

## COVID -19 PANDEMIC: STRATEGIES TO REVIVE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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### Abstract

*Covid 19 pandemic has hit every sector hard, as it was quite unprecedented. Almost all the nations have witnessed slowing down of economy in last six months. Education is one of the main sectors which were greatly affected by this pandemic situation. The educational institutions, were the first ones to be locked and probably will be last ones to reopen; considering the safety of youth. Looking at the highly contagious nature of this virus, there are minimum possibilities in near future for education to be on track. In response to this pandemic, all educational institutions including schools, colleges and universities; have tried to switch from conventional education to online education. The top most educational institutions such as IITs and IIMs have been among the first to adapt according to new system, but for other higher educational institutions; there is a plethora of challenges including lack of resources, digital illiteracy, fear and uncertainty and lack of infrastructure. The present paper endeavours to look at the array of challenges faced by higher educational institutions in India and suggests some remedies to combat the impact of this pandemic effectively, within the given time frame.*

**Key Words:** Pandemic, Covid-19, Higher Education

### Introduction

The global pandemic Covid 19 right now has hit almost every sector including education, health, business and whole economy. The Covid 19 pandemic started somewhere in December 2019 and as of now globally, there have

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been 25,541,380 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 852,000 deaths, reported to WHO.<sup>1</sup>

As far as Indian economy is concerned, the GDP observed almost 23 percent fall recently in the last quarter.<sup>2</sup> All the sectors of economy have gone through unexpected shocks and some paradigm shifts. For some industries the growth has been hampered and some industries have observed complete lockdown. However, industries and corporations have been continuously looking for innovative solutions to revive themselves since the advent of pandemic. Education is no exception including school and higher education institutions.

According to UNESCO, around one billion students including youth; have been affected due to this pandemic.<sup>3</sup> Youth, specially who are registered in higher education; are facing a number of challenges related to their security of future, placement prospects and availability of jobs at the end of their education. The coming text discusses the challenges and some of the remedies to overcome these challenges.

The challenges of pandemic for higher education are numerous. Amongst these the most common are:

1. How and to what extent have the higher education institutions been affected by Covid 19 pandemic?
2. How higher education institutions are trying to mitigate these impacts?
3. How higher education institutions can prepare themselves by anticipating and address the larger impact pandemic on students, research and job market?

The pandemic has affected every education institution in all aspects, be it schools, colleges, universities or professional studies and coaching institutions; every institution is facing a number of challenges.

1. <https://covid19.who.int/> accessed on 02/09/2020.
2. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/gdp-contraction-23-9-the-economics-behind-the-math-6578046/> accessed on 02/09/2020.
3. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/globalcoalition> accessed on 02/09/2020.

## **Understanding Covid 19**

First, we need to understand that why this pandemic has been declared and what causes this. The 2019 novel coronavirus or COVID-19 is a coronavirus disease. The COVID-19 has been established to be fatal and by attacking respiratory system, it can be life threatening too (Meng, Hua, & Bian, 2020).

This virus is of highly contagious nature and it affects a number of people within a very short span of time and so far now in absence of clear-cut guidelines of treatment; the virus spreads at a very fast rate and prevention is indispensable (Meng, Hua & Bian, 2020).

The campuses of schools, colleges and universities have a large number of students studying in close proximity with each other, in the limited spaces available. These institutions have students coming from different social, economic, demographic and geographical backgrounds from around the world. So, in this pandemic it was very natural for these systems to be at high risk of spreading infections. Further, their vulnerability is also more towards this pandemic. Their closing down and uncertainty about probability of opening again has led to a big uncertainty. Resultantly, there is a big question on future of many students; creating uncertainty for higher education including school and college education.

## **Challenges of Higher Education Institutions:**

As per the report of UNESCO on April, 2020; thousands of educational institutions have been affected and figures also suggest that 1, 576, 021, 818 learners have been affected.<sup>4</sup> The main challenges faced by higher educational institutions are:

### **Closed Down Campuses:**

The institutions have observed a large number of cancelled classes and closed down campuses across the globe. This response to corona or Covid 19 outbreak is considered to be essential to save thousands of youth from getting affected.

The globe has also observed a large number of foreign students returning to their nations and discontinuing the studies.

4. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/globalcoalition> accessed 05/09/2020.

### **Discontinuation of Academic Sessions and Deferred Admission Process:**

Considering the pandemic widely spreading across the globe, a large number of students have not been able to start their studies at due time. The institutions have closed down without any preparation and activities like admissions, examinations, entrance tests by various colleges and universities are on hold.

### **Research and Development Activities:**

All the research and development activities are also on hold as researchers are not able to travel and collect data. Certainly, this will lead come as a setback for young researchers of higher education.

### **Placement and Training:**

The training and placement activities are also on hold as the companies are now not recruiting and placements are on a hold for unknown time. The internes, trainees and final year/semester students will have to wait till the situation normalise or till the organizations come with a blended training model, comprising of offline and online modes.

### **Understanding the Economic Impact:**

The biggest risk is that this pandemic's effect on education institutions will also resultantly lead to economic disruptions. The local education sector across the world is massively affected by international students not turning up, who actually are a large share of their students. Reportedly in US, Chinese students comprises 33.7 per cent of the foreign student population, while Indian students comprise of 18.4 per cent.<sup>5</sup> A large number of foreign students have been unable to register for new courses as well as start new courses due to travel restrictions.

### **Lack of Resources:**

There is a lack of infrastructure and resources- financial, technological as well as human for implementation of online education system. The situation is graver with tier two cities and rural areas where there is a lack of digital literacy as well as appropriate infrastructure. Further, discontinuation of academic sessions and new admissions has led to lack of funds for regular activities as well as the updating of systems.

5. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/07/health/universities-coronavirus-impact/index.html> accessed on 05/09/2020

### **Uncertainty and Fear:**

The Covid 19 outbreak and pandemic has led to an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear amongst educators, administrators and students. There are many adaptive responses and systematic interventions which can effectively deal with an uncertain and ambiguous context. The systematic handling of fear and uncertainty through systematic measures can boost the morale and positivity during pandemic (Durodié, Bill., 2020)

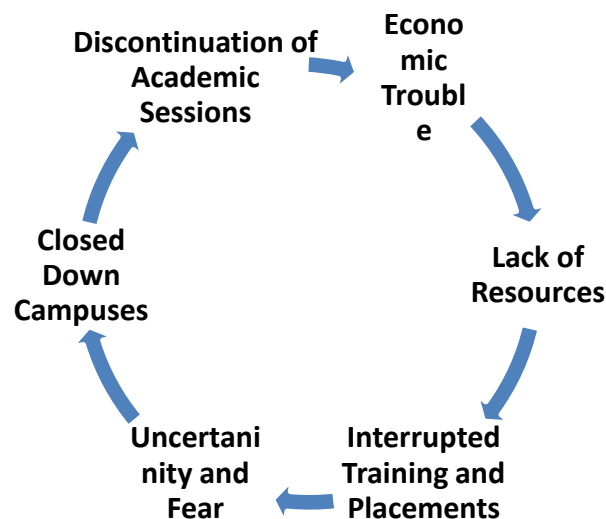


Figure 1: Challenges of Covid 19 Pandemic for Higher Education Institutions

### **Remedies to overcome the challenges of pandemic:**

#### **Maximise Online Learning:**

The most effective remedy is to run the courses online. Classes along with other supported procedure like admissions, examinations; can also be performed online. Through online learning, students from remote places also do not need to risk their lives

by travelling and it will also save their time and resources. The open source learning or credit based MOOCs are now popular modes of training. But the institution must also be aware of the challenges of distance learning and appropriately use them (Kirkup, G., 2014).

### **Develop Strong Systems:**

Although, online learning and administration of Indian universities is suggested but at the same time; it's quite challenging too. Specially, the state-run universities and schools in tier two cities and remote areas, are not equipped with the systems, technology and skilled people; which makes it more difficult to adapt and innovate. But the higher educational institutions must try in the direction of gradually shifting the conventional admissions, examinations and teaching learning process from offline to online mode, with help of adequate technology. The investment in development of e-learning centres bring a plethora of advantages for institutions (Dutta, Mosley & Akhtar, 2011).

### **Cost Effectiveness:**

To overcome the financial losses, the simplest remedy is to cut down the costs; wherever possible. The institutions must focus on optimum utilization of valuable resources. The online learning system has already led to cost cutting in several areas but building robust technology driven system also need big investments. The institutions now must diversify their resources from conventional systems to technology driven systems. So that the cost efficiency can be achieved. The studies suggest that public educational institutes are less cost efficient in comparison to private counterparts (Tochkov, Nenovsky & Tochkov, 2012). The state-run institutions can make efficient use of online resources developed by government, which are cost effective to enhance the efficiency of organizations.

### **Innovative Curriculum and Research Methods:**

The current pandemic has affected higher educational institutions in around 188 countries in 2020. If we want to save the educational system from collapsing, it is essential to come up with some strong measures and innovation to combat the challenges posed by this pandemic. The educational system has to build up a strong system where

participation and engagement of students can be effective at the same degree as it is in the conventional system. Now, there is a greater need for educational institutions to strengthen the practices in the curriculum and make it more responsive to the learning needs of the students even beyond the conventional classrooms(Davis et al, 2020).

### **Psychological Upliftment of Students and Staff:**

The COVID-19 pandemic has given birth to a strong psychological impact among medical workers as well as workers from others industries and the general public. The experts have already suggested that psychological interventions are required to be designed after identifying and targeting people with heavy psychological burdens. Future studies are warranted to design and evaluate the effectiveness of psychological interventions(Ho, Chee& Ho, 2020) (Luo, Min. et al., 2020).

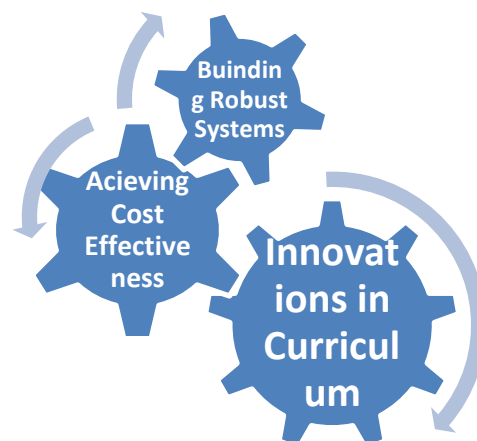


Figure 2: Key Focuses for Higher Education Institutions during Pandemic.

### **Conclusion**

The unexpected Covid 19 pandemic has disrupted the whole education system across the globe, be it elementary, higher education or technical education. The institutions are forced to rethink, reshape and redesign their strategies in order to survive and maintain the academic excellence in new scenario. In the lieu of pandemic, innovative solutions can bring several benefits like greater access to education, higher efficacy of educational effort, cost-effectiveness etc. (Ehlers&Pawlowski, 2006).

The higher educational institutions must think carefully about the e-learning systems and weigh their relative costs and benefits of implementation (Selwyn, 2020). So, considering the factors like availability of resources, need of stakeholders, requirements of the local community, government support and economic viability; the higher educational institutions must evolve in order to survive and grow during and post pandemic. Also, they are now required to innovate and invent sustainable solutions to not only to combat Covid-19, but also make them future ready and environment friendly. Sustainability is the key for all the industries including education sector.

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