

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN EDUCATION DURING COVID-19

Sharanjit Kaur*

Abstract

Covid-19 pandemic has resulted to total closure of educational institutes in about 109 countries all over the world with 60.5% of the total number of enrolled learners in these countries temporarily forced out of school. It is reported that more than 1.05 billion learners across the world are currently compelled to stay out of educational institutes as social distancing is being enforced locally and regionally around the world in order to contain the spread of Corona virus disease (UNESCO, August 22, 2020). Covid-19 has dramatically reshaped the way global higher education is delivered. As a result, universities are rapidly shifting how they communicate and operate to meet the evolving needs of students and staff. As the global coronavirus pandemic opens up an entirely new set of challenges for the education system, we're seeing just how important it is to build a more adaptable and inclusive approach to learning. Whereas, some of the other challenges for educational sector all across the globe are delay in standardized testing, classes and semesters are being delayed as staff and teachers acclimate to the new online platforms and try to switch their material to a new teaching style, both students and staff are learning how to deal with remote learning and communication, students with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) or other special needs, find it difficult to concentrate to full capacity with online educational tools. The opportunities that this virus has created for teachers, students and educators is that more emphasis is being put on online and distance education-making affordable programs more relevant and known to the public, active learners, rise in blended learning, improvement in learning material etc. So, the present paper will focus on the challenges and opportunities in education sector during corona crisis.

Keywords: Covid-19 (Corona crisis), Challenges and Opportunities, Education Sector.

Mankind has witnessed numerous catastrophes in history, including calamitous outbreak of diseases. However, the enormity of the hazardous impact of coronavirus and the uncertainty of finding an antivirus/preventive, has created havoc among people, administration and the government worldwide. The rapid spread of the virus has left us with no way but to seek safety and isolate ourselves in the confines of our respective homes. The extraordinary ripple effect of the new coronavirus is experienced worldwide by teachers, administrators, service providers, parents and students as schools are shut down during an emergency. Like every sector, education at all level is equally suffering (Symonds, 2020).

The most recent corona virus (also referred as the novel corona virus) is called COVID-19, and was first detected in Wuhan, China in December of

2019. Since its first case in China, COVID-19 has spread to almost every country worldwide. According to the World Health Organization, 2,28,12,491 global cases were reported, including 7,95,132 deaths, as of August 22, 2020 (WHO, 2020) and this data alarmingly increasing every day.

The pandemic has influenced education systems around the world, contributing to the full suspension of colleges, schools and universities. We are living in a massive education crisis, which is probably one of the biggest challenges in our lives to global education. The COVID-19 pandemic has shed a light on numerous issues affecting access to education, as well as broader socio-economic issues. More than 1.05 billion children and youth are not attending school because of temporary or indefinite country wide school closures mandated by governments in an attempt to slow the spread of

* Khalsa College Girls Senior Secondary School, Amritsar

COVID-19. However, only developed countries are better prepared to move to online learning strategies, with a lot of effort and challenges for teachers and parents. The situation is very mixed in middle-and poorer countries and the widespread unequal opportunities between developed countries and lower-income nations will occur if we do not behave accordingly. Many children don't have a desk, books, internet connectivity, a home laptop, or supportive parents in low income and poorer nations (Yeshoda, 2020).

Educators and students all over the world are going through a phase quite unknown to them due to the rapidly spreading of the corona virus. Within weeks, students saw a drastic change in education which they have been experiencing continuously for years (Vnaya, 2020). Covid-19 has radically reshaped the way in which global higher education is delivered. As a result, universities are rapidly shifting how they communicate and operate to meet the evolving needs of students and staff (Symonds, 2020). Here are some of the opportunities that has created by covid-19 and how our education has changed from the formal system to tech-oriented system which has provided following opportunities to the students while staying at home obeying the social distancing:

1. **Online learning:** With students stranded all over the globe and the forced closures of university campuses, many institutions are moving their learning and teaching online. Many schools and universities are opting to continue their regular classes on online platforms. This includes the use of online tools, such as group video programs, that allow teachers and students to meet and conduct classes over internet. Another way for students to continue their studies is through distance learning, which uses online programs that replace instructors with educational materials that student's study on their own. An example of distance learning would be online classes or videos which students use on their own time, as opposed to meeting live with the teacher and other students (UoPeople, n.d.). Institutions who do not prioritize their online learning offering are more likely to struggle in times like this.

2. **Webinars and online workshops for teachers and students:** During this corona virus crisis many universities are actively conducting the online webinars and workshops for the improvement of teachers and providing them the best training how to disseminate the learning material to students without affecting their mental health. A large number of academic meetings, seminars and conferences will be online and there is a possibility that some new form of online conferencing will emerge.

3. **Quality Teaching-learning material:** There is a great opportunity for universities and colleges to start improving the quality of the learning materials used in teaching and learning process. Since blended learning will be a new learning format, there will be a push to find new ways of designing and delivering quality content, especially as a result of this fact that the use of learning management systems will bring about more openness and transparency in academics (Mishra, 2020).

4. **Rise in Blended Learning and collaborative work:** Universities and colleges will shift to a model of blended learning where both face to face deliveries along with an online model will become a norm. This will require all teachers to become more technology savvy and go through some training to bring them to the level that would be required. The teaching community to a large extent has been much insulated and more so in a country like India. There is a new opportunity where collaborative teaching and learning can take on new forms and can even be monetized (Mishra, 2020).

5. **International mobility and partnerships within higher education:** Today, more than ever, the higher education industry understands how interconnected the system is globally. As borders shut to reduce the spread of the virus, international students across the globe struggled to return home to their friends and families. Many universities stepped up to help their students and study abroad programmes have been cancelled or postponed (Moody, 2020). During this crisis, it's vital that universities nurture their international connections, looking out for all members of the higher education community on a global scale. Universities that still focus on their international partnerships and continue

their relationship building during this time might find the transition back to normal operations a lot smoother.

6. ***The role nature can play in the higher education experience:*** For staff and students who have to work and study indoors, it's important to remember the link between productivity and nature. Studies show that, "because nature captures our attention without requiring us to focus on it, looking at natural environments lets us replenish our stores of attention control" (Harvard Business Review, 2015). Moderate sunlight exposure can boost your mood, improve sleep, and strengthen your immune system; all factors that can have a positive effect on productivity. Since there are barriers for outdoor spending, universities may learn to appreciate our link with nature and incorporate it closely into higher education. In the wake of the Corona virus outbreak, we may begin to see more universities mirroring the actions of institutions like Texas, which has over 10,000 trees on campus.

7. ***The value of community:*** Most people in the higher education field would be disconnected during the Corona virus crisis; away from friends, colleagues, and other members of the higher education community. However, studies repeatedly show that spending times with others is tied to being happier (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). In all countries people who spend times with friends and family are tend to be happier. Seminars, socializing with friends, attending lectures, or staff meetings are all events in the university experience that involve valuable human connection. The social distance constraints currently in effect in many countries around the world have convinced people of the importance of these daily situations and interactions. It's important that your institution maintains regular communication with its staff and students during this time; updating them on the status of the situation and encouraging them to utilize digital platforms that will enable human connection.

8. ***The importance of having up-to-date technology:*** The corona virus outbreak is likely to have disrupted several processes at various institutions. Delay in semesters and examination processes will have to be pushed back, changes in

the shift and pay of staff members for temporarily, and university-led events are cancelled. While these changes may be difficult to manage, utilizing outdated technology at your institution will make the entire process much more challenging for your university's administration staff. It's important to review and upgrade institution's technology on a regular basis, because this will help the institution to respond more effectively in case of a crisis. Having up-to - date and effective technologies will help minimize the negative effects on the institution when university processes, such as recruiting and admissions, are interrupted.

According to Mishra (2020), there are a number of areas of potential risks for global education. Following are the some of the challenges of Covid-19 in education such as:

1. ***Sluggish cross-border movement of students:*** Universities in many nations, such as Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Canada, are highly dependent on student movements from China and India. It is becoming more and clearer that this cross-border movement of students will take a time of at least for the next two to three years and will lead to more financial risk for higher educational institutions in these countries who are already under financial pressure. Many parents will avoid sending students abroad to higher education because of the high risk of a pandemic.

2. ***Unprepared teachers for online education:*** Online learning is a special kind of methodology and not all teachers are good at it or at least not all of them were ready for this sudden transition from face to face learning to online learning. As a result, most teachers only give lessons on video platforms, such as Zoom, which might not be actual online learning in the absence of a dedicated learning platform expressly designed for the purpose. There is a possibility that, in such a situation, learning outcomes may not be reached and can only result in the involvement of students.

3. ***Changing format of student recruitment:*** Universities and colleges worldwide are facing a major risk in the area of student recruitment and retention. The prospect of losing applicants is so high that universities will need to re-

examine their hiring processes, acceptance requirements and the overall recruiting process itself, including innovative ways of outreach and the selection process itself.

4. **Passive learning by students:** The sudden shift to online learning without any planning—especially in countries like India where the backbone for online learning was not ready and the curriculum was not designed for such a format—has created the risk of most of our students becoming passive learners and they seem to be losing interest due to low levels of attention span. Adding to this is that a significant proportion of the student population may be left unaffected by the digital gap that is part of other developed countries, including India. We are now starting to understand that online learning could be tedious, producing a new generation of passive learners that could face new challenges.

According to the University of People, following are the further negative impacts of corona crisis on education sector (UoPeople, 2020):

1. **Concentration difficulties:** Younger learners, as well as students with ADHD or other special needs, find it difficult to focus entirely on online instructional resources. Young children require help with in-person teaching and can find it difficult to focus on a standard front-end lesson on a computer. Students with special needs, who also rely on in-person instruction, may find it particularly difficult to switch to online platforms. These difficulties may require a more unique approach to online learning, or may require additional assistance from parents as these students navigate a new educational paradigm.

2. **Challenges for low-income families:** Unfortunately, many families rely on the public-school system, not only for education, but for necessities like food and childcare. With schools cancelled, many children are left without proper meals, and parents are forced to take off work in order to care for their young children. While many classrooms are still online, many students do not have access to laptops or the Internet at home. Without adequate infrastructure, more students will be unable to lose out on their studies before more options can be sought.

3. **Delays:** Standardized testing and school admissions are being delayed across the country. Some states have opted to cancel or delay standardized testing, while others are thinking of extending the school year due to delays and many missed days of school. Classes and semesters are being delayed as staff and teachers acclimate to the new online platforms and try to switch their material to a new teaching style. It involves learning how to use multimedia resources, working out how to adapt hands-on instructional materials or discussion-based courses on digital formats, and potentially improving instructional as a whole plan based on the inability to switch it over to an online platform.

4. **Challenges for staff and students:** As school and university staff learn how to convert their lessons to online platforms, both students and staff are learning how to deal with remote learning and communication. While technology has always had a huge hand in most school affairs, the latest reliance on technology for any part of education is forced to happen immediately, leaving many people behind struggling with technological difficulties, as well as coping with the challenges of studying at home and learning how to construct a productive schedule outside of the school environment.

Recommendations for Planning Education during Covid-19 (UNESCO, 2020)

1. **Examine the readiness and choose the most relevant tools:** Decide on the use high-technology and low-technology solutions based on the reliability of local power supplies, internet connectivity, and digital skills of teachers and students. This could range through integrated digital learning platforms, video lessons, MOOCs, to broadcasting through radios and TVs.

2. **Ensure inclusion of the distance learning programmes:** Implement measures to ensure that students including those with disabilities or from low-income backgrounds have access to distance learning programmes, if only a limited number of them have access to digital devices. Consider temporarily decentralising such devices from computer labs to families and support them

with internet connectivity.

3. **Protect data privacy and data security:** Assess data security when uploading data or educational resources to web spaces, as well as when sharing them with other organisations or individuals. Ensure that the use of applications and platforms does not violate students' data privacy.

4. **Prioritize solutions to address psychosocial challenges before teaching:** Mobilize available tools to connect schools, parents, teachers, and students with each other. Create communities to ensure regular human interactions, enable social caring measures, and address possible psychosocial challenges that students may face when they are isolated.

5. **Plan the study schedule of the distance learning programmes:** Organise discussions with stakeholders to examine the possible duration of school closures and decide whether the distance learning programme should focus on teaching new knowledge or enhance students' knowledge of prior lessons. Plan the schedule depending on the situation of the affected zones, level of studies, needs of student's needs, and availability of parents. Choose the appropriate learning methodologies based on the status of school closures and home-based quarantines. Avoid learning methodologies that require face-to-face communication.

6. **Provide support to teachers and parents on the use of digital tools:** Organise brief training or orientation sessions for teachers and parents as well, if monitoring and facilitation are needed. Help teachers to prepare the basic settings such as solutions to the use of internet data if they are required to provide live streaming of lessons.

7. **Blend appropriate approaches and limit the number of applications and platforms:** Blend tools or media that are available for most students, both for synchronous communication and lessons, and for asynchronous learning. Avoid overloading students and parents by asking them to download and test too many applications or platforms.

8. **Develop distance learning rules and monitor students' learning process:** Define the rules with parents and students on distance learning.

Design formative questions, tests, or exercises to monitor closely students' learning process. Try to use tools to support submission of students' feedback and avoid overloading parents by requesting them to scan and send students' feedback.

9. **Define the duration of distance learning units based on students' self-regulation skills:** Keep a coherent timing according to the level of the students' self-regulation and meta-cognitive abilities especially for live streaming classes. Preferably, the unit for primary school students should not be more than 20 minute and no longer than 40 minutes for secondary school students.

10. **Create communities and enhance connection:** Create communities of teachers, parents, and school managers to address sense of loneliness or helplessness, facilitate sharing of experience and discussion on coping strategies when facing learning difficulties.

Conclusion

With efforts to prevent the spread of the novel Corona virus, education is suddenly and rapidly moving online along with new educational opportunities and challenges. New educational opportunities are being advertised and made available for students, but the switch has also pointed to the importance of the public-school systems for lower-income families, and the challenges the switch presents for families, special needs students, as well as staff and students across the board. This has been shown so far is that online learning has its drawbacks, but transitioning to digital channels still offers students and teachers more chances to seek out various methods of education. It is likely that as the COVID-19 pandemic comes to an end, we may see a continuing growth in school systems using internet sites for research aids, as well as students taking up online education for their higher education programs.

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