ONLINE CLASSES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A BOON OR BANE

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ABSTRACT

COVID- 19 pandemic has shaken the world by influencing the lives of people in a nasty manner. It has affected the economies of the nations, the lifestyle of people at large, their thought processes, etc. It won't be wrong to say that the impact of this pandemic on every sector like education, health, entertainment, travel, etc. has been dreadful. Frequent lockdowns that were imposed at the start of the pandemic forced people to live in their homes to stop the spread of the SARS –COV – 2 virus. The education sector is not untouched by the impact of coronavirus and has forced the students and teachers to go for online teaching. The repercussions of online teaching has, been discussed in the paper. The author has tried to reflect a transparent picture of classrooms/sessions that have been organized through online mode and their effect on the education and thought processes of the students. An attempt has been made to highlight the circumstances and probability of online teaching in a country like India where many parts of the nation are still not getting internet services or lack the basic infrastructure required to attend an online class.

Keywords: COVID-19, Dreadful, Education, Teaching, Online

The Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaken the roots of every nation on the globe by impacting its economy, health structure, and overall development. The nations have reported negative growth in GDP for the financial year 2020-2021. It would be correct to say that their citizens have suffered a lot due to the outbreak of the virus and India is not untouched by its impact. The most important point that needs to be noticed here is the use of vaccines and other medicines for combating the virus, the use of which has ultimately helped in keeping a check on its transmission. As said earlier, almost all sectors of the economy have been affected by the SARS COV-2 virus; education is also one of them. The importance of education in a developing country like India can be understood from the fact that the Right to Education has been made a Fundamental Right in Article 21-A of the Indian Constitution through the 86th Amendment Act of 2002. Education is considered to be a weapon through which any war can be fought. Saying this, the pandemic has also forced students to take their classes through online mode i.e. by sitting in front of a computer/laptop/mobile, etc. with a stable internet connection. But, the question that arises here is, is this way of teaching, an appropriate one, or in other words, has this method proven to be beneficial for the students and the teachers at large? The answer to this question cannot be objective but rather involves a study of various factors that played an important role during this procedural tenure. Besides this, the involvement and interest of students during online classes need to be understood with a broad and clear mind set. One of the most important questions that need to be answered is, were the teachers and students able to communicate properly during online classes, and if yes, was the communication prolific leading to a matured and clear understanding of facts and doubts? The response received from students all across the nation has reflected the fact that they were not able to understand the explanation given by the teachers clearly and had to face problems related to sense organs like the ear (burning sensation) and eye (dry eye syndrome) due to prolonged use of earphones and continuously looking at the screen of their electronic devices[1]. Undoubtedly, the use of online classes has helped schools, colleges, coaching institutes, etc. to catch up on the classes lost due to continuous lockdowns so imposed by the government at different periods. But, how classroom (offline) teaching helps the students to understand the concepts is missing in online classes. Personal and physical interaction between a teacher and

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[1] B Madhu Gopal, *Online classes*: *Students complain of eye and ear problems,* THE HINDU.COM, (December 22,2022, 9:15 AM), https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/online-classes-students-complain-of-eye-and-ear-problems/article31863501.ece

student not only creates an environment of healthy and fruitful discussion but also helps in getting the doubts clear in a more transparent manner.

Online vs. Offline- Infrastructure and the demands

The classes through online mode started in April 2020 when the government of India was forced to impose a lockdown in the nation due to the outbreak of the pandemic. Since that time, schools and colleges have been reluctant to resume offline classes due to the mutation of the virus leading to an increase in the number of infections. The omicron variant of SARS -COV-2 proved to be highly transmissible and is said to be six times more infectious than the delta variant that had wreaked havoc on the lives of people all across the globe. Due to all these factors, online classes have been the only option left for students as well as academicians. Keeping these inevitable circumstances in mind, let's try to understand the *modus operandi* adopted for managing things during online classes. As said earlier, a stable and strong internet connection is the first requirement for conducting classes smoothly through online mode. However, there are so many areas in the nation where internet connection is not available and the students are unable to take the classes. Their studies are severely impacted due to poor infrastructure and inadequate facilities. As per data compiled by the World Bank, there were 719 million internet subscribers in India by the end of 2019, mobile telecom operators played an important role in the distribution of services, but even as the number of internet users has grown rapidly, there is still a large section of the society which is devoid of its use, the people of Bihar and Jharkhand being majorly covered in this category[2]. There can be an argument on the role of government in providing internet connection and other needs to the people, especially students of these two states, but that is not the subject matter of discussion. In absence of these facilities, students living in remote areas face hardships in learning and when these problems are for a long period, they lose interest in studies leading to the withdrawal of their names from schools and colleges. India is still a developing nation and will take some more time to be on the list of developed ones. It won't be wrong to say that becoming a developed nation requires constant sincere efforts not only on the part of the governments but also the citizens of a nation. Due to the lack of infrastructural facilities like the absence of

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[2] Vijdan Mohammad Kawoosa, *Connectivity gets better but parts of India still logged out,* HINDUSTAN TIMES.COM, (December 31, 2022, 8:20 AM), https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/connectivity-gets-better-but-parts-of-india-still-logged-out/story-VSqXriMdGUudWb7eBcWzjN.html

internet facilities in some areas, it is a tedious task to give fruitful and proper education to every student who wishes to be educated.

As far as the demands of the students are concerned, they have often complained of a lack of conceptual clarity during online classes where it was found that many of them were unable to understand the points that were explained by the teachers. On the other hand, academicians have also reported incidents of indiscipline committed by students during online classes.

Offline class: A traditional and well-accepted mode of teaching

The academicians find it convenient to deliver the lectures through offline mode/class as it ensures better understanding and communication. Sometimes, it has been seen that as they are not familiar with the online teaching methodology, their way of teaching in this process becomes pathetic because, they fail to communicate with the students in a manner in which they should communicate or in other words, they don't succeed in making students learn and understand the concepts properly. This does not mean that they lack content or the ability to explain, but the lack of bonding between them and the students due to the absence of a 'classroom environment' is the reason for this. The report titled "*The use of technology and learning in Indian Higher Education Institutes" based on a survey conducted by Team Lease and School guru Eduserve involving 1200 university professors from across 15 states and 50 universities says that due to lack of training methods on online learning pedagogy, teaching in front of the camera has brought a lot of discomfort for the teachers*[3]. *Discomfort here should mean the inability to use technology by teachers and the ruckus created by students in the class. More often than not, it has been seen that the students misbehave with each other and deliberately try to spoil the purpose of the online classes by doing mischievous activities. However, it is not the case in every class but generally, on several occasions, this has been witnessed. The traditional method of teaching students in the class is well accepted as it lays down the foundation of proper understanding. The diagrams, flowcharts, tables, etc. drawn and explained in an offline class help the students memorizing things for a long time. Their capacity to learn and interpret the content of their syllabus vastly depends on the ability of the*

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[3] A Ganesh Nadar, *Why 50 percent teachers are unhappy with offline classes?* REDIFF.COM, (December 25, 2022, 2:30 PM), https://www.rediff.com/getahead/report/why-50-teachers-are-unhappy-with-online-classes/20200928.htm

teacher to make them understand. It is human nature to grasp things more quickly when explained in a room physically in presence of a mentor, guide, teacher, etc.

Conclusion and Suggestions

There can be an argument on the fact that teaching institutions are left with no option but to go for an online mode of teaching in the time of the pandemic. However, there is a need to have an inclusion of more viable policies adopted for teaching through online mode, like giving frequent breaks during online classes, ensuring the fact that students show a formal and disciplined attitude towards the class, taking steps for making learning easy and interesting for students by giving them examples, providing sufficient time interval between the classes, etc. These steps, if taken appropriately will yield good results not only for the students as well as the teachers. *The contention of going for online classes is quite acceptable but should be taken into consideration only under circumstances that are beyond human control, like a high number of COVID cases being found in the areas, containment zones closer to the schools, etc. It should not be made as a practice and not be compared with working from home. In the latter, the employees have already taken their education and are implementing it for earning purposes, whereas the school or college students are still taking their education for building their future and that's why it is necessary to ensure that they get it through proper, justified, and best means. A 'studious environment' plays an important role in making things clear to students and this can be done only through physical or offline classes. The State governments in India have already started with offline classes knowing the fact that most of the citizens of India have been fully vaccinated. Even students have started demanding that classes should be conducted in offline mode owing to the need of the students and their future goals. It is advised that the parents as well as the government should come forward to ensure that physical classes should be the deal of the day and the remedy of online classes are availed only in exceptional circumstances.*