colleges and 10725 stand Alone Institutions, which contribute to education. The total enrolments in Higher Education every year are nearly 37.4 million which is reflecting the expanding horizons of Education Industry. The sector was seen catching pace by the passing day until Coronavirus impacted the country intensely. Even in the time of crisis there are conscious choices to grow, the universities decided to digitalise the sector, allowing the educational institutions to adopt online learning and infuse a virtual study culture. Thus, the pandemic is already steering the sector forward with technological innovation and advancements.

In India, it is probably the first time to experiment with the education system and make a paradigm shift to the virtual world, blending classrooms with online learning. This switch over is ensuring that students suffer no loss of studies and at the sometime it is also enabling the students to learn creatively. Students are also getting chance to learn by choice and not just by their physical presence in the classroom. Such type of online learning is making the country envision a new tomorrow based on educational reforms. For instance, medical students can discuss specific case studies by opting interactive sessions, whereas engineering students could delve into the depths of environmental engineering and city planning and much more.

But during the lockdown period, science, medicine and technology students are missing the workshops and laboratory practice.

Many may suggest that the loss of practical classes be compensated by training through simulation. But employers and society at large are not likely to accept it. Modern education in these areas requires skills and knowledge base in advanced technologies through both simulation and hands on practice. All students pursuing science and engineering education must soil their hands in the workshop and laboratory and enjoy the happenings in reality.

In fact, there are some universities offering courses related to fourth industrial revolution, which will stimulate the minds of the students and inspire them to bring change in their respective fields. Thus, online education is gaining worldwide popularity and is nourishing a lot many inquisitive students, instead of giving in to the circumstances.

Students are also getting opportunities of virtual internships, which are allowing students to go beyond their curriculum and learn about the practicality of their professions. In this way universities are encouraging the students to observe the current scenario and understand the need to automate. This will further allow them to digitalise their fields in the near future along with preparing them for any such situations. This practice will instil more confidence on students than panic.

Even though the country has been adapting to the new age learning, but these still lies an obstacle in making the endeavours entirely successful. What still remain intact is that only 45 score people of our total population of the country have access to e-learning but there are people residing in rural areas. They are still very much deprived of the latest advancements and therefore, hampering the cause of online learning. And that's where we lag behind as our country is not fully equipped to make education reach all corners of the nation

via digital platforms or online classrooms. The students who are economically weak will be held back due to the current resort and there is no denying that. But the government is relentlessly trying to come up with a solution to come up with a solution to resolve this problem.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has led to many colleges in India to defer their GD/PI process. There are chances that the 2020 placement season may witness a dip as the World Economy is going through a massive decline. With more and more companies requesting an “outplacement” wherein support service is provided by some organizations to help former employees transition to new jobs or are deferring their joining dates, it will not be aggressive to assume that globally, we are heading towards a major recession in 2020. In the event of such uncertainty, students in 2020 can seize this opportunity to take up a certificate/pursue a master’s degree.

III. Higher Education Crisis in Tripura due to Pandemic

Tripura, which is one of the smallest state of North-East having highest literacy rate in India is lagging far behind from the national average its youths in the higher education. A recent survey conducted by the Higher Education Department revealed that the Gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education in this state is only 19 percent while it is 25 percent in the national level.

The Tripura state has one Central University (Tripura University), one state University (Maharaja BirBikram University) and one private University (a branch of the Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts of India). There are 22 general degree in colleges, 3 engineering college (IIT, NIT and Techno India, Agartala), 2 medical colleges (AGMC and TMC).

Higher education institutions can play a major role in shaping a democratic, civilised and inclusive society. This aim should apply not only to ensuring success promoting equal opportunities within higher education institutions but should be interpreted broadly to recognize the role that the sector can play in enabling all students to achieve their full potential.

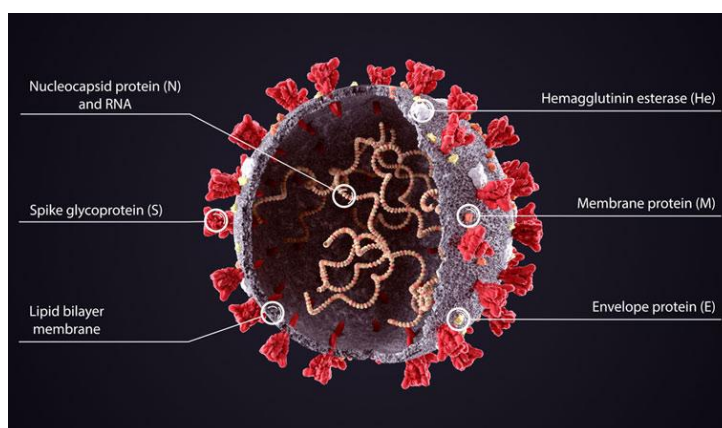


Figure2: Coronavirus.

In recent years, Tripura has reportedly shown considerable improvement at each level of education for boys as well as girls.

To prevent a possible spread of Covid-19, the Government of Tripura had also closed down all the educational institutions and the hostels were also vacated. Institutions are the hubs of social activity and human interaction. Due to lockdown youths are missing those social contacts that are essential to learning and development. Students residing in remote or rural areas of Tripura having poor economic conditions are also struggling with limited educational and resources. Due to closures it had negatively impact on student-learning outcomes. Colleges and Universities provide essential learning and when these are closed youths are deprived of opportunities for growth and development. In response to institutions closures caused by COVID-19 UNESCO recommends the use of distance learning programmes and open educational applications and platforms that teachers can use to reach learners remotely and limit the disruption of education. But lack of access to technology or fast, reliable internet access prevent students in rural areas and from disadvantaged families and lack of access to technology or good internet connectivity is an obstacle to continued learning, especially for students from disadvantaged family.

IV. How to cope with COVID-19 in Education

In a country like China that practices a much more centralized education system, a switch to digital learning will be easier. Whereas even in a country like the U.S.A, there are many low-income students who do not have access to broadband and laptops, digital learning might not be the ideal solution. The same is the case

with India, not every student here is tech-savvy or has access to the high-speed internet and will therefore suffer. When classes actually commence online, many students will suffer because of their inability to bear the cost. Unless India makes internet available to all, there are chances that the gap in education quality may widen.

COVID-19 will impact higher education in India but what it has taught us is to build resilience to face such threats in the future. The outbreak of Corona virus has reminded us that change is inevitable.

Students need to make the most of the uncertainty that prevails and use this time to prepare for exams or take up online courses that may help them in their future.

V. Conclusion

Thus COVID-19 pandemic has posed a serious challenge to the process of imparting higher education. It is time that educationists must put their heads together and deliberate on the education system to be pursued and work strategies to be followed in future. During the lockdown period, science, medicine and technology students are missing the workshops and laboratory Practice.

Further, the universities would be required to augment the infrastructure, both physical and intellectual. The existing infrastructure may be inadequate in current pandemic and even in the post pandemic world.

The current lockdown situation should be seized as an opportunity to innovate and develop new techniques to impart education that would be safe, user friendly, robust and accessible to all at a responsible cost. Another challenge is to keep the weaker students engaged. This would require enough patience and skills in every teacher for the success of an online education system.

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