The 'New Normal' of Education in the midst of Catastrophic Wave of Pandemic

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Abstract

Pandemic has created a catastrophic wave in the earth and all aspects of human life, especially students' life, have been in danger. The classroom teaching and learning was one of the first and foremost affected for very common/obvious reasons; as it involves mass gatherings and student audiences. Given the continuous process or nature of the teaching-learning system, the administrative mechanism resorted or was dropped down to the only possible solution, that of online teaching and learning, for primary as well as higher education. Given the unexpected crisis, it is the most viable and plausible solution. Although it is mired with multiple issues and barriers: heterogeneity of users in terms of accessibility; and affordability of gadgets and connectivity was very challenging. A pertinent issue here is that popular discourse is projecting it as a panacea for all the malaise plaguing the education system. Through the rise in the digital technological era of learning the crisis has led us to a virtual learning environment, the transformation of learning from a gurukul environment (sitting beneath a tree) to a virtual/digital environment is the new normal of learning. This research paper throws light on the wave of transformation or usage of innovative teaching strategies for the new normal of education for the productive engagement of students. It breaks down the various ways how the current teaching and learning process has transformed. This research concludes by showing the future research or opens a way to further research in the field of the education industry with special reference to the innovative learning strategies.

Keyword: *Pandemic, Catastrophic, students, innovative, teaching, gurukul, digital, strategi*

Introduction:

COVID-19- CoronaVirus 2019 was first experienced in Wuhan, China in late December 2019 (Shereen et al., 2020). COVID19 timeline or the reports shows that on:

- January 13, 2020, the first COVID 19 infection outside China was reported;

- February 02, 2020, the first COVID 19 mortality outside China was recorded;

- March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the outbreak a pandemic spreading across countries;

- April 10, 2020, the global death toll crossed a hundred thousand;

- May 11, 2020, countries like Spain, New Zealand, Thailand, and Iran began to ease out their quarantine restrictions after a decrease, which was a bad tactic (Secon et al., 2020).

- June 1, 2020, started affecting all the countries in a worst situation with most affected countries as USA, India, France and others being high on the rate of infection.

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Education sector was one of the worst hit sector, we say an educational system produces future legends/geniuses of the nation adding up to the economy. Educational systems are likewise preparing for the post- COVID-19 era characterized by "new normal." the concept new normal is playing a wide role across the education sector. This expression first evolved in the field of business and management. Its origin lies from economics. It was used to highlight the belief of economists that industrial economies would regain to normal after the recession (El-Erian, 2010). The term has been widely used in the contexts to mean that something which was previously not typical has become typical. The Oxford Dictionary described "new normal" as the situation of being after some critical change has occurred. It substitutes the agreed, usual, habitual, frequent state after a certain event happened or occurred.

There is a steady incline in the research publications to tackle the implications and barriers of COVID-19 crisis to the expected "new normal" period (Sintema, 2020 & Toquero, 2020). Within the educational research there have been a wide discussion on adopting the online modality in the usage of instructing the students in the new normal post-COVID-19 era (Sintema, 2020 digitalized virtual classroom) (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020 online education) (Naciri et al., 2020 mobile learning) (Mulenga & Marbán, 2020 digital learning).

A well framed curriculum plays an important role when it comes to frame/design the curriculum during the pandemic scenario. Keeping in mind the new normal post-COVID-19 period, a reconsideration of education within the curriculum studies perspectives is vital and eminent. It provides a nutshell of opportunities and challenges in the future of education as far as curriculum is concerned. Curriculum discussion helps in formulating the objective, content and the approach in order to tackle the problems, decisions and arrive at a solution to the approach.

Hence, this paper attempted to bring a new change in the education of the new normal post-COVID-19 era from the perspective of curriculum studies as well as bring out the innovative online techniques during the Covid era. This paper also throws light on the Vedic traditions and the modern tradition of learning.

Transformation: Vedic traditions to Modern Traditions

The present education has become identical with data/information, which is not a good sign for the society as a whole. Education in Vedic traditions is considered as a devotional engagement and commitment of one's life. The Indian education system has produced great and noble teachers like Guru Vashistha, Chanakya and students like Chandragupta, Rama. Due to the large number of seekers Gurukul education is not desirable in the current scenario. Gurukul education has received a lot of discrimination in regards to the education system followed, but Gurukul education can be guzzled to create, more educated and insightful humans in relation to the modern educations that create informational vessels. Education must have moral, ethical & societal values; it should not impact the society adversely. Classroom learning creates a divine atmosphere, which is currently lacking in the present scenario. The interaction must not only be subject or domain specific, it must be an open interaction. Value based ecosystem is yet another important concept which needs to be delivered to the young minds to navigate them to the labyrinthine

world. Online teaching has its advantages as it enables no boundaries in learning and teaching process. The important concept here is to define the objective is to produce well trained and informed human resource or to create well shaped humans armed to lead happy & healthy lives.

In reference to Mahabharata Lord Krishna says "Don't seek forgiveness from me for the misadventures of your children, seek forgiveness from your children for not providing education (Dharma aur Adharma) propriety and impropriety." The education system in India has failed to a greater extent, we as administrators, parents and teachers owe forgiveness to generation for not imparting the meaningful education. In the era of artificial intelligence and machine learning, the space for teachers & parents are shrinking rapidly. In this situation, we teachers need to ask an vital question why teachers are not able to command respect and reverence in society, are we losing the vision of empathy towards our students and more precisely have we lost the dedication towards the profession. We cannot hold society responsible for not providing good teachers. Each and every parent wishes to have knowledgeable and worthy teachers for their kids but they look at the teaching profession with a lugubrious attitude. It's quite surprising to see the current regime, has moved from the Vedic tradition to the modern and western ideas of education.

Range or teaching Approaches

Education is one of the important and evaluative aspects of any country but with the outstretch of COVID – 19 pandemic, this sector has seen enormous disruption and has changed our lives. Educators around the globe have been agile in adapting and switched teaching from offline to the online classroom. The lockdown in India was imposed from March 24, 2020, and we as educators did not get much chance to prepare and train ourselves for virtual classes.

But in spite of this, teachers and faculties are putting in their best efforts to deliver their online classes making it interesting and motivating the students to be attentive and concentrate on the topics discussed. The COVID-19 comes with stern social distancing and self-isolating followed with a lockdown in all the countries across the globe. Students are already missing their classroom learning, studying with peers in groups, and significantly the co-learning as well as co-creating which was earlier considered normal. The Parents and the Guardians are now finding it difficult to motivate their wards to maintain the pace of learning. Globally over 1.2 billion children are affected due to COVID-19 and presently taking education using digital platforms, of which, India itself is observing 34,337,594 affected learners. (UNESCO) To help institutions overcome this unexpected crisis, UNESCO is working with ministries of education across the globe to ensure continued and uninterrupted learning of students using different alternative channels, and supporting them in various ways by technical assistance, selection of digital learning tools, arranging webinars and creation of national learning platforms (Chandra, 2020).

Most of them are looking into the role of technology and how it's playing a role in education. During an era of social distancing practice demon strating a major new normal behavior, many schools are headed towards complete online modality or blended learning modality in instruction. The complete online modality of the instructional approach during the post-COVID-19 era can be feasible. Forinstance, in China that was the first

epicenter of the virus, more than 180 million children were ordered to remain at home. But while schools were closed for quarantine, education had to continue but this time in an altered modality. It was implemented online through a variety of online courses and electronic textbooks (Patrinos & Shmis, 2020).

Moreover, blended learning is coincidentally known as the "new normal" (Norberg et al., 2011) in the realm of educational technology. Though there are obscurities in its definition, blended learning can be commonly described as an instructional approach that integrates traditional classroom methods and online digital methods (Graham 2013). It necessitates the physical presence of both teacher and learner, with features of learner control over time, setting, or pace (Huang et al., 2009). Given these features of blended learning, it provides auspicious prospects for use in education come new normal times.

While complete online and blended learning sound like the "holy grail" in this new era in education, it requires massive changes. For some developed countries, blended learning is an established educational modality. It has enabled these countries to cope with the effects of the current COVID-19 plague. Online learning and teaching are supported by developed structures and trained teachers (Olivier, 2020). However, for other countries, schools must carefully plan virtual learning solutions. It requires an assessment of their capabilities based on the reliability of local power supplies, internet connectivity, and readiness of the teachers (Obana, 2020).

Blended learning still requires an amount of traditional classroom modality. Considering the social distancing practice in this new era, group work approaches that require interactions with close physical contacts such as formal and informal cooperative learning groups, think-pair-share, peer instruction, and jigsaw, (Brame & Biel, 2015) might just be modified or reduced, if not eliminated, from the options of instructional methods of teaching.

On the other side, there can be more use of methods that require less movement and physical contact. One method is direct instruction. It is an instructional approach that is planned, sequenced, and managed by the teachers. The implementation of instruction to learners is attained mainly through strategies like lectures or demonstrations. With this method, teachers generally direct the process (The Glossary of Educational Reform, 2013), thus keeping students less active. The COVID-19 global outbreak is evidently redefining the approaches to instructional implementation. The range of options that education systems are contemplating presents not only opportunities but also challenges that must be considered in the process.

Many of the educational campuses have also started faculty development programs to enhance the technical skills of educators, giving hands-on-experience to various software and applications and making them ready for our new normal world.

Innovative Learning Methods used by the Educators

Artificial Intelligence

There are a lot of innovative methods of teaching which is now becoming popular and are been discussed by educators and educational administrators. It is very interesting to note that a lot of these things which are existing since long (but not given much importance) are now being observed as very crucially helpful considering today's time.

Scholars say that online education, digital education, virtual classrooms using technology and artificial intelligence are nothing new to us.

We all have attended a lot of online classes, listening to podcasts, Ted talks, browsing it all the time but what we weren't expecting is that with COVID-19, this will become our only source of teaching survival. Using digital technology to transform classroom experience is crucial, but yet it is more interesting. Educators are using platforms such as Zoom meetings, Microsoft Teams, Google Classrooms, Cloud Meeting, Cisco Webex, Udemy, Coursera, etc. These are some of the popular platforms used by educators which provide a blend of tools apart from audio-visual such as creating videos using documents, excel sheets PDFs, PowerPoint slides, discussion forums for students, whiteboard features to make teaching and learning more interactive, multiple-choice quizzes with instant analysis and feedback, grading of assignments, exams, and whatnot.

Students enjoy learning from hands-on experience and pay attention to things that give them challenges to pursue. For example, a lot of Gaming Companies are now into education which in the future can replace classroom teaching (using artificial intelligence) and may provide a newer learning experience to students.

Gaming experience using artificial intelligence is taking a giant leap, young people, students, and children are more attracted towards these games, these games give a lot of new and exciting experience apart from enhancing some of the competencies in students, such as readiness to run risks, decision making in crucial situations, critical thinking, persistence, and develop entrepreneurial attitudes. This entire experience gives a complex yet multifaceted nature of learning and teaching. Educators are now taking reflections from this and are creating reading material and virtual classes which will have a blend of these experience to students such as simulation exercises based on different stages, situational aspects, decision-based games/quizzes which help them to gain scores towards completing each stage and motivate to pursue and learn more.

Startups And e-Learning Experience

E-Learning startups are emerging and are proving very successful in their ways to enhance the current learning experience of students. For example, Byju's, a Bangalore based startup which has become most favorite of educator, parents, and children; yet another is Ahmedabad based E-learning startup named Pedagogy; Enuma, a California based company provides engaging learning experience; Manabie, a Singapore hub company that provides online and offline merged learning; a similar example is Emtrain, a California based company provides online education and guidance on human resources and compliance tools.

Educators' Experience On Innovative Learning

Educators are held responsible for creating new knowledge and hence our responsibility to nurture young minds is important and yet crucial for their future. The Tuck School of Business Prof. Vijay Govindrajan in a conversation during a webinar led by HBR Editor Amy Bernstein (May 20, 2020) says that we need to now focus on switching from the residential experience of teaching to a hybrid model of teaching which includes giving a sense of residential learning along with the digital technology and virtual learning.

Students for a country like India needs more courses

which are focused on competency-based learning, the pyramid of knowledge needs to move up from providing a blend of foundation knowledge courses along with enhancing skills and attitudes. The world will now need people with multi-skills with a mix of technical and managerial knowledge together. Along with teaching using innovative ways, we also need to cultivate few things in students in today's time, some of which are: we need to teach students a "tolerance to failure but no tolerance for incompetence". Today is the world where all of us are trying to learn new skills, building new knowledge, which enhances our competencies.

Companies recruit the best aptitude, they want young talent to explore risky ideas that even if fails will still be sound acceptable, but poor management, a technical mediocre skill, unethical working styles are a strict no. Another trait that organizations look for is the willingness to experiment but in a highly disciplined manner. They welcome people who are adaptable and comfortable with uncertain and ambiguous ideas, and they give enough space for young talent to experiment rather than jumping to produce immediate marketable products.

Yet another is "building psychologically safe but brutally candid" talents, Amy Edmondson, a Harvard Business School professor says that "psychologically safe environments" help organizations to avoid catastrophic errors while supporting innovation and learning (Pisano, 2019).

Lastly, we also need to make our students confident to voice their opinions, take leadership actions and make their decisions, even if the decision fails but it can cultivate a feeling of self-accomplishment and help to develop students emotional intelligence. This is a new normal.

Conclusion

The unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 global outbreak are indeed ushering educational systems to a new normal period in human history, transformation from gurukul learning to the virtual classroom. This paper attempted to throw light on the transformation of vedic teachings to modern teachings. It emphasized on the range of teaching approaches and also enlightened about the various innovative teaching strategies in the new normal. When it comes to curriculum content, there are challenges to whether to integrate or reduce. This paper offers an insight into how curriculum can be reshaped, considering the new normal post-COVID-19 era.

Other researches should look into other aspects of education from a wider perspective. The COVID-19 pandemic affects political, economic, social, and psychological dimensions. There is a rise in the privacy concerns and exploitation of privacy when there is a huge increase in technology. The Indian education system has to be well prepared to adopt to an online modality of learning in order to shape better citizens of country. These dimensions continuously tackled in the emerging studies should be further examined to better prepare education systems in the new period in human history.

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