

“Distanced” Learning: Online Classes, Perplexed Students and the New Avataar of Teaching

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Abstract

The outbreak of the pandemic Covid-19 has brought lot of shifts in our lives. Schools and colleges remain closed since March 2020 .In order to help the student folk, teachers in various levels of educational institutions in India have been asked to conduct online classes. While online classes have become successful to a greater extent among urban students at all levels, they have become mirages for rural students at all levels. Moreover, there are many other issues that have sprung up regarding online classes. An attempt has been made here to look into these issues.

Keywords: Online Classes, Rural Students, Network Issues, Teachers, Educational Institutions, India.

Introduction

Following the outbreak of Covid-19, all the educational institutions in India have been shut down since March 2020. With the imposition of lockdown and the subsequent unlocking procedures, the academic activities have been staggering since then. This has paved the way for a viable solution in the form of online classes. Though practically suitable for students at higher levels, this method is being used for primary and secondary school education as well. The urban students are gaining upper hand over their rural counterparts owing to the availability of better gadgets and faster internet connections. Hence, the efforts of conducting online classes are not able to reach the majority of the stakeholders. An attempt has been made here to look into these issues.

Aims of the Study

1. To assess the impact of online classes in the Indian context.
2. To evaluate the feasibility of online classes in India.
3. To look into the perspectives of teachers, students and the society in general regarding online classes.
4. To look into the merits and limitations of online classes amidst the pandemic covid-19 in India.

Covid-19 and Online Classes in India

The outbreak of the pandemic Covid-19 has brought lot of shifts in our lives. Apart from the visible changes like people wearing masks, maintaining social distance, crumbling economy and staggering lives, the pandemic has also brought in lot of invisible implications as well. Psychological stress or anxiety among people, lots of law and order issues and a deep agony regarding the uncertain future are the other offshoots of this pandemic. Schools and colleges remain closed since March 2020 .In order to help the student folk, teachers in various levels of educational institutions in India have been asked to conduct online classes. While online classes have become successful to a greater extent among urban students at all levels, they have become mirages for rural students at all levels. Moreover, there are many other issues that have sprung up regarding online classes.

Online classes are the modernized versions of traditional classroom teaching methods. A teacher can reach students through internet based audio/ video lectures which can be accessed by students through specific applications in their laptops or smartphones. After the gradual relaxation of restrictions imposed during lockdown, the question of reopening of schools has come up. Since conducting regular classes is not a feasible solution at present, online classes have become a handy option. Most of the educational institutions in India have begun conducting online



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classes for primary and secondary school students to run the “show”. Some institutions are even contemplating about conducting online examinations as well.

There is no doubt regarding the fact that in the present scenario, online classes are the only way for teachers to reach their students. Urban population has been able to follow the trend of online classes where online classes seem to have become fairly successful. However, their rural counterparts are losing their edge, as far as online classes are concerned.

“Distanced” Learning: Issues Associated with Online Classes

Many issues have sprung up in the wake of online classes. The first problem comes from the side of teachers. Most of the teachers have been used to face to face mode of classes or lecturing methods are finding it difficult to adapt themselves to this new mode of teaching. Facing a camera or addressing an unseen class of students is what they have not been used to. On the other hand, the students too find it difficult comprehend online classes. The common factor for both the teaching and learning community is the lack of a real class room ambience.

Further, we have the issues of network and connectivity. Attending online classes or delivering online video lecture requires high-speed uninterrupted internet connectivity. Though India has more than 100 crores of cell phone users, the rural areas still struggle with their network issues. Therefore, students from rural areas miss their classes. We have news reports from different corners of the country about students struggling to access their classes, committing suicide for not having smart phones to attend online classes or rural parents selling off their cattle for buying smart phones for their children. Coupled with issues are the anxiety and the stress that such students are facing regarding the bleak future of their education.

Excessive usage of gadgets may pose several health related issues in the long run. These issues include straining of eyes, sleeplessness, loss of appetite and other health issues. We have to keep in mind the fact that these health issues will be there for the teaching community as well.

These issues lead to a question regarding the effectiveness of the success of the online classes. The answers are not so encouraging. A well planned, well prepared, and well executed video lecture can be really informative. However, all the teachers are not alike. Some are better users of technology and gadgets, while some are not. It requires lot of training for developing good e-contents. Moreover, all the

concepts or components of the curriculum cannot be explained through video lectures. Apart from these, the physical absence of the teacher may prompt some students to deviate from their listening activity. Therefore, with the exception of some, many online classes may fail to reach their expected outcome.

Conclusion

It is definitely inappropriate to project online classes as successful enterprises *in lieu of* regular classes. It is also equally inappropriate to project online classes to be better than regular classes. At a time when conducting regular classes is not possible, online classes are providing opportunities to sections of students and teachers to keep themselves academically engaged. Enough care has to be taken so that online classes reach all the concerned students. Even if a single student is unable to get access to online classes, then justice is denied to that student. Further, enough thinking has to be done before making a call for conducting examinations on the basis of online classes. Online classes can be considered supplementary to regular classes; they should not be considered “substitutes” for teachers and regular classroom teaching methods. Enough training should be given to the teaching community and all the concerned students should have better gadgets and network connectivity. Only then, the objectives of online classes can be realized better.

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