

ROLE OF ONLINE LEARNING IN INDIA DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC¹Khurshid Ahmad Bhat, ²Dr. Peer Zada RayeesLecturer Govt. Degree College Batote¹, Assistant Professor: BGSBU Rajouri²
Khurshidk87@gmail.com¹, peerzadarayees22@gmail.com²**ABSTRACT**

As a global pandemic, COVID-19 has prompted social isolation. It has made it obligatory for people to sit indoors, and staying inactive indoors can cause mental tension. As a result, online learning or E-learning may play a significant role in keeping people interested and stress-free. During this pandemic, online learning is the most effective solution. Teachers can use virtual classrooms to teach from home and have access to all of the essential equipment, making online sessions just as productive as in-person sessions. Pandemics frequently force students to stay at home for extended periods of time, obstructing the teaching-learning process. This article focuses on the benefits of online learning during times of crisis, such as job absenteeism or pandemics. As a result, various online learning tools and strategies that can assure learning continuity are highlighted. The government of India's evolving initiatives on online learning are considered. The advantages and disadvantages of using an online learning environment are also explored.

Keywords: COVID-19, Online Learning, Online Platforms, Pandemic

INTRODUCTION

To combat the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic, most governments throughout the world have temporarily closed educational institutions. With an increasing number of states, regions, and even entire countries closing educational institutions and over 91% of the world's student population not attending schools, colleges and universities (UNESCO), Several other countries have enacted localized closures that will affect millions of additional students. UNESCO is assisting countries in their attempts to mitigate the immediate impact of school closures, especially for more vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, and to promote the continuation of education for all through distance learning. The World Bank is also collaborating with ministries of education in a number of countries to support their efforts to use educational technologies to provide students with virtual learning opportunities when their schools are closed due to the COVID-19 outbreak. "The corona virus pandemic has led to an unprecedented rise in present time," said Global Partnership to End Violence Executive Director Dr. Howard Taylor. "School closures and strict containment measures mean more and more families are relying on technology and digital solutions to keep children learning, entertained and connected to the outside world, but not all children have the necessary knowledge, skills and resources to keep themselves safe online" (UNICEF).

Learning can now be realised online and knowledge can be imparted electronically via numerous media in this COVID-19 pandemic scenario. During this time, online learning is the best approach. Online learning or E-learning is a learning environment that takes place over the Internet. An online educator compensates for the virtual classroom's absence of physical presence by providing a friendly environment in which all students feel comfortable participating in online classes (Joshua). It contributes significantly to the transformation of our lives into the digital world by providing flexible venues, class schedules, and high-quality content. It presents a path for mankind's development during a period of physical isolation induced by a pandemic. Online learning is advantageous since it is readily available and allows for flexible scheduling. Learners in this system use the Internet to communicate electronically with their teachers and classmates via email, WhatsApp, videoconferencing, instant messaging, and other means. Videoconferencing, on the other hand, can be utilised effectively in online learning to improve group cooperation and foster a feeling of community among students,

potentially replacing face-to-face classroom learning to some extent. Rural students used to miss out on many of the chances that their urban and suburban contemporaries took for granted. Connecting these rural students to online learning via video conferencing can improve their learning experience substantially. This allows rural/disadvantaged students to attend school/college from home while also having access to specialists. A synchronous approach for interactive voice, video, and data communication between two or more groups/people is video-conferencing (Wiesemas & Wang, 2010). One of the technology solutions that can be employed in online learning is video-conferencing. More organisations are seeing the value of online learning because it is a cost-effective way to target a vast number of individuals. It has the potential to achieve considerable outcomes by lowering expenses while simultaneously enhancing performance. During the COVID-19 lockdown time, online learning is recommended for the following reasons:

- ❖ One can gain information while remaining socially isolated by staying at home.
- ❖ Due to social isolation, the spread of COVID-19 can be kept to a minimum.
- ❖ It provides excellent learning conditions.
- ❖ It provides students with additional interactive support that allows them to learn at their own speed and at any time, i.e., 24/7.
- ❖ It allows for a variety of scheduling options.
- ❖ It may be accessed from any location with an internet connection, and students can use their own devices to participate (mobiles, computers, tablets, etc.).
- ❖ It deals with student monitoring and reporting in real time.
- ❖ Improves the institution's image by providing technical solutions that address real-world issues.

OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Examine the steps taken by the Indian government to encourage online learning during the COVID-19 lockdown.
2. Describe the numerous internet tools and platforms that educational institutions used during the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. It outlines some of the advantages and disadvantages of online learning, as well as suggestions for improvement.

METHODOLOGY

Some journals and e-contents pertaining to online learning systems are examined in order to determine the issues associated with online learning systems, particularly during pandemics. Measures undertaken by the Indian government to assist online learning during the COVID-19 lockdown period have been gathered from the website. During the Indian lockdown, the author held some online counselling sessions and online induction meetings with newly enrolled January 2021 students from various Learner Support Centres (LSCs) affiliated with the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) Regional Centre in Srinagar (India). While conducting online counselling classes and online induction meetings utilising video-conferencing software ZOOM and Google Meet, the perceptions and views of learners and educators of LSCs under the IGNOU Regional Centre, Srinagar are collected. The obtained data is examined to determine the benefits and drawbacks of the online learning system during lockdown, as well as better strategies for making it more successful for the students.

INDIA'S INITIATIVES FOR ONLINE LEARNING DURING THE LOCKDOWN

COVID-19 has put countries all over the world on lockdown, and educational institutions are no exception. The country is experiencing a huge crisis in various areas as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak across the country, but the education sector has been affected the worst, with the majority of examinations being cancelled during final assessments. Students and teachers are striving to get an internet connection that is both reliable and consistent. At the same time, the country should not jeopardise students' eagerly anticipated academic advancement. As a result, educational institutions should use innovative approaches to combat the endemic crisis, such as online learning. During the ongoing lockdown, many Indian state governments are looking into using an online learning platform to access online educational resources. They're trying to figure out how to keep students learning throughout the nationwide lockdown caused by COVID-19. The goal is for students to be able to continue their academic cycles without being hampered by the lockdown. Students will be expected to supply audio and video content as well as self-assessment assignments. For students, special doubt-clearing meetings on crucial topics may be arranged. People in India must continue to undertake coordinated and collaborative efforts to combat COVID-19 as well as make effective use of their time in the current scenario by using information and communication technology (ICT) for teaching and learning processes and contributing to the nation's intellectual treasure. During the lockdown, the University Grants Commission (UGC) encouraged online classes at several universities to ensure that students did not miss any classes. Teachers, students, and researchers in Universities and Colleges can use the resources, which are in the form of digital platforms, to enhance their knowledge. The MHRD urges students to continue their studies using online learning systems to ensure that there is no interruption in their education and that they have full access to classes as before. Students can use online learning platforms to not merely have complete access to study materials, but also to participate in online classes and interact with teachers in the same way they would in a real classroom setting.

The following is a list of some of the MHRD and UGC's digital initiatives, as well as their access links for school students as well as UG and PG level education:

- 1. SWAYAM online learning courses:** It provides free access to the top teaching and learning resources that were previously only available on the SWAYAM Platform and may now be viewed by any learner without having to register. Link-<https://storage.googleapis.com/uniquecourses/online.html>
- 2. UG/PG MOOCs:**
It provides learning materials from SWAYAM's archived UG and PG (Non-Technology) courses. Linkhttps://ugcmoocs.inflibnet.ac.in/ugcmoocs/moocs_courses.php
- 3. e-PGPathshala:** It provides 23,000 modules (e-text and video) in 70 postgraduate disciplines of social sciences, arts, fine arts, and humanities, as well as natural and mathematical sciences in high-quality, curriculum-based, interactive e-content.
Link- epgp.inflibnet.ac.in
- 4. e-Content courseware in UG subjects:** On the CEC website at <http://cec.nic.in/>, students can get e-content courseware for 87 undergraduate courses, comprising 24,110 e-content modules.
- 5. SWAYAM PRABHA:** It is a group of 32 DTH channels that provide high-quality educational curriculum-based course content in a variety of disciplines to all teachers, students and citizens across the country who are interested in lifelong learning, including arts, science, commerce, performing arts,

social sciences, humanities, engineering, technology, law, medicine, agriculture, and so on. These channels are available for free over the air and can be assessed through cable service. The televised videos/lectures are also available on the Swayamprabha portal as archived videos. Link- <https://www.swayamprabha.gov.in/>

6. **CEC-UGC YouTube channel:** It provides free access to an infinite number of educational curriculum-based lectures. Link-<http://www.youtube.com/user/cecedusat>
7. **National Digital Library:** It is a digital repository with a huge quantity of academic content in various forms, as well as interface support for leading Indian languages for all academic levels, including researchers and life-long learners, all subjects, all popular access devices, and differently-abled learners. Link- <https://ndl.iitkgp.ac.in/>
8. **Shodhganga:** It is a digital repository platform with 2,60,000 Indian electronic theses and dissertations where research students can upload their Ph.D. theses and make them openly available to the scholarly community. Link- <https://shodhganaa.inflibnet.ac.in>
9. **e-ShodhSindhu:** It provides current and archival access to over 15,000 peer-reviewed journals as well as a variety of bibliographic, citation, and factual databases in various disciplines from a large number of publishers and aggregators to its member institutions, which include centrally-funded technical institutions, universities, and colleges that are covered under the UGC Act's I2(B) and 2(f) Sections. Link- <https://ess.inflibnet.ac.in/>
10. **Vidwan:** It's a database of experts that enables peers, future collaborators, funding agencies, policymakers, and research scholars in the country with information. These ICT efforts, which cover a wide range of disciplines and courses and have been designed by specialists, are believed to provide an exceptional learning experience for all. Link- <https://vidwan.inflibnet.ac.in/>

Emerging approaches of Govt. of India for online learning

Various free digital online learning tools were offered by the Union HRD Minister for students to continue their education during the COVID-19 school closures. The World Bank is also identifying innovative techniques made by various countries and archiving all relevant information that may be valuable to others. The emerging approaches of India shared by World Bank are as listed below:

- **The DIKSHA** portal includes curriculum-aligned online learning content for students, teachers, and parents, including video lessons, worksheets, textbooks, and assessments. The content was created by more than 250 instructors who teach in different languages under the supervision of the country's national board of education (CBSE) and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). Students are encouraged to venture beyond the book through QR codes in textbooks. Offline use is possible with the app.
- **NCERT's e-Pathshala** is a multilingual online learning programme for classes 1 to 12. The app contains books, videos, audio and other content intended for students, educators, and parents in many languages, including Hindi, Urdu, and English.
- **The National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER)** portal offers a variety of resources in many languages for students and teachers, including books, interactive

modules, and videos. For classes 1–12, content is mapped to the curriculum and the teachers' materials are aligned.

- **Swayam** offers 1900 entire courses, including teaching videos, weekly assignments, tests, and credit transfers, for students in grades 9 to 12, as well as those in higher education (undergraduate and postgraduate). Engineering, humanities, social sciences, law, and management courses, including robotics, are all related to the curriculum.
- **Swayam Prabha** is a network of 32 Direct-to-Home (DTH) channels dedicated to educational programming that airs 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and is available throughout the country. Courses for school education (grades 9–12), higher education (undergraduate and postgraduate), out-of-school children, vocational education, and teacher training are broadcast on the channels. Arts, science, commerce, performing arts, social sciences, humanities, engineering, technology, law, medicine, and agriculture are among the subjects covered. On the website, one may see television broadcast schedules as well as archival shows.

Free online platforms that support live-video communication

There are many live-video communication platforms available on the internet, but some of the free online platforms that can be utilised by learners of all categories are described below:

- **Zoom**-Video and audio conferencing, collaboration, chat, and webinars are all possible with this cloud platform.
- **Google meet**-Google's G-Suite products are integrated with video calls. Join calls using Google Calendar, record video meetings, and screen share.
- **Skype**-Video and audio calls featuring capabilities including talk, chat and collaboration
- **Facebook Live**-It is a perfect fit for businesses, influencers, or individuals who want to broadcast live demos, films, or show off their corporate culture. Social media followers may comment and chat live, and videos can be scheduled ahead of time to build excitement.
- **YouTube Live**-It's a platform for exhibiting a product with real-time engagement, organising an educational session to teach an audience using screen sharing or a whiteboard, and it includes features like location tags and advanced scheduling.
- **Uber Conference**-Unlimited video and audio calls with options such as speaking, chatting, and collaboration.
- **Free Conference**-Screen sharing, document sharing, text sharing, and other features make it excellent for small teams or gatherings.
- **Dingtalk**-Video conferencing, task and calendar management, attendance monitoring, and instant messaging are all supported by this communication platform.
- **Lark**-Chat, calendar, and other networked tools are part of the collaboration suite. In Japanese, Korean, Italian, and English, users can create and store files in the cloud.
- **Teams**-Microsoft Office software has chat, meeting, phone, and collaboration features.
- **TrueConf Online**-High-definition video with collaboration options (screen sharing, remote desktop control, recorded calls, file transfer and a shared virtual whiteboard).

- **Slack Video Calls**-It is suitable for small teams who require a supplementary video calling solution; features include individual calls and message services.
- **Lifesize Go**-There are no time limits on meetings, and they are best used for group discussions.

Merits of online learning during lockdown

- Online learning teaches people to make better use of their time, which keeps them safe from pandemics like COVID-19.
- It provides more access to experts and specialists (both nationally and worldwide), and learners learn at their own pace and time 24/7. It extends its geographical reach to rural and remote areas.
- It is a cheap and cost-effective device that improves communication between educators and students. One educator can teach multiple virtual classes at the same time, reducing the need to travel to different locations. It can accommodate a larger number of students at any particular time.
- The content of an online class or conference session can be saved on a website for future use. Class notes, for example, can be saved and transmitted over a network for students to review. Class/meeting digital recordings can be uploaded to a website for later review.
- Institutions may explore employing online examination software to help conduct online examinations. This will prevent significant delays in the annual academic calendar for institutions.
- Some emergency service personnel, such as cops, doctors, and nurses, who are unable to devote a specified period to learning during lockdown might use the online recordings to continue their education.

Demerits of online learning during lockdown

- Not all children have the information, skills, or resources necessary to stay safe online. Children may be more exposed to online sexual exploitation if they spend more time on virtual platforms.
- Learners from low-income households and disadvantaged groups are more likely to struggle with online learning because they may not be able to afford a high-speed internet connection or the necessary technical equipment. It widens the disparity between rich and disadvantaged students.
- The atmosphere of a face-to-face meeting is lost. Relationships between students and teachers, as well as between students, may be hampered.

SUGGESTIONS

It is necessary to ensure that online platforms have improved security and safeguarding procedures, particularly for virtual learning tools. The devices must have the most recent software updates and antivirus applications installed, or the security of personal data may be jeopardised because digital gadgets can be hacked.

- High-speed internet connectivity should be provided to all students, particularly those from disadvantaged groups and low-income families, to ensure that they have easy access.
- To keep children safe while taking online classes, everyone should follow the new rules provided by UNICEF and partners.
- While conducting online classes, schools should keep an eye on children's good online behaviour.
- Parents should make sure that their children's devices have the most up-to-date software and antivirus protection. They should collaborate with children to develop guidelines for how, when, and where they

can use the internet. They should also discuss how and with whom their children communicate online with them.

- Online platforms should be enhanced with more safety safeguards, particularly while using virtual learning resources, as per social networking sites.
- To deal with such a crisis of lockdown during any pandemic, the government should make the required preparations to teach all stakeholders in education on an online learning platform. The government should raise awareness about online education, including safety precautions for children, as well as take steps to raise understanding about cyber security.
- Online learning is out of reach for many people, particularly the poor and underprivileged. As a result, the government and educational institutions should take the required steps to close the gap between rich and underprivileged students.

CONCLUSIONS

Today, the most popular technique of distance learning is online learning. Online learning is the greatest venue for keeping learners and educators engaged and secure during the COVID-19 lockdown phase by preserving social distancing. The government of India has launched a number of online learning portals to continue educational activities during the lockdown, which have been recognised by UNESCO and the World Bank. The online learning approach makes use of a variety of internet-based apps to provide classroom materials and facilitate communication between students and teachers. Educators can create a more engaged distance learning experience by delivering real-time, synchronous video conferencing using the many technologies available for online learning. Online learning is seen as the learning process of the future, and this platform has the capacity to transform the methodology of teaching in the present world. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, online learning is the ideal means of learning at this time of lockdown, and a more in-depth statistical analysis on the impact of online learning during the lockdown period may be conducted.

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