TIMES OF LOCKDOWN OR TIMES OF OPPORTUNITY?

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ABSTRACT

Corona – The biggest calamity that the world has faced so far which is shaking the world down. Be it the economy or even education sector for that matter, our lives have changed pretty much because of this pandemic. COVID – 19 has clearly thrown education around the world in a loop. Harvard, MIT, IIT you name it. All of them are shut at the cost of our lives. There is panic all around and both students and educators are confused as the virus is growing expeditiously. There are students caught in crossfire and the entire education system is disrupted. More than 1.3 billion of students in India and all over the world are at home fighting the pandemic by social distancing. The closure of educational institutions has an impact economically and societally too. Virtual classrooms and all the required measures have been taken by the Governments as well as the to make sure the student is benefitted. Students can actively participate in various events being conducted online and utilize this time to develop skills and think innovatively with an optimistic thought that this storm of the pandemic will pass real soon. All the institutions around the world are coming up with various ideas to continue their lessons online. As distance learning is the one and only method by which education can sustain in the present scenario, this can open new doors of opportunities for the future. Lessons are being taught but the exams are all at halt for now. Few have cancelled the exams and promoted the students but the situation of the children appearing for board exams and entrance exams are the one in fear. One can also think of distance learning to be an opportunity for children and their parents to bond better in the process of learning. The pandemic is giving tech massive insights as to what learning would really look like, allowing it to potentially shift from content dissemination to augmenting relationships. But things changing overnight, with no training and often not enough bandwidth will leave many with a sour taste about the whole new change. Highly developed nations like China can continue with the e-learning but there are so many underdeveloped countries which do not have the necessary resources like electronic gadgets and the necessary band width. Such countries will have to gain the momentum and ensure that there is no loss to their children. UNESCO is supporting such countries to mitigate the immediate impact of school closures and facilitate remote learning. This pandemic is widening the scope and growth of the digital world. Speaking of 'Digital Literacy' How should we look at it? As a pro or a con? How long can education continue through a zoom app or video conferencing? Can the practical aspect of what is being taught to the kids be achieved? Can anything be done about the board and entrance exams? Will this pandemic result in a new educational revolution in India and throughout the world? Is there a bonding scenario between children and their parents or are their conflicts because of an increased screen time?

Keywords: Covid-19, pandemic, education sector, virtual classrooms, distance learning, educational revolution, online.

"Education is a better safeguard of liberty than a standing army."

-Edward Everett

This raging pandemic has undoubtedly created a panic scene globally. Every sector has been adversely affected but this being at the cost of our health and lives, it really leaves us with no option. The economy has crashed down but so did the education sector. All the schools and other educational institutions are all shut, students are all stranded at home. Children have been deprived of physical activity and almost a zero contact with their friends. All the educational institutions are making sure and trying every possible way to ensure that the students do not suffer any losses. Digital learning. This is adapted by every school to continue the process of learning. This measure has been taken as of now, but can this really be an alternative to the classroom learning? Distance learning costs the practical aspect of education which cannot be achieved by an online mode.

Major education problems faced:
1. Students caught in the crossfire: There are many students giving their boards year which have all been postponed until further students. There are other students who are awaiting their results to get admission into colleges. The colleges have paused the admission process. This leaves students worried and causes panic in concern for their future. The other set of students who are affected mainly are the students graduating this year. They would be entering a new

phase of their lives and are clueless now as not only them but so many others do not know what and when the next step in their life would be.
2. Education-disruption: Not only these set of students are affected but students are troubled because of the change in the pattern of lectures. Children are expected to cope with the tension and panic created in the society out there as well as cop with the new system of education. This imposing on them will create tension and parents must make sure that the student is relieved.
3. Distance learning reinforces the teaching and learning approaches which might not work well and might not cater to the needs of the students learning process.
4. It is a challenging task for the teachers as well as asking them to adapt to this method of teaching is something even, they are new to.[1]
5. This crisis that we are all currently in is definitely posing a lot of challenges such as low internet connectivity connections or the bandwidth and for that matter not possessing an electronic gadget but at the same time will help us come together and cross boundaries.

Distance learning is not only a massive shock to parents' productivity but also a threat to the children's social life and learning. This short-term issue has a lot of uncertainty as moving the lectures and assessments online overnight poses as a challenge to the educators.

As a part of conducting research Carlsson studied a group of men in Sweden had different number of days each to prepare for a test. From this, it was analysed that even

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[1] John R. Allen, On corona virus America and China must demonstrate global relationship together, Brookings (March 30, 2020, 10:05 AM), https://www.brookings.edu/president/on-coronavirus-america-and-china-must-demonstrate-global-leadership-and-join-together/

ten days of extra schooling resulted in a significant rise in their test scores. This is known as crystallised intelligence.[2]

Aspect of families: A family plays a crucial role in one's life, especially in a student's life. As described by Bjorklund and Salvanes (2011), a family is key and central to education and aid in providing input into the student.[3] But, according to Oreopoulos[4], in some cases this might not be achieved pertaining to the various differences like the amount of time a parent can devote to the learning of the child as the parents themselves could be working. Some may not be accessible to the various resources that are available online and the amount of knowledge the parent has. This is an important fact to consider as how can a parent explain something to his child if he himself cannot understand that topic or has no knowledge about the same. This entire episode might lead to an increase in the inequality of human capital growth for the affected cohorts.

Assessment: Now not only are the lessons and teaching segments affected but also the assessment and the exam part. The key part of learning where the child is assessed is interrupted. Assessment helps the teachers and the parents analyse what the child has understood. Few institutions have cancelled the exams and are marking students based on the internal evaluation which to a certain

level can be biased and can be inaccurate as said by Murphy and Wyness.[5] Coming to the students graduating amidst the pandemic have faced a serious. The final lessons have been interrupted and students from the law background especially who would be exploring the practical aspect in the form of internships have been put on hold as well. The main concern of the online learning is how can this practical field be brought into online learning?

Cancelled events: Hundreds of competitions, events, conferences, etc. that have been planned and organised have all been put at hold too. Students who find organizing and taking part in such events are disappointed. This pandemic is anyway bringing out the innovative and creative side of a few. Students with the help of their teachers are thinking out of the box and arranging online conferences and online conferences as well. These serve as a great opportunity for students to conduct research on various topics and explore various options available on the online platform.

Impact on the students emotional and mental health: Due to the restricted movement globally, we are all restricted to our households. Children especially, who require physical activity have been are restricted to their rooms and the corridors at the most. This restricted movement physically has been proved to have a mental

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[2] Carlsson, M, G B Dahl, B Öckert and D Rooth (2015), "The Effect of Schooling on Cognitive Skills", *Review of Economics and Statistics* 97(3), 2015.

[3] Bjorklund, A and K Salvanes (2011), "Education and Family Background: Mechanisms and Policies", in E Hanushek, S Machin and L Woessmann (eds), *Handbook of the Economics of Education,* Vol. 3.

[4] Oreopoulos, P, M Page and A Stevens (2006), "Does human capital transfer from parent to child? The intergenerational effects of compulsory schooling", *Journal of Labour Economics* 24(4)

[5] Murphy, R and G Wyness (2020), "Minority Report: the impact of predicted grades on university admissions of disadvantaged groups", CEPEO Working Paper Series No 20-07 Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities, UCL Institute of Education.

impact too. Many children might fall into depression, anxiety, and such other mental illness due to the restricted social life. It can be straining on them, emotionally too. To overcome this, one should engage themselves in various activities which could include reading, gardening, helping the elder ones and innovative thinking.

COVID-19 redefining the conventional aspect of education: Due to the current situations, our entire outside world is digitalised and so is the education in the form of distance learning. This seems to be the only way to continue education while fighting against the invisible enemy out there. But it is expected that after these times of crisis, the entire educational revolution will undergo a massive change and chances are it can go form the conventional method of learning to the digital mode. Digital education would be integrated into the mainstream education. This will automatically lead to a manifold increase in the ed-tech companies as vernacular modules would be shot in the arm for digital education. Students are given access to audio-visual explanation of concepts, solved examples and e-books, interactive simulations which are catering to the educational needs of a student. The school fraternity can take this as an opportunity to make learning more fun and interesting by engaging them into various activities online which would be a major change from the conventional classroom mode of teaching.

Scope for public-private partnerships to bloom with importance: As a result of this on-going pandemic, there is a scope for the public-private partnerships too. The Chinese Government especially, has upgraded to a new suite of educational culture on the online platform. Emerging countries thus can tie up with the telecom network operators and fight the crisis.

Artificial intelligence: As the days are changing rapidly and with technological advancements being made rapidly, individual preferences are changing rapidly too. Unless and until such preferences are catered too, such things are disliked and not recommended further. This is the era of personalization and be it Netflix recommendations or Instagram ads, everything is demanded personal in these days of customization. Artificial Intelligence is a technology that empowers educators and the teaching staff to address and cater to the individual demands of the child. Some students are gifted with high grasping power, but the larger section falls with an average IQ who need a bit more care as compared to these students. Thus, AI would help equalising the learning ability by adapting to the individual student learning and grasping abilities. This would also aid in finding out the strengths and weaknesses of every child and provide extra assistance to the required students. The teaching staff would then be able to focus on developing the cognitive skills and understanding the needs of each student. Thus, technology which is already very much advanced is bringing about various changes in every aspect of life, especially in the education sector which builds the students personality, holistically. Block chain technology is another technology that focuses on course and skill development.

Changes in students: Due to the various lifestyle changes nowadays, children are vulnerable to various mental and emotional disorders such as depression and anxiety. To

add to this, the pandemic could be a little more challenging for such individuals due to the pandemic and the panic caused all around. To overcome this and ensure the overall well-being of the child, the school fraternity is also including meditation and yoga classes as a part of the extra-curricular activities in the curriculum.

Challenges faced in distance learning:
The silver lining of the COVID-19 crisis in the educational sphere is that education does not have to be paused and can still be continued through the online platforms. There would be an extremely high usage of electronic gadgets, usage of power and internet in the process of distance learning or remote learning. It highly relies upon the ubiquitous net connections. This might be a far-fetched challenging thing for tier 2 and 3 towns. Distance learning also requires a lot of self-control as it is very easy to get distracted while using laptops and computers to not shift to a gaming app or social media. It is also difficult for a student to study using electronic gadgets as online mode is not conducive in nature and does not create the atmosphere for learning. Online learning is indeed not a substitute for field and practical knowledge. It can be said that it is highly impossible to achieve practical knowledge through an online mode. The field trips in school, the cultural programs and fests that take place on campus is something a student would be missing out on, which is considered to play a crucial role in the overall holistic development of a child. One of the ways to achieve this through the process of remote learning to make the

sessions more interactive and personalized through customization which would indeed require a lot of inputs from the teaching staff and the institution management staff. The future as of now is uncertain and unclear. After various hit and trial methods that have been conducted to facilitate a smoot process of remote learning, few say that due to technical issues, online classes are not that helpful but as a long term change, the online content can replace the conventional text books as online content could be more descriptive and easy to grasp and understand. As per a survey conducted by Fairgaze, which is a reputed engagement ecosystems for the school fraternity, it has been noted that 89% agreed that the schools need to change the whole curriculum of the course and the way in which classes are being taken to improvise the way of learning further. 47% has also been agreed that the teachers and staff should adapt to the educational portals online replacing the textbooks.[6]

Government on the new trend in education: As we say that students and the younger generation is the only hope for a brighter future, we need to ensure they are not being deprived of their education mainly. The Government indeed is passing rules and encouraging the process of learning and education through online platforms. According to surveys. Only 25% of the students have access to both electronic gadgets as well as the required bandwidth with connections. How will the rest of the students be accommodated in the concept of remote learning? The Government must do something about it and take necessary steps.

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[6]Roshni, Online classes not better, India Today (April 22, 2020, 6:30 AM), https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/latest-studies/story/post-covid-19-learning-trends-survey-physical-classrooms-better-1665496-2020-04-10?utm_source=recengine&utm_medium=web&referral=yes&utm_content=footerstrip-3

The Government can contribute by donating a share of the funds towards this issue by providing basic electronic gadgets and minimal net connections. This way a larger sector of students will be able to attend online classes.

Will distance learning put an end for the road for brick and mortar schools?

This must strictly be a NO. We have discussed about how important the practical aspect of education is. Mere teaching of lessons might not be as successful in achieving the aim as including the practical and field teaching in the curriculum too. Communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and analysis which are an important aspect in the upbringing of a student. The teaching staff must put in a lot of efforts as previously it was just 'chalk and talk' but now they must adapt to the flipped reality which is the digital mode of learning. The faculty heads are riddled with doubt as to how they can ensure that the standard of teaching does not drop. For this, the classes conducted by the teaching staff is recorded and reviewed by various schools and groups to see the quality and the method of teaching.

Aspect of peer pressure: Few parents choose to 'home-school' their kids for various reasons. The main reason being to safeguard their children from the peer pressure. Unhealthy peer pressure would result in an unhealthy thinking and unhealthy competition. Another reason is the fear of bullying. Bullying and ragging are various acts prevalent in school and the victims of it tend to develop an inferiority complex. This allows the child to blossom without any of

these social troubles and the parental worries would also decrease. Due to the raging pandemic, distance learning has been adapted and every child is now home-schooled leaving no room for bullying and ragging to occur. Home-schooling indeed relies upon the online resources for counselling of students and career guidance.[7]

Pandemic as an opportunity: This pandemic that broke out in the world has begun to increase enormously causing many deaths across the globe. The only way to fight this pandemic and stay safe is by practicing 'Social Distancing'. As we are confined to our homes, we can look at this time as an opportunity to think innovatively and do something productive. Excelling not only in the academic aspect but also doing well in extra-curricular activities is something that has always been given importance to. This time can also be devoted to quality conversations and discussions with family members that will lead to debates on various topics and there would be a growth in the child's view and thinking. Reading is one such activity which is the base to any out of the box thinking.

CONCLUSION

"Resilience must be built into our educational systems."

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Gloria Tam

This global lockdown and especially that of educational institutions that has caused an altogether disruption in education has to be recovered. Education is key to life and is

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[7] Apoorva Anand, How home schooling helps kids blossom freely, India Today (April 18, 2020, 9;18 AM), https://www.indiatoday.in/education-

today/featurephilia/story/how-homeschooling-helps-kids-grow-blossom-freely-without-any-peer-pressure-1663847-2020-04-06

something that we do not comprise no matter what. Something must be done to mitigate these negative impacts ensuring there is no academic loss to any student, globally. The educational institutions need to recover from the pandemic immediately. This is imposing in nature and a burden on them, but they are the temples of wisdom, right? Schools should particularly those set of students who could not cope with the distance learning and take extra classes and lessons and assessed regularly so that they are at par with all the other students of their batch. The institutions must also make sure that the exams that have been cancelled and postponed shall be conducted to analyse how much the students could grasp. For the set of students graduating at these times, who are the most vulnerable ones, there should be special provisions ensuring there is no unemployment for the ones who deserve the job.

As per UNESCO, COVID-19 is going to shed light on the need for a new education model. The UNESCO general conference adopted a new global framework on Education for Sustainable Development(ESD) for the years 2020-2030.[8] This new framework mainly focuses on the new challenges that the world would face after this crisis and also to strengthen the education system across the globe. ESD also aims at introducing unique subjects such as gender studies and environmental sustainability. Through such multi-dimensional approaches, the overall objective of academic concepts would be improvised and focus on a student's overall critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

[8] Mame Omar, UNESCO (April 20, 2020, 12;12 AM) https://en.unesco.org/news/covid-19-crisis-sheds-light-need-new-education-model

The rapid spread of this invisible enemy has established the importance of building resilience to face such threats ranging from extremist violence to climate insecurity to a pandemic disease or maybe even a rapid technological change. This pandemic must remind us of the skills that students and children need in this unpredictable world such as informed decision making, creative problem solving, out of the box thinking but above all, the skill of adaptability. The ability to be able to understand and adjust to various situations and circumstances is very important for a peaceful survival and growth of a being. To ensure all of this, resilience must be inculcated into our educational systems as well.

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