

Impact of COVID 19 on learning status of college students in Kerala

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Abstract

COVID 19 pandemic leads to plunge of global economy into worst recession. It disturbed every aspect of human life including education. According to UNESCO, over 32 core Indian learners stopped moving to schools and colleges. Though most of the higher education institutions reacted positively, managed hindrances and threat of pandemic by changing the face to face class room in to online teaching- learning.

In this paper, it assesses the impact of COVID 19 pandemic on higher education system and identified the challenges of students in the online learning platform from various colleges and universities of Kerala. The study is an explanatory in nature, both primary and secondary data are used for discussion. Data and information collected from the study conducted among the students and teachers of various colleges in Kerala through the online structural questionnaire method using the 'Google form, send to students' through WhatsApp and E-mail. The simple percentage distribution was used to assess the learning status of students. It reveals that most of the students using android phone for e-learning. The Students have been facing various problems such as lack of facilities, gap created among students and teachers, distractions from the family etc.. That leads to create the mental pressure among the students. Students from remote areas and marginalized sections commonly faced enormous challenges in accessing the online classes and the study material during this pandemic. The study discussed shortcomings of this newly adapted education system has to be taken on a serious account and need to be modified.

Keywords: Covid 19, higher education system, Kerala, e learning

Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic has not been merely a health issue; rather it has negatively impacted on global economy. Since we live in a globalised world, we can't restrict the movement of anything and survive without interdependence between each other, so the harmful sides of globalisation can't be overlooked. The first ever cases of the outbreak of novel Coronavirus was reported in Wuhan city of China, but the virus spread rapidly to affect the whole world within no time. The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared it as pandemic on 11th March 2020. The restriction measures imposed by several countries in the light of the pandemic led to decline in income, rise in unemployment, disruption in the transportation, service and several industries all over the world.

The education sector has not been free from the consequences of pandemic. Almost all educational institutions in the world closed their gates, affecting 1.57 billion students in 191 countries, 63 million teachers, and philanthropists in the field. In India, first COVID-19 positive cases were reported in Kerala on 30 January of 2020. Since March 2020, India imposed lockdown. According to UNESCO, over 32 core Indian learners stopped moving to schools and colleges (IESALC, 2020) [4]. Though most of the higher education institutions reacted positively, managed hindrances and threat of pandemic by changing the face to face classroom into online teaching-learning (Mohanty, 2020) [10]. This paper highlights the impact of COVID-19 on higher education sector, enlightens

various challenges, and the status of virtual learning among the students pursuing higher education in Kerala.

Data and Methodology

In this paper, it assesses the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on higher education system and analyse students opinion about online class during the lockdown. It identified the challenges of students in the online learning platform from various colleges and universities of Kerala.

For this study, data and information have been gathered from both primary and secondary sources for analysing impact of COVID-19 on higher education students learning in Kerala. Higher education comprises all post-secondary education, training and research guidance at education institutions such as universities that are authorized as institutions of higher education by state authorities. But in this study we have taken only general higher education categories – science, commerce and humanities. Primary data have been collected through online structured questionnaire by Google form of students from colleges and universities from Malappuram district in Kerala. Total 186 students have responded positively and provided complete information of survey.

The secondary data have been brought together from various resources such as documents prepared by higher education department of Kerala government, world bank report, website of Ministry of education, various journals and research papers. In this study, descriptive analysis was also used; besides, simple

percentage distribution was used to assess the learning status of students (World Bank, 1998).

Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education

Higher education and economic development have a positive relationship, higher education is a dynamic concept; it is essential for the economic growth of a nation that is universally recognized. A health and an economic crisis could affect higher education institutions in several ways, mainly in the mode of teaching, evaluation, and financing. The lockdown has forced educational institutions to evolve their teaching methodologies from in-person lectures to e-Learning platforms almost overnight (Dhoot, 2020).

Impact on education financing

The economic crisis related to COVID-19 is higher than the economic crisis of 2008. The pandemic transmitted every stakeholder’s major share spending health needs, the health sector has been struggling to cope up with demand and supply pressure. There are clear pieces of evidence where various countries’ public spending on higher education changed to various health and social protections, and also forecasting of spending on education is stagnant or declining trends (World Bank, 2020).

There is no exception in the case of household spending on education. Lockdown and its result of unemployment and under unemployment have shackled family budget as well as their education expenditure (Al-Samarrai *et al.*, 2020). Except for some countries, fees of higher education haven’t changed even this crisis. India, especially Kerala, is not free from the privatization trend in the higher education. Private and self-financing institutes didn’t provide fee reduction or exemption for the students even during the lockdown.

Stagnated all educational activities

The war between COVID-19 and the world, the result has been complete lockdown across the globe. All educational stakeholders faced several type of hindrances due to the gate close of educational institutions and resulted in ceasing all educational activities. So, the processes like admission, examination, entrance tests conducted by different boards, colleges, and universities were postponed (Banupriya, 2020). The lack of physical presence of teachers and students overtook through the online class which created a virtual environment to study. Variety of platforms was used for academic purpose and admission process. However, a lot of teachers and students remained unfamiliar with online teaching and learning.

The digital divide is one of the most important problems in developing nations. Access and equity of digital infrastructure and platforms in all-region, as well as communities, are still key goals for these countries. Students from marginalized social sectors are still deprived of reliable internet access or private spaces for studies. We cannot simply ignore these facts. According to the vice chairman of Kerala Higher Education Council, about 30 percent of students at home under lockdown were not able to access online lessons due to lack of internet connectivity.

Impact on assessment system and academic research

Several internal and external examinations were negatively affected by the pandemic, almost all examinations were cancelled and some institutes conducted their exams through the digital platform.

Postponed examination further creates problems related to obtaining certificate of final year students, who need to pursue higher education and job.

The travel restrictions at the national and international level obstructed researchers and scholars from their work and scientific laboratories were closed, so they were not able to conduct research. However, webinars and online conferences supplied a large amount of knowledge and connected philanthropies all over the world.

Impact on employment

The pandemic imposed direct and indirect pressure on employment in organized and unorganized sectors, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) predicating 400 million people losing their jobs in India alone, and more than 2 billion globally. Labour market demand and supply dilemma affect final year students in various higher education sectors. India, as well as Kerala, is occupied with a large unemployment rate, besides, current crisis resulted in huge job loss and reduced job opportunity.

Results and Discussion

The following details provided in tables are based on the primary data collected through the survey.

Characteristics of study participants

Table 1 shows the profile of student participants in the online survey. Out of 186 students, over two third are female students. Medium of the age of participants is 21 years; around fifty percent of students are under 21 years. Most of the students are from the other backward class (89.2%) and almost forty percent are affiliated with arts & humanities academic background. In the case of income of family, half of the student participants are associated with less than INR15000 P.M income group and thirty percent of families fall in category of 15000 -30000.

Table 2 displays impact of COVID-19 on study participants’ economic condition of family. The study shows, majority of the study participants’ family affected by this pandemic (82.8%). Almost of the family associated with financial problem, out of 186, 120 students’ family financially attacked it also affect their education

Table 1: Characteristics of study participants

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Boys	46	24.7
Girls	140	75.3
Age of students		
21 Years	26	13.97
Below 21 years	92	49.46
Above 21 years	68	36.57
Social Group		
SC and ST	10	5.4
OBC	164	89.2
General	10	5.4
Stream of study		
Arts and Humanities	80	43
Science	76	40.9
Commerce	30	16.1
Income of the family		
Below 15000	96	51.7
15000-30000	56	30.1
Above 30000	34	18.2

Table 2: COVID-19 impact on Family’s economy

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Do you think, that the economic condition of your family affected by COVID-19		
Difficulties faced during the lockdown		
Financial	120	64.5
Food	16	8.7
Health	10	5.3
Others	40	21.5
Did the economic crisis during the lockdown affect Your education?		
yes	116	62.3
no	70	37.7

E-learning during lockdown

Table 3: Were you familiar with online platforms of learning before the lockdown?

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	74	39.8
No	112	60.2

Table 4: Were you aware of government e-learning facilities (SWAYAM, DIKSHA, etc)?

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	56	30.1
No	130	69.9

We have analyzed e-learning details of students in lockdown. The study found that online learning has been used to substitute physical classrooms and around 60 percent of students were not familiar with online platforms before lockdown (Table 3). Ministry of Education introduces a number of online platforms and tools for learning such as SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) DIKSHA, e-PG Pathshala, Swayam Prabha, E-ShodhSindhu, National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL), Virtual Labs, etc. Nevertheless, more than half of the participants in this study are unaware of the above-mentioned platforms and tools (Table 4). Many students availed smart phones to attend online classes and grab knowledge during the lockdown. Around two-third of the participants attended their online classes through their own mobile phones (Table 5). India is the second-largest country in the number of mobile users in the world. Most of the learning activities took place in the platform of Google Meet (60.7%) and one fourth of the students used WhatsApp as a platform of learning (Table 6).

Table 5: Information about Gadget for online class

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gadget used for accessing online class		
Android mobile	182	97.8
Computer or Laptop	4	2.2
Availability of gadget		
Self	133	71.5
Family	51	27.4
Friends	2	1.1
Pandemic?		
Yes	154	82.8
No	32	17.2

Table 6: Platform used for online class

Various platforms	Frequency	Percentage
Google meet	113	60.7
Whatsapp	52	28
Zoom	8	4.3
Youtube	7	3.8
Others	6	3.2

Table 7: Frequency attending the online class

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Regular	123	66.1
Occasionally	50	26.9
Rarely	13	7

Table 8: Time studying during Lockdown

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Less than normal situation	146	78.4
Same as normal situation	33	17.8
More than normal situation	7	3.8

Out of 186 students in the study, 123 students regularly attended online classes (Table7). However, during this period, two third of the students utilized their time for studying and allied activities less than the normal situation (Table 8). They have been facing a lot of challenges and difficulties. According to this study, around 90 percent of students were not satisfied with the online classroom system, they faced problems like feeling stress, depression, lack of digital infrastructure facilities such as poor interconnectivity, lack of good digital devices etc. (Table 9). Apart from that, students missed their friends circle, academic atmosphere and campus life. Their collective opinion is to reopen the campus at all level of higher education, aided by proper preventive measures.

Table 9: Satisfaction with E learning

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	19	10.2
No	167	89.8

Table 10: Problem faced studying during lockdown

Problems	Frequency	Percentage
Feelings stress, Depression	97	52.1
Related with internet connectivity	49	26.3
Don’t have favourable environment to study at home	27	14.6
Teachers are not interested to teaching	13	7

Conclusion

The study outlined different kind of impacts of COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown on higher education sector, it has made significant disruption in academic activities. Also the study assessed online learning status of students in higher education sector of Kerala. Majority of learners have been seen dissatisfied with online learning and facing digital infrastructure challenges. In the higher education sector, initial steps were made to online learning, and the lockdown accelerated the rapid trend. And also government should address the problems of digital divide and make better IT infrastructure facilities and make serious consideration to improve the conditions of marginalised communities and ghettoised regions. Substituting physical classrooms with virtual spaces is not a

proper way in a society where digital divide pre-eminently exists, rather, online classes should work in tandem with traditional methods. Human beings in general are faced by economic constraints, so the governments must assure adequate funds, enrolment and employment opportunities. Universities and institutions should focus on satisfaction level, psychological matters and academic purpose of students, if this is not the case academic programmes and years would become of zero utility.

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