

REVIEW ARTICLE



A Review of The Impact of Covid-19 on Higher Education in Nashik District: Challenges & Opportunities

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Abstract

Objectives: To find out the impact and effects of COVID-19 on higher education and the challenges faced by the educators and the learners from India.

Methods: The study is carried out by collecting data through a questionnaire shared through a link of Google form to students in Nashik. Sample size of the review is 1147 students from various UG and PG colleges of Nashik districts situated in rural as well as urban area. The period of the survey is around seven months starting from 11th of April 2021 to 17th of October 2021.

Findings: The impact of Covid-19 is seen in all educational institutes located in Nashik region, Maharashtra, India. Total 82.9% students from the online survey accepted that their institution was disturbed by Covid-19. Students faced in online learning 41.7% difficulty and 29.9% reported no difficulty. Students faced difficulty in exams as 25.2%. The 35.8% their, classes were interrupted by internet. Online teaching awareness (91.7%), satisfaction about online classes (40.8%), and assignment (79.4%) responded. The negative effects are observed as difficulties faced during online learning (65.6%), network issues (52.2%), impact on financial status (46.8%), unsatisfied (31.5%), effectiveness of online classes for study (22.9%) responded. **Novelty:** This study establishes that the impact of Covid-19 is seen on higher educational institutes of Nashik region in terms of online teaching and learning, conduction of online examination, online admission process, etc. This survey characterizes the inclination of rural and urban students about online classes and hints areas where things can be improved.

Keywords: Impact; Covid19; Education; Challenges and Opportunities; Online Survey

1 Introduction

Higher Educational institutes in Nashik District of Maharashtra, India, too went through massive transition as an aftermath of Covid-19 Pandemic. It is seen that with the introduction of a new method of learning through the digital mode, students adopted the new method and started using digital tools for the same as established in the primary data. Although not every student was able to procure digital gadgets due to

financial constraints and accessing the e-learning platforms initially too served an impediment in the process as students faced problems regarding network issues, connectivity, effectiveness of online classes for study, students' opinion about online classes, etc. (Table 1). Students were able to switch to the new mode of learning but at the same time had to face problems concerning connectivity, poor bandwidth, difficulty in understanding contents, technical glitches as could be seen through the data (Table 1). This scenario brings to the notice the fact that even though higher educational institutes in Nashik region switched to online mode of teaching-learning, it has its own pros and cons (Table 1). Here, an attempt has been made to discuss the challenges and opportunities that has been posed by Covid-19 in Higher Educational institutes of Nashik Region, Maharashtra, India.

1.1 Data Sources

The study covers the primary data received through the online survey of undergraduate and post-graduate students of higher educational institutions from Nashik Region. Total 1147 students with 77% from urban area (cities) and 23% from rural area (villages) responded to the qualitative and quantitative questionnaire designed to collect data on the opportunities and challenges of e-learning scenario. This study was conducted for the period of around six months starting from April 2021 till October 2021. The total male respondents are 47.8% and female respondents are 52.2%. Students from Arts (18.1), Commerce (65.8%), and Science (16.1%) streams of undergraduate and post graduate classes participated in this online survey. The data thus received is further analyzed to find out the results. The primary data has been collected during second wave of Covid-19 pandemic.

2 Results and Discussion

The very data reveals a very striking contrast between the Urban and Rural area in terms of the availability of digital gadgets as only 23% students from Rural area of Nashik district could participate in this survey in comparison with the number of participants from Urban area i.e. 77%. The result of both of these scenarios saw positive and negative outcomes. Majority of the students (90.4%) did not find any difficulty in online admission process in college while as around 10% students faced difficulties in online admission process. So far as financial impact of the pandemic is concerned 46.8% students admitted that there (family or individual) income has been decreased due to the pandemic, whereas 28.3% reported it to be the same and 20% participant seem to be unaware of the income aspect with very marginal 4.9% participants claiming their income has been increased. A significant number of participant (73.9%) asserted that the interaction between students and teachers during online classes/e-learning amid pandemic was up to mark. A 95.6% student participant agreed that their institution is offering online Teaching-learning. When the same participants were asked about whether their education is disturbed by the pandemic 82.9% replied affirmative. So far as conduction of examination is concerned 58.9% students strongly agreed that examinations were conducted on time, 25.2% only expressed their agreement whereas 15.9% students expressed their disagreement for the same. In Nashik region the higher educational institutes adopted digital technology for continuing education and conduction of internal examination and submission of assignments and reports. Savitribai Phule Pune University conducted semester end and annual examinations through online mode. Of course, university and colleges could not conduct online examination as per schedule. Some examinations have been rescheduled and some postponed for indefinite time. Even students faced several problems while taking up online examinations. The survey also sought the information about interruption during online classes owing to poor bandwidth or other technical glitches, an overwhelming 64.2% students replied affirmative, whereas 35.85 replied in negation. The effectiveness of online classes from the perspective of study was also put to question, where 23% students disagreed to the motion, 36.3% students were found satisfied with effectiveness of online study, shockingly 31.6% students expressed neutral opinion about it. The students were asked their opinion on satisfaction about online classes wherein 40.8% students stated their satisfaction about online classes, 31.5% students did not approve online mode of learning whereas 27.7% students expressed neutral opinion about it. Students were also asked about their parents' opinion on online classes, 54.5% parents found online classes suitable for their children, 45.4% parents did not find the new mode of learning suitable. So far learning material is concerned an overwhelming majority 81.7% of the students accepted that the institution provides them online study material. The response to the question of use of electronic gadgets for e-learning was also found to be affirmative with 93.7% students. Students responded the question regarding online submission of assignment and report affirmatively with a percentage of 79.4, while around 10% students found it difficult. The last question sought the response about effective medium of teaching-learning and 65.8% felt online mode to be more effective as compared to 34.2% voting for offline mode.

The overall findings emphasize the inevitable usage of online mode of learning with students accepting it open-heartedly and positive approach. The study also highlights the challenges and the opportunities presented by the new mode of learning for all stakeholders of higher education

Table 1. Qualitative and Quantitative data

Responses at a glance					
Gender	Male 48.3%	Female 51.7%			
Do you belong to rural area or urban area?	Urban 77%	Rural 23%			
Awareness about Google Classroom	Yes 99%	No 1%			
Awareness about online teaching	Yes 91.7%	No 8.3%			
Did you face any problem during online Admission process in college?	Yes 9.6%	No 90.4%			
To what extent has the pandemic impacted your financial status?	Increase 4.9%	Same 28.3%	Decrease 46.8%	No Idea 20%	
Student teacher interaction is up to the mark?	Yes 73.9%	No 26.1%			
Does your Institution offer Online Teaching & Learning?	Yes 95.6%	No 4.4%			
Is the Colleges disturbed by COVID-19?	Yes 82.9%	No 17.1%			
Was your institution able to carry out exams as planned for the past semester/academic year?	Strongly Agree 58.9%	Partial agreement 25.2%	Disagree 15.9%		
Is there any interruption during online classes?	Yes 64.2%	No 35.8%			
Are the online classes effective for the Study?	Strongly Disagree 9.1%	Disagree 22.9%	Agree 31.1%	Strongly Agree 5.2%	Natural 31.6%
What is your personal opinion about the online classes?	Satisfied 40.8%	Un Satisfied 31.5%	Nothing 27.7%		
What is your parents' opinion about the online classes?	Excellent 8.5%	Very Good 8.4%	Good 37.8%	Fair 28%	Poor 17.4%
Is your College / Institution providing the online study materials?	Yes 81.7%	No. 8.2%	Maybe 10.1%		
Are you using Laptop/ Desktop/Mobile for online Teaching?	Yes 93.7%	No. 3.6%	Maybe 2.7%		
Is the Assignment and report submission being easy in online mode?	Yes 79.4%	No. 9.5%	Maybe 11.1%		
In the online mode of teaching are you satisfied by the examination results?	Yes 76.8%	No 23.2%			
Which teaching platform is effective	Online 65.8%	Offline 34.2%			

Source: Responses received through Google form- <https://forms.gle/FeoGmLMZtbH2FbgC6>

3 Challenges

3.1 Disparity in participation of students

The less sample size of rural student participation in the online\ survey itself is a biggest challenge for all administrative and educational authorities. This could be a result of financial constraints, social class, lack of awareness for e-learning tools, etc. Urban students have participated in great numbers have adapted the new mode of learning as a new normal way of life, while as remote places where network connectivity, poor bandwidth, financial condition of the family have affected the whole learning process. This will further widen the gap between urban and rural area as students in rural area without skills knowledge and equal opportunities due to lack of technology and apt environment will always lag behind.

3.2 Technology and its implementation

Implementation of digital technology/or e-learning tools became very big challenge for all the higher institutions situated in Nashik area. The additional cost that the institutions had to bear owning to setting up technology to cater to online teaching-learning created a roadblock in the whole process. Students too had to purchase new smart phone to attend online classes. This increased financial burden of the families. The online mode of learning could not achieve 100% success as not all students could adopt the technology. Hence some students had come across numerous problems. According to UNESCO, over 314

million students in Indian schools and colleges are currently impacted. The pandemic has made the world to reinvent ways of coping with this situation. The impact of this sudden and inevitable transformation in the mode of teaching-learning was emotionally and physically very challenging. Since the physical environment of the school and colleges was replaced with the virtual tools where students have faced many psychological problems.

The digital division has been further spreading the gap and needs urgent attention from both public and private sector players as the crisis continues. Good educators refreshed curricula and effective tools will ensure students stay involved and active in the learning process⁽¹⁾. In this situation, all the Ed-tech firms will change the way of teaching and learning. In the tradition of teaching with the classroom, schools will witness the rise of 'flipped classrooms' and giving instructions online and offline mode. Students watch the video lecture at home and complete their homework in an online class. The effect of this is students get boring in the online classrooms and it also offers real-life learning opportunities and diminishes the gap between what is taught in the classrooms and the real-life workplace requirements.

3.3 Vernacular / Language content

This was the biggest problem face by students in Nashik region. The data emphasizes that online learning was easier for English medium students and teachers due to the ready availability of tools or content available in English language. This has made the vernacular students to lag behind on the behest of linguistic monopoly. Unavailability of content and study material in vernacular language added to the frustration of those students who hailed from vernacular medium.

3.4 Availability of online study material

The primary data states the fact that majority of the students are seen happy with the online study material provided by educational institutions but still around 9% students lack the accessibility of online material. As there is no mechanism to check or assess the delivery of online material to students it becomes very difficult for rural area and poor students to study properly. The rural population is not completely equipped with utilities like fast internet, uninterrupted power supply, and electronic devices. There have been improvements regarding basic infrastructural facilities but many rural areas in Nashik region are still grappling with these challenges to make education completely digital or online.

4 Some of the major challenges enlisted below-

4.2 Use of online platform for complete Digital Literacy and resources

This is the most prominent challenge found in Nashik region to use online platform of teaching-learning in rural areas. The power and network infrastructure also play a key role to maintain stability in online teaching. Teachers and students in villages are ready for the online platform but the infrastructural facilities are still no at par the requirement. The important sources like availability and the steady flow of electricity and high-speed internet pose a major challenge for the rural population.

4.2 Availability of technological devices and data

The online platform is suitable for teaching, but the domain and devices of digital learning are not right for each student for accessing the digital content. In Nashik region, still the number of students having their own laptop, computer or smart-phones is not 100%. Even those with smart phones face problems like battery life, screen issues, etc. which do not support the long online learning hours. The biggest problem is that of data packs and their costs as they become deterrent both for teachers as well as learners. In Nashik region, many students do not have their personal laptops/ smart-phones or they are available for a limited time. This results in limited learning.

5 Opportunities

5.1 Stay-at-home trend

Lakhs of Indian students pursue higher education abroad. India is the second largest country in the world wherefrom students travel abroad for higher education and better opportunities for career. This scenario seems to have taken a U-turn given travel limitations and health risks. Students now prefer to stay back at their home-town and pursue higher education. It is a significant opportunity for India to improve its dimensions and offer quality education at par with international standards. Nashik region is not unaware of the changes that has been taking place in world-wide. Many students prefer to stay-at-home and pursue higher education. At the same time considering the pandemic like situations in future they do not wish to go to abroad in search of better

opportunities. Students have come up with new-startups and are helping the local economy with innovations and technology. Specialized courses like engineering and management became more significant during COVID19. It gave a new enhancement to science and technology. Fortunately, the government of India also used this time to promote “Atma Nirbhar Bharat” which powered the demand for skilled manpower in the Indian market. However, it is also true that skill circles are moving very fast. COVID 19 has recognized a few important drifts. Hyper-connectivity, cloud computing, a smarter world, cyber-security, supercomputing will be some of the areas for which skilled manpower will be needed⁽²⁾. Most of the universities are designing M Tech. courses around Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, etc. It is important to note that traditional gradations are being replaced by some of the new gradations which are required by the industry. Universities are rapidly accepting the cross model of teaching for professional courses. Students can get access to the best resources at the lowest cost in all subjects. Many start-ups and established players found a new opportunity to this extent⁽³⁾.

5.2 New trends in education & knowledge will emerge

There is an opportunity to reconsider the traditional education system now. Digital knowledge is leading the charge as a mainstay, and many new drifts are picking up momentum across the globe. Multidisciplinary and sectional education that afford transferable skills and customized learning will succeed. Post-pandemic times could see a combination of e-learning and mainstream face-to-face teaching with a boost from traditional universities and the Edu-tech sector⁽⁴⁾. The evaluations of the numbers of Indian students abroad vary significantly by source: while according to UNESCO there were 345,000 Indian students studying abroad in 2017, more recent data by the Ministry of External Affairs puts the number at more than double that, at 843,000 in 2018. In 2018-19, there were over 240,000 Indian students studying in the United States alone, although this includes so many students staying on in the US for research work after their active studies had ended^(2,5). The purposes of Indian students have also expanded, and they are now going in large numbers to countries like China, France, Italy, and Russia. It took the corona virus epidemic to draw attention to the 27,000 Indian students studying in China, of whom about 645 were near Wuhan. The corona virus epidemic has produced extensive speculation and nervousness within higher education sectors on whether Indian students will continue to seek foreign education with the same interest as before. In a country where a student’s future largely depends on high-risk exit exams, the unspecified postponement of the 12th grade CBSE, ICSE, and other exams because of the corona virus has additional impaired the condition – Indian students dignified for college have had to scramble to figure out their undergraduate options⁽⁴⁾. In this Pandemic period, Smartphone applications are the debatable and burning issue of different organizations during covid-19, which is focusing on the learning activities of students. Smartphone applications need not be successful unless the electiveness and usage of these applications are ensured⁽⁶⁾. The study carried out by the researcher stated that the online teaching community and also the students to understand the basic problems of online education which if corrected can help the teachers to deliver better and the students to understand better⁽⁷⁾. Packialakshmi reported that reading habits in the digital era were during the lockdown among the students. They also stated that undergraduate students are interested in digital reading during this lockdown period. The UG students spent the most time on a digital platform for reading and learning during lockdown⁽⁸⁾. Another study was carried out and adopted descriptive research techniques to compare travel scenarios during the normal situation, pre-lockdown, and till the COVID-19 pandemic ended⁽⁹⁾. The machine learning approach has been described as the study of outlining some measures that might help investors hedge against such risk using portfolio allocation strategies⁽¹⁰⁾. Gajendran stated that the problems cropping in the existing research interactive and also put forward an improved interactive platform “Scholarly Needs” by which the motivated research scholars can be identified for their original contribution, ranked and showcased for their talent⁽¹¹⁾. Online teaching is one of the innovations in the teaching and learning process, a complete switch over from traditional teaching practices affects the students and teacher as well⁽¹²⁾. Meena reported that the struggle of India in the COVID-19, the cause of death in the reproductive age group, and change in the pattern of death⁽¹³⁾. Online teaching in Delhi-NCR schools in India during the Covid-19 pandemic. Technical issues are the biggest challenge for teachers and students and connectivity causes major problems. The pedagogy required for online teaching needs refinement. Both teachers and students have expressed that they have faced health issues with greater exposure to screen time were very well described by Tyagi. One another study on the COVID-19 outbreak an overview and India’s perspectives on the management of infection as well as help to raise awareness of the current pandemic among primary and secondary health care providers reported by Jeyanthi. Khatibani reported that the challenges in the education system are become coming due to the transferring from in-person teaching to virtual education. Some Other reasons are shifting away from discipline-based teaching to organ-system based in medical curriculum and additional pressures on pathology faculties, such as increased demand for pathology services, lack of time, and learning resources. Keeping the national standards in pathology education even in the constant disruptions from pandemic outbreaks is a current challenge. Nowadays it is clear that education needs a shift in focus from the more traditional, operational aspects of hospitality and tourism to technological awareness, knowledge, and soft skills development. Hence present review has been undertaken to focus on the current educational opportunities and

challenges before, present and in the future after the pandemic.

5.3 Call for the greater global association between students, university & industry

Opportunities for student flexibility and practical experience through various exchange programs, internships, participation in conferences, workshops, and more could likely be off the table for some time. Advanced new forms of collaboration and alternative models are needed to drive learning, research, and teaching. Allocation of knowledge between institutions globally through joint-teaching, Seminars, virtual guest lectures, etc. could give students an improved global outlook in these difficult times.

Numerous Government initiatives are being accepted to lift the growth of the distance education market as well focusing on new education methods, such as E-learning and M-learning. The Education segment has seen a host of reform and improved financial expenditures in recent years that could perhaps transform the country into a knowledge haven. With human resources increasingly gaining significance in the overall development of the country, the development of education structure is expected to remain the key focus in the current era. In this situation, infrastructure investment in education is likely to see a significant increase in the current era.

The Government of India has taken several steps including the opening of IITs and IIMs in new locations as well as distributing educational grants for research scholars in most government institutions. Also, with the online methods of education being used by some educational organizations, the higher education sector in India is set for major change and development in the years to come.

5.4 List of Recommendations

1. All the required facility, materials and accessibility will be provided by the Colleges, Institutions and Universities.
2. For the E-learning well-trained teaching faculties is needed.
3. The Software tools must be easy to use.
4. During the teaching plenty of breaks will be given to the students from the screen to refresh them.
5. The assured of the security will be given during the online programs.
6. The online teaching focuses on the theoretical knowledge, so it should be practical-based.
7. Students and parent satisfaction survey must conduct by 3rd Party.
8. Every week one online exam should be taken by concerned teachers.
9. The results of the online exams will be shared with the parents also.

6 Conclusion

It is concluded from the present study that colleges have been affected in all the regions of Nashik District (Table 1). Digitization is not done in every college of Nashik region and required some time due to the sources not being available. Digital learning is easy but, Indian rural regions have a number of challenges like smart-phones, data, and electricity, etc. 100% of online classes on E-learning is possible in those institutes having required all the facilities for online learning. In this situation, all the educational sectors have their academic losses. Now a day's many affordable e-learning solutions are available and it is easy and convenient online learning classes in rural India. In the past few years, we faced some challenges in rural India regarding education, infrastructure, and other facilities. The digital platform is very easy and affordable as well as accessible to everyone in government Colleges as well as private institutes planning to provide facilities to each student and Teachers.

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