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Challenges in education management due to the Coronavirus pandemic

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ABSTRACT

With the Coronavirus pandemic, educators across the board have had to rethink and devise innovative, yet accessible ways and means to reach out to the students. Today's day invokes a great sense of anxiety, as far as the future is concerned, owing to the fact that there is not yet a vaccine to the virus, rampant and swift job loss and discontinuity of businesses. The ongoing pandemic has changed the way that most of us go about doing our jobs. Each one is grappling with what is now the 'New Normal', that is a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment, where adaptability is of utmost importance. Just a few months ago, educators across the board were delivering lectures in well organised classes, without much to worry about, save examination, correction, completing syllabus, and other routine activities part of education management. How quickly this bastion of learning has had to adapt to the changing environment. But has the old system of education been parcelled out? This paper aims to look into the challenges faced by educators in a developing nation, India, where there is no standard quality of education, and more importantly, technology is not ubiquitous across the geography of India.

Keywords: Education Institutes, Management, Technology, Online Education, Coronavirus, Pandemic

1. INTRODUCTION

Online learning has pushed educators to rely on technology tools like Zoom, Google Suite, Flipboards and Padlet, among others. This has had educators zooming in and out of virtual classrooms ever since the coronavirus pandemic began its onslaught on the world. The chalk and talk method of yesteryears lies untouched, with teachers having to scramble to adapt to the online learning platform (Privateer, 1999). Change is the only constant, and parallelly necessity is the mother of invention, so having the innate desire to survive, educators have adapted and embraced the change, as students, in a way, absorb the energy of the class from their educators, and draw their enthusiasm and strength from them (Roschelle, et al., 2000). Be that as it may, the education industry has had to combat a steep uphill task, with the environment reminiscent of Sisyphus. The students see the virtual picture of a teacher delivering lectures and engaging with the class, albeit through the webcam. But there is a tremendous degree of hard work, planning and brainstorming before this point. At the same time, education institutions have had to make tough choices in order to stay afloat in these troubled waters. In this paper we will understand these challenges and identify how the education industry has adapted to the challenges thrown at them by the recent pandemic, that has cut short countless lives.

2. OBJECTIVE

The objective of the paper is to understand the current scenario that the education industry has had to face in India, and the impact of the same on all the vested stakeholders. The paper will also delve into and explore the ways and means by which the institutions have adapted to the coronavirus pandemic. This means the paper will throw light on layoffs, closures and readjustments to the duration of the sessions held, all done in order to adapt the knowledge sharing model to the new environment.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research paper is reliant on external secondary data research. The paper aims to discern the true challenges faced by educational institutes during the coronavirus pandemic. In order to do the above the research study has explored various government statistics, institution wise statistics and published research work of a similar nature. Having done so, the paper brings to the fore ways and means by which the education industry of India is trying to cope with the pandemic, and the innovative techniques thus used.

4. ANCIENT EDUCATION SYSTEM OF INDIA

Formal practices of education, 'Gurukul', in India date back to the Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanishads and Dharmasutras, with records of ancient script on stone, copper and leaves (Thapar, 1968). Aryabhata, Panini, Katyayana and Patanjali, were great thinkers and philosophers, and their teachings are still studied to this day (Kak, 1986). Their writings and the medical treatises of

Charaka and Sushruta were also some of the sources of learning (Valiathan, 1990). In the ancient system of education in India, distinction was drawn between *Shastras* (learned disciplines) and *Kavyas* (imaginative and creative literature) (Gupt, 2014). Learning and knowledge was gleaned from various disciplines, such as *Itihas* (history), *Anviksiki* (logic), *Mimamsa* (interpretation), *Shilpashastra* (architecture), *Arthashastra* (polity), *Varta* (agriculture, trade, commerce, animal husbandry) and *Dhanurvedya* (archery) (Sankaranarayanan, 1981). Physical education was not neglected in the pursuit of knowledge and it was an important curricular area, where pupils participated in *krida* (games, recreational activities), *vyayamaprakara* (exercises), *dhanurvedya* (archery) for acquiring martial skills, and *yogasadhana* (training the mind and body) among others, as mental health was of equal importance (Ray, 1939). The *Gurus* (teachers) and their pupils worked conscientiously in harmony to become proficient in all aspects of learning. In order to assess pupils' learning, *shastrartha* (learned debates) were organised (Singh, 2012). Pupils at an advanced stage of learning mentored younger pupils. There also existed the system of peer learning, like you have group/peer work today.

5. PRESENT EDUCATION SYSTEM OF INDIA

Education 1.0, which was the system of education followed in India until recently, emphasized on the need for discipline, complete adherence to the command of the lecturer within the four walls of the lecture room and technology is to be left outside the class; learners in this system were regularly penalised for breaking the rules, and corporal punishment was rampantly used (Nawani, 2013). The present system of education followed in India leans more towards a standardized and rote learning system, where the students are rewarded marks based on their memorization skills, with creativity and innovation taking a back seat (Fuller, 2001). This system of education has a parallel system in India, where Education 3.0 is in the forefront, with technology being actively employed, teacher-student collaboration happens and creativity and innovation are encouraged, which can be seen in education institutions who have adapted their teaching methods to the curriculum followed internationally, with creative licence allowed to the students (Bunnell, 2008). We associate classroom teaching with face-to-face interaction, emotional connect, real-time learning and engaging activities. At the same time, the systems of education in India are getting more internationalised and open to input from the foreign counterpart, in terms of importing better technology, methods and best practices (Upadhyay, et al., 2014).

6. IMPACT OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

6.1 Immediate Impact

The coronavirus pandemic has dunked the Indian education industry into hot waters, with the management of these institutes devising ways to cope with the same. The Government of India had immediately acted to prevent any infection to the students. Students from privileged backgrounds have the advantage of having access to smart phones and multiple electronic devices, the same not being a reality for the students in rural and semi-urban areas of the country (Mukhopadhyay, 2020). To compound the same, there is poor internet connectivity in these rural and semi-urban location of India, leaving these students behind, as compared to their urban counterparts (Bisht, 2020). India is a country that has many types of educational institutes, such as government run, government-aided, private schools which are run by missionaries and the ones run by private trusts and individuals. There are schemes run by the Indian government which provide education through schools to below-poverty-line sections of society in both urban areas and villages, through the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* scheme (India Today Web Desk, 2019). Technology is the lifebuoy that most education institute have decided to relying on, as technology has opened the gateway to cybernetic learning, that is, virtual classes. Being immersed in virtual classes can have a downside as well, as this system has tied the learner and the educator to the chair (Mayadas, et al., 2009). The pandemic has had further impact on the Indian education industry, such as job loss, premature closure of the same, salary cut, stalling of extra-curricular activities and deepening the digital divide between the haves and the have-nots. One of the measures that the Indian education boards have decided to put in place is to either reduce the syllabus or postpone the examinations, over and above online education (FE Bureau, 2020). This is a measure which will protect the health of the learners, but it is also going to lead a discontinuity in education for those who will not be able to access the online classes due to lack of resources. Faculty have also had to face difficult choices, as they have to face salary cuts, non-payment of salaries and sadly, also layoffs. The future of their employments hangs precariously in the hands of the management, thereby making the situation highly stressful for many educators, with International Labour Organization (ILO) making a note of the same and giving a dire warning that if the pattern continues there may be as many as 400 million Indians pushed into poverty (Nanda, 2020).

6.2 Role of Technology

Technology has both its pros and cons, with respect to the online classes that are used as a medium of knowledge dispersion. Subjects that require the need of laboratories and those of a physical nature such as sports and athletics, are being greatly neglected. Students that excel in these subjects are adversely affected, as they are not able to pursue the same in any capacity. The lack of social sports, and technology not being able to fill this void completely, will be detrimental for the social development of the students, as interaction is limited, if not next to nil (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020). At the same time, technology has helped to salvage the situation to a great extent with online classes. What needs to be addresses however, is the dissemination of the same in all parts of the country equitably, so that no learner is neglected and left out of the system. Using technology nearly at all hours of the day, has in a way, greatly affected the physical and mental health of its users, with a rise in physiological strain and mental anxiety in the recent days (Johnson, 2020). Physiological strain can manifest in eye strain, poor posture, back pain, weight gain and sleep deprivation. Hence technology needs to be used wisely and responsibly, with education institutes giving clear direction to the faculty as to not to overburden the learners with excessive amount of 'homework' and assignments, which rob them of activity, sleep, relaxation and peace of mind (Feinberg, 2020).

7. CONCLUSION

Educators have to be reachable at nearly every hour of the day, and at times even at odd hours of the night. This adds stress, as no matter what state they are in personally, they cannot allow the learners to suffer, and have to always be able to support the emotional wellbeing of the learners. Bottom line is, we need to remember why we do what we do, and it is to help the learners to cope with these unprecedented times, to be strong and challenge themselves, build on their skills and push them to do their best in areas that pique their interest (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), 2020). There has to be psycho-education, where there is equal emphasis on the mental wellbeing of the learners, along with their subject knowledge education. Change can be incremental or monumental, but it is up to us how we adapt to it. Educators need to keep abreast with the latest technology available in the teaching industry and upgrade our skills in order to ensure that we can, at all times, give our best to the learners and nurture their growth always. Therefore, instead of being fearful of what the future will bring, we can adopt, adapt and channelize the spirit of change.

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