SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIS) IN INDIA

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Abstract - Over the last decade, there has been a transformation in teaching and learning in different domains and COVID-19 has also brought a long term impact on the functioning of educational institutions. Even the New Education Policy (NEP-2020) emphasizes upon transformational reforms in educational sector to provide quality education by adopting holistic approach towards education. The thrust on access to social services such as education is considered to be very critical to face this unprecedented situation arisen due to pandemic. The purpose of this paper is to study the transition to online teaching and learning and how various education institutions have adopted digital mode for dissemination of knowledge with no geographical boundaries. The whole education system has transformed from the pedagogical tools and techniques adopted for teaching to the process of assessment mechanism. The findings of the study also focused on the need to provision of high quality educational opportunity and investment in education infrastructure. The digital platforms have emerged as enablers and adoption of new and innovative technology have also brought changes in the teaching pedagogy and learning environment. The study also concluded that the education models and structures have transformed and there is an urgent need to upgrade the digital knowledge and digital infrastructure for imparting education to the students and adopt the curricula as per the requirements of the industry.

Keywords - Socio-economic Impact, Pandemic, Digital Infrastructure, Online Teaching-Learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

India is a second largest populated country in the world with a high density and because of that even the transmission potential of COVID-19 was very high. There has been adverse impact on the livelihood of people because of closure of economic activity and impact of lockdown in terms of social aspect could be widely seen in various sectors.

There is a wide range of responses all over the world to contain the spread of Covid-19 and various measures are adopted like lockdowns but there have been wide variations in stringency of lockdown in various countries also.

Though India has a young population with only 10% of the people above the 60 years of age which is also significantly higher than other countries.Given the diversity in India, the management of Covid-19 within states in India depended upon the population density, demographic aspect and certain other factors considered by policy makers. The present study focuses on the long term impact of Covid-19 on teaching and learning in context of India and policies and strategies adopted for limiting the spread of the pandemic that adversely impacted the education sector.

II. FAR SIGHTED RESPONSE AND EMERGING APPROACHES

The Higher Education Institutions are incorporating the skill component in the curriculum and aligning to the industry requirement. It results into enhancing the workforce productivity by creating a skill ecosystem for outcome based training and learning. The Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) both at State and Central level and Skill Based Universities are also taking a lead to enable pathways for learners by offering programs that are mapped to employer demand and benchmarked to global standards. The industry integrated model by offering training/internships are focusing on delivering quality courses and promoting on-the-job training, thereby enhancing academic excellence for learners. The Government and various apex Institutions like UGC, AICTE, ICSSR, DST have also come up with several new schemes and programs to facilitate the promotion of excellence in Higher Education and Research. To strengthen the economy and Higher Education Institutions and to reduce the impact of Covid-19, such initiatives are imperative to provide scientific training and skilling of the youth. The emerging challenges due to this unprecedented situation, can have long term social impact on teaching and learning which may be addressed by integration of knowledge and technology. Some of the digital initiatives of UGC & MHRD are pointed as below:

- e-GyanKosh
- Gyandarshan
- Gyandhara
- Swayam
- National Digital Library of India (NDLI)
- Virtual Labs
- National Educational Alliance for Technology (NEAT)

III. IMPACT ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Pandemic Covid-19 has severely affected the total educational system of India as well as the globe but some of the most impacted areas of higher education of India are as pointed below:

3.1 Destabilized all Educational Activities

Outbreak of Covid-19 compelled lockdown in every sector including education. The Institutions got closed with cease of educational activities and created many challenges for the stake holders. So, the various activities like admission, examinations, entrance tests, competitive examinations conducted by various boards/schools/colleges/ universities were postponed. Many entrance tests for higher study got cancelled which created a great challenge in the life of a student of higher education. The primary challenge was to continue teaching learning process when students, faculties and staff could no longer be physically present on the campuses. The obvious solution for the institutions was to depend online teaching learning. However, within a relatively short time, HEIs have been able to provide support to the students through online modes and have started conducting orientation programmes, induction meetings and counselling classes with the help of different e-conferencing tools like Google Meet, YouTube live, Facebook live, WebEx etc. to provide support services to the students.

3.2 Mixed Impact on Academic Research & Professional Development

Covid-19 has both negative and positive impacts on research. If we take the negative side, it has made impossible for researchers to travel and work together with others nationally and internationally. Some joint research work or project work became difficult to complete and laboratory testing/research work could not be conducted. If we look at the positive side, academicians got much time to improve their theoretical research work. Academicians got acquainted with technological methods and improved their research. Webinars and e-conferences became normal methods for sharing expertise among students and academicians around the globe with similar issues. They could get much time to concentrate on professional development by doing research, publishing papers in journals and to improve knowledge by sharing ideas through webinars and e-conferences.

3.3 Severely affected the Educational Assessment System

Most of the external examinations were postponed and almost all the internal assessments got cancelled. The cancellation of assessments has negative impact on students' learning. Many institutions have been managing the internal assessments through online mode using different digital tools but the postponement of the external assessments, has a direct impact on the educational and occupational future of students' life.

3.4Reduced Employment Opportunities

Many entrance tests job recruitments got cancelled which created negative impact with a great challenge in the life of a student of higher education. The Indians who have been doing their jobs abroad became upset of their job withdrawal also. In India, there is no recruitment in Government sector and fresh graduates are in pressure of fearing withdrawal of job offers from corporate sectors because of the pandemic situation. Many students may lose their jobs from India and overseas. The pass out students may not get their job outside India due to various restrictions caused by Covid-19. All these facts imply towards increase of unemployment rate due to this pandemic.

IV. ROLE OF INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Faced with an unprecedented pandemic and the resultant uncertainty, there has been disruptions in supply chain not only at the local level but also at the global level. This in turn also has some long term social impact and various higher education institutions are adopting digital platforms and innovative technologies to enhance the learning experience. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has helped showcase the role of technology-enabled platforms along with digitization for disseminating the knowledge to learners. Empirical evidence and vast literature also suggest that there is great role of innovation and technological progress in growth and development as a whole. As per Global Innovation Index, India ranks 48th amongst 131 countries in terms of innovation performance and India has also entered the top 50 innovating countries for the first time in 2020.

V. MEASURES TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT

The Government announced relief packages and welfare schemes that enabled the country to endure the Impact of Covid-19. The same is depicted below in the table:

Item	2014-15	201516	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20(RE)	2020-21 (BE)
Total Budgetary Expenditure	32.85	37.61	42.66	45.16	50.41	58.76	64.70
Expenditure on Social Services of which:	7.68	9.16	10.41	11.40	12.78	15.31	17.16
*Education	3.54	3.92	4.35	4.83	5.26	6.13	6.75
As percentage to GDP							
Expenditure on Social Services of which:	6.2	6.6	6.8	6.7	6.7	7.5	8.8
*Education	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8	3.0	3.5
As percentage to Total Expenditure							
Expenditure on Social Services of which	23.4	24.3	24.4	25.2	25.4	26.1	26.5
*Education	10.8	10.4	10.2	10.7	10.4	10.4	10.4
As percentage to Social Services							
*Education	46.1	42.8	41.8	42.4	41.2	40.0	39.3

Table 1.1 Trends in Social Service Sector Expenditures by Governments (Centre and State) (Rs. in Lakh Crores)
Source: Economic Survey 2020-2021
Expenditure on *'Education' pertains to expenditure on Education, Sports, Arts and Culture'.

From Table 1.1, it is interpreted that considering the importance of social sector, the Government has also increased the expenditure on social services (Education, health and other social sectors) as a proportion of GDP from 6.2% to 8.8 % during the period 2014-15 to 2020-21 as per Economic Survey of 2020-21. In the context of education sector, it has increased from 2.8% in 2014-15 to 3.5 % in 2020-21.There is an increase in the capital spending by the Government in both demand and supply and thus, facilitate in creating infrastructure capacity for future growth. There is a need to evaluate the macroeconomic indicators and growth of various sectors in the economy. The advance estimates of Annual Growth of GVA in Industry in 2021-22 is 11.8 percent as compared to provisional estimate of 2020-21 which was -7.0 %. The share of industry in GVA is now estimated at 28.2 % in 2021-22(AE) as compared to 25.9% in 2020-21(PE).

VI. LOOKING FORWARD

Given the uncertainty of COVID-19, the new policy paves the way for transformational reforms in higher education systems in India by focusing on quality education and learning outcome with emphasis on two T's- Teachers and Technology. To enhance India's economic growth, investment made in social infrastructure played an important role for improving socio-economic indicators and thereby achieving Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs). The skill development sector helps in enhancing the employment opportunities and realizing self-reliance through AtmaNirbhar Bharat initiative launched by Government of India. To address the challenges faced in this unprecedented situation, Higher Education Institutions and Skill Development Universities are playing a crucial role by adopting innovative measures for online/digital teaching. The global pandemic has caused radical changes in education and HEIs managed this transition by shifting to virtual teaching. Still, there is a need to invest in digital infrastructure and also to adopt best practices to strive for excellence in hybrid learning. To face new challenges and opportunities, reskilling and upgrading faculties are the need of the hour. Even the faculty members and students need to be prepared themselves for Industry 4.0 and the pandemic has caused significant disruptive challenges. During the pandemic, Ministry of Education, Government of India, UGC, AICTE and State Government has proved to be torch bearer for the HEIs for continuation of teaching and learning and issued relevant instructions. The academia has started courses through online or hybrid mode and also collaborated with other international universities to

realize the collective vision of raising the quality and standard of teaching. The long term social impact of pandemic on education sector can be reduced by adopting multifaceted and multidisciplinary learning. The government has adopted certain strategies to deal with the long term unpredictability of the COVID-19 by focusing on reforms that improve flexibility and innovation. The economy shall be impacted by various factors like change in technology, consumer behavior, geopolitics, supply chain etc. Therefore, such reforms are needed which are aimed at improving the resilience of the economy as a whole.

VII. CONCLUSION

The purpose of education is to enable oneself to better the world in which they live. Technology today has become need of an hour. It is difficult to imagine colleges and university education without the use of digital resources which has provided different educational and academic information. However, it is also necessary to understand that it shouldn't reinforce structures of power and inequality. It should not create digital divide between rich and poor. As we cannot expect in country like India to have availability of all required resources due to different socio-economic conditions in India. Online mode of learning can be the best mode of teaching if it can be accessed by all the sections of the society however it can pose threat if certain section of society cannot avail this facility and thus exclusion. It is therefore important to take cognizance of online education and plan for interventions that will prioritize greater inclusivity, connectivity and equitability.

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