

Article

Youth Perception on Online Teaching: Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic and Lockdown on Higher Education

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A B S T R A C T

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all age groups of people around the world both physically and mentally but the impact of COVID-19 on youth, in particular, the university level students are long-lasting. In India the educational institutions and universities are closed indefinitely since March 2020 and they have introduced the process of teaching-learning through online and e-learning platforms. The compulsory learning through digitised mode and distance learning served as an alternative mechanism during pandemic. However, it missed the issues of physical interaction of students and instructors as well. It has also been a contributor towards increased level of stress and anxiety. The present study focuses on the perception of youth mainly the undergraduate and post graduate students on short-term and long-term impacts of the closure of campuses, online teaching, and covid-19 lockdown on university students in India. An online survey with 230 respondents in age group 18-30 years across various states was conducted to understand the research problem. Apart from physical and mental problems being faced by students, lack of gadgets and internet connectivity was also an important issue. The study concludes the need for the development of interventions and policies targeting youth and their mental health

Keywords: COVID-19, E-learning, Mental health, Youth, University, Online classes, Pandemic, and Lockdown

Introduction

COVID-19 is a virus caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) which was originated in Wuhan China in December 2019 and then quickly spread around the world. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a global public health emergency of international concern on 30th January 2020 as well as a pandemic on 11th March 2020.² The first case of COVID-19 in India was reported on 30 January 2020. India currently has the largest number of cases in Asia and has the second-

largest number of confirmed cases in the world after the United States with more than 9 million cases and over one hundred thirty thousand deaths. Soon after the first wave of the spread of coronavirus, the Government of India has announced a nationwide lockdown in March 2020 and all colleges, universities and educational institutions were closed down indefinitely and thus continued the process of teaching-learning online through remote learning using the internet or called e-learning. The government started easing down the lockdown restrictions all around the

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country since June 2020 and slowly all restaurants, malls, cinema halls and markets got opened up by November 2020 with some restrictions; but in spite of permissions from central and state governments, some campuses of universities and colleges are still closed in India.

To maintain the social distancing to prevent the spread of the virus, universities closed their campus and changed the process of teaching-learning from face to face to the virtual learning. This mode of remote learning proved to be highly challenging in India as more than half of the population resides in rural areas which include hilly and isolated places where internet connectivity is poor and gadgets such as smartphones and laptops are not available to the young students. The universities and colleges had to confront multiple issues ranging from technical support, faculty training, monitoring of online teaching and conducting online examinations in a short period of time. It is observed that numerous advanced educational institutions in India are still not equipped with digital facilities to cope with sudden change from traditional education set up to the online education system.³ Online education, with development of online platforms and resources for the process of teaching learning, came out as an alternative and helpful means of teaching-learning process amid this COVID-19 pandemic. However, pandemic effected the conventional way of teaching, and students faced various technical and monetary issues while adapting to online learning and also missed the interaction with instructors and fellows.¹

Also, teachers and students faced these problems while urgently adopting to virtual learning. The situation is unique; unlike online learning or home-schooling as some may claim, it is more accurately crisis learning and teaching.⁴ This closing of campuses had both short term and long-term impact on the young students who are confined to their homes and are attending their classes online. Remote learning through the internet may have fulfilled the basic demand of completing classes and submitting assignments but it also contributed to the level of stress that arose by the worldwide pandemic in the life of young students both physical and mental health of young students are deeply affected by this COVID-19 pandemic. Previous studies have shown the immediate effects of the pandemic on youth and higher education across the globe and in India and how the teachers and students started adapting the virtual mode of education, also some studies were deeply focused on the impact of pandemic on the mental health of students.^{6,7}

There lies a huge research gap as slowly the lockdown restrictions are now easing and life is getting back to normal but the higher education system is sticking to remote ways of learning and conducting exams there are very few

studies focused on the perspectives of students regarding the online classes and exams. The present study is focused on the impact of the closing of universities and colleges due to COVID-19 pandemic on the life of young students and both long term and short term, including mental and physical health and the higher education had been covered in this study also the perspectives of students amid virtual learning, online exams, course workload, and its effectiveness are also included in the study.

Aim of the Study

The present study aimed:

- To understand the perception of students on online teaching
- To understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental and physical health of university students in India
- To understand the effectiveness of online learning in India

Methodology

The study was designed to undertake an online survey to understand and analyse the perception of youth regarding online teaching and impact of pandemic. The sample size of the study was 230 (131 Males and 99 Females). Data was collected through an online structured questionnaire using Google forms and snowball sampling method from 18 states and more than 150 different institutions of India. Online collection of data was done due to COVID-19 pandemic and following government guidelines of lockdown and maintaining social distancing measures. Respondents having 18-30 years of age were included in the study. Eighteen States are representative of diverse data from various colleges and universities of respective States. The data obtained were analysed using Microsoft Office tools like MS Excel and Word. Students enrolled in any Undergraduate, Postgraduate, Ph.D., certificate, Diploma and are enrolled under any recognized university/college and institutions present in India were included in the study. Appropriate revisions and necessary modifications were also made based on questionnaire. The study was conducted in November 2020 and the questionnaire included questions regarding the present scenario of higher education and perspectives of young students on the effectiveness of online and virtual means of conducting classes and exams by colleges and universities amid COVID-19 pandemic, some questions regarding effects of lockdown on the mental and physical health of the students were also included in the study.

Result

Background of Respondents: The study respondents mainly belonged in the age group 18-30 years old however a majority of the respondents i.e., 90 % were falling in the age group of 20-24 years.

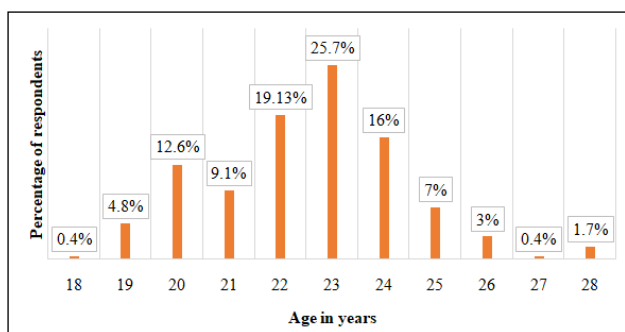


Figure 1. Age Distribution

51.7% of respondents were enrolled in government institutions whereas 43% of respondents were enrolled in private institutions, and 5.2% of respondents were from semi-government institutions. These respondents represented eighteen states of India. Of the total respondents 49% of respondents were pursuing Post Graduation/master's program, 47% of respondents were enrolled in Under Graduation programs, 2% of respondents are doing Ph.D., and 1% of respondents were from certificate courses and 1% from coaching's institutions. 91% of respondents reported that their universities/institutions closed due to lockdown imposed in March, whereas 2.17% of respondent's institutions closed as early as in February, and 1% of students reported that their university closed in May.

Universities/ Institutions reopened for students in some places by implementing the guidelines imposed by the Government. According to the present study, only 8.3% of respondents state that their university is open while 91.7% of respondents responded that their universities and colleges campus is still closed, and for most of them universities campus opened recently in November 2020.

The study also found that 56.08% of respondents returned to home after lockdown, while 34.78% of respondents' hometown and place of study are the same and 9.13% of students did not return to home after lockdown.

Impact of Pandemic on Higher Education: Student Perceptions

Data collected from respondents has been analysed for understanding the student's perception about online teaching and learning, its effectiveness and impact of pandemic on physical and mental wellbeing. 92.60% of respondents stated that their academic activities were continued through an online medium in the form of online classes, whereas 7% of students state that no online classes were organized for them. Zoom platform is the most used platform for online classes, followed by Google meets and Microsoft Teams. It was also revealed that even WhatsApp and YouTube were also used for online classes and teaching. 67.8% of respondents stated that their teachers/professors

took class regularly on online mode, whereas 32.2% of respondents state that their teachers did not take online classes. The majority of universities and institutions are conducting examinations online. 76.1% of respondents responded that they would have examinations on online platforms. Whereas 15% of respondents said that their examinations have been suspended for now and will be conducted in normal mode after the reopening of institutions. While 7.5% of respondents reported that their universities will conduct exams offline on campus as normal.

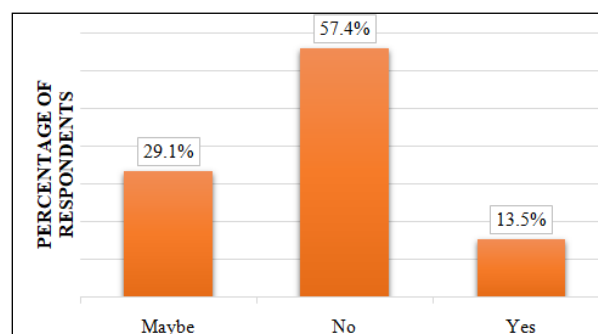


Figure 2. Students Experience Regarding the Effectiveness of Online Classes

Figure 2, is representing one of the most important results of the research, it is reflecting the effectiveness of online classes and the satisfaction of students. It was found that a big portion is 57.4% of respondents emphasized that online classes are not effective and useful, 29.1% of respondents says that maybe they can be effective and cannot be effective, and only 13.5% of respondents state that yes online classes are effective and can be used for the academic purposes. A majority of students not favouring the online cases are mainly due to poor connectivity, non-availability of gadgets, Boredom, extra work, distractions, health issues, scree time, face to face interaction etc.

Out of the above-mentioned problems, slow internet connection, unavailability of electronic gadgets is commonly faced by more than 60% and 50% of respondents respectively. Other important problems are the lack of a classroom environment for online classes, eventually leading to a lack of concentration.

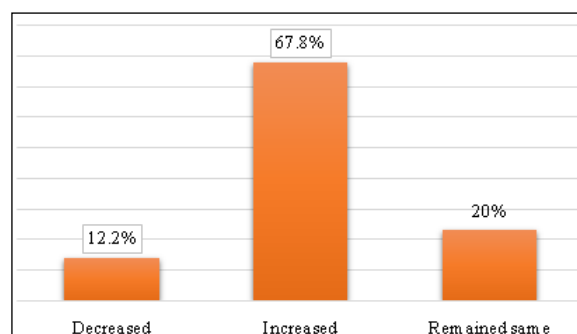


Figure 3. Changes on Workload Faced by Students due to Lockdown

67.8% of respondents stated that the workload of their courses has increased during the online mode of teaching, 20% of the respondents' state that it has remained the same, and 12.2% of respondents reported that workload has decreased on online mode of teaching (Figure 3). Increase in workload is mainly explained in terms of self-reading, submission of more assignments, frequent online quizzes and test One of the important indicators to understand education during lockdown was the relaxation in the fee submissions by students. A majority of the students i.e., 93% had revealed about no relaxation being provided by university whereas only 7% of respondents' institutions have given them relaxation in terms of fee payment, altogether 73% of respondents had paid the full fees to university in the lockdown period. One of the major impacts of COVID-19 pandemic is on economic systems where many people lost their wages and jobs. This has led to decrease in the income of families. With the introduction of remote learning for students, it was expectations of many families regarding the redemption of fees by universities which actually did not happen in majority of the cases. It may also be added that 61% of respondents reported that the economic condition of their family is affected due to COVID 19 and lockdown, while 18% of respondents are not sure about it and 21% of respondents stated that their economic condition is not affected by COVID-19 and lockdown. Due to impact of pandemic on economy it was also found that altogether 58% of respondents stated that their education in some or other way is being impacted.

Lockdown has brought a sudden change in society due to which people are going under severe mental pressure. 51.70% of respondents stated that lockdown has raised their level of stress and anxiety, whereas. 50% of respondents believe that lockdown has not affected their mental health. 17.40% of students also revealed having a depressive feeling whereas 6.50% of respondents were having suicidal thoughts. The responses of the youth here give an indication of mental health issues due to pandemic and lockdown Barring 21 % of respondents the rest 79% are of the view that remote learning has contributed to their stress and anxiety at various levels and are the major contributor in bringing changes in the mental health of the youth population.

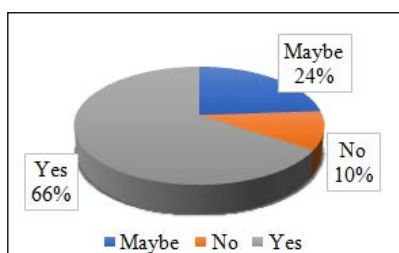


Figure 4. Relation between COVID-19 Pandemic and discontinuation of higher education of students in India

66% of respondents believe that COVID-19 pandemic is becoming a reason for discontinuation of education (Figure 4) of students in India, 24% of respondents are not sure about it and only 10% of respondents think that this is not the reason for discontinuation of education.

Looking into some of the major health and lifestyle changes that occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic can be understood from figure 18 as 65.7% of respondents stated that they feel the strain on eyes due to excessive screen time, 57% of respondents stated that due to lockdown their sleeping pattern changed, 33.5% of respondents feel sleeplessness during night time, 36.1% respondents experienced body fatigue due to improper postures and excessive use of electronic gadgets. 45.2% of respondents have gained weight and 12.6% of respondents faced decreased body weight during the lockdown.

60% of respondents took measures to combat the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic as they started exercising, 39.6% of respondents worked on their hobbies, 27.8% of respondents participated in various online certificate programs, 27% of respondents gave time in developing their skills, 20% of respondents started yoga and meditation to improve mental health.

Table 1. Major Health and Lifestyle changes During Lockdown

| S. No. | Major health and lifestyle changes during lockdown | Percentage of Respondents |
|--------|--|---------------------------|
| 1. | Sleeplessness | 33.5% |
| 2. | Decrease in weight | 12.6% |
| 3. | Increase in weight | 45.2% |
| 4. | Changes in sleeping patterns | 57% |
| 5. | Body Fatigue | 36.1% |
| 6. | Strain on eyes | 65.7% |

Table 2. Lifestyle Changes made to Improve Health Conditions

| S. No. | Lifestyle changes made by respondents to improve mental and physical health | Percentage of Respondents |
|--------|---|---------------------------|
| 1. | Started Meditation | 20% |
| 2. | Exercise | 60% |
| 3. | Yoga | 20% |
| 4. | Improved sleep quality | 26.1% |
| 5. | Gave time on developing skills | 27% |
| 6. | Worked on Hobbies | 39.6% |
| 7. | Engaged in online certificate programs | 27.8% |

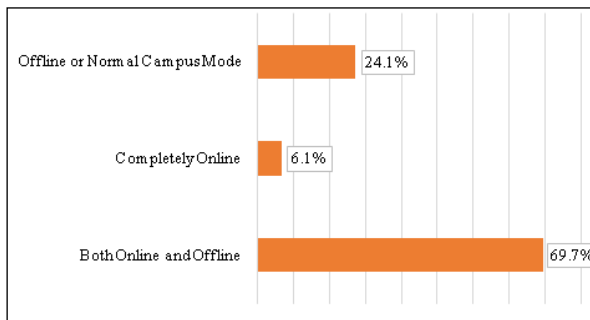


Figure 5. Future of Teaching and Learning

Figure 5, shows that 69.7% of respondents are of the opinion that the future of the higher education system in India after the pandemic will be online and offline both, while only 24.1% of respondents are with the opinion that things will be the same as they were used to be earlier i.e., offline or normal classes, and 6.1% respondents are of the opinion that education system will be completely shifted to online teaching.

Discussion

India with comprising around 356 million youths has the world's largest young population in the world and will continue to have it till 2030 according to UNFPA (United Nation Populations Fund) and this large number of young populations is directly affected by this worldwide pandemic. The focus of this study was specifically on the youth population (18-30 years) of the country and responses were recorded from all regions and major Institutions. 91.7% of universities and colleges are still closed and the remaining 8.3% were opened recently for conducting the exams and practical of final year students with strict restrictions of wearing masks, sanitizing and maintaining social distancing these institutions are closed since mid of March 2020. Most of the students returned home and migrated back to their homes after the closure of campuses and 92.6% of them are engaged in online mode of learning since then through various e-learning and virtual meeting platforms such as Zoom (58.3%), Google meet (42.6%) and MS teams (32.6%) although students are studying virtually but 57.4% of them does not found online teaching effective and 29.1% were not sure regarding the efficacy of virtual learning, These students faced various problems such as slow or poor internet connection (71.7%), unavailability of gadgets (20%) and found it boring (52.6%) also, 67.8% of them reported that the workload of the courses increased during the remote learning as the focus of institutions turned towards continuous evaluation such as class presentations and assignments.

Teachers also faced an increase in their work as they had to prepare e-contents and adapt to the new normal of virtual teaching, 67.8% of students reported that their teachers took classes regularly. Conducting exams and

assessing students became a major challenge for the universities amid this virtual learning and 76.1% of them are conducting exams online in forms of MCQ and quiz (42.2%), open book exams (39.6%) and Regular proctored exams (15.2%) exams already include stress and anxiety and these exams triggered stress among students and they also faced technical glitches and connectivity issues during online exams. The economy of the country also took a tailspin due to COVID-19 pandemic and affected young students and their families directly hence 60.9% of students think that their economic condition is affected negatively due to pandemic and 38.7% reported that bad economic condition arose due to pandemic are affecting their education. However, institutions around the country are still asking to submit full fees with deadlines, and 73.5% of students paid full fees during the lockdown, and only 7.4% of them received any sought of relaxation from the university or the government.

All these factors together contributed to the level of stress and anxiety that young students are facing during this lockdown as 51.7% of students reported a high level of stress and anxiety and 17.4% of them reported depression and 6.5% reported having suicidal thoughts, 43.9% of students reported that remote and online learning is slightly contributing to their level of stress and 26.5% reported that remote learning is contributing very much to their level of stress and anxiety, 69.6% of students remained socially active with their friends and class fellows during the lockdown. Physical health of the students were also effected in negative ways as students reported various physical issues such as increase in weight (45.2%), sleeplessness (33.5%), strain on eyes (65.7%) and body fatigue (36.1%) this was due to continuously sitting in front of computers and screen for hours this is also a major drawback of virtual learning although students also took measures such as started meditation (20%), started exercising (60%), yoga (20%) and engaged in other hobbies (39.6%) to combat the mental and physical issues that arose from the pandemic and lockdown. Future plans of the students for higher education/jobs and internship (68.7%), Study/Migrate abroad (34.8%) and preparation of competitive exams (61.7%) are also postponed due to lockdown restrictions. Students are now confused regarding their future and 69.7% of them think that the future of higher education will be both online and offline whereas 24.1% are optimistic that campuses will be open soon.

COVID-19 pandemic is not only a health issue but it is highly correlated with many other important factors. Impact on Youth and higher education is one important parameter. It is clear from the above discussion and results that though universities had taken a major challenge in terms of providing online teaching in pandemic as an alternative form however the emerging issues related to health, lack

of physical interaction become a major bottleneck in terms of learning and teaching.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study indicate a long-lasting negative impact on the higher education of the second most populated country of the world due to the closure of campuses and restrictions imposed by the government. This closure of campuses and lockdown deeply affects the vulnerable population of youth in India which are already facing various challenges such as unemployment, poverty, overpopulation, depression, lack of political representation and several other problems. The online means of learning including various platforms of e-learning may have evolved as the need of the day but this also increased the level of stress and anxiety among young students who are already facing the pandemic stress as most of the students reported an increase in the workload of courses and remote learning as a strong contributor to the increase in the level of stress. Our study suggests an urgent need for interventions and to develop preventive measures to address the mental health of young students in India.

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