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Teaching Effectiveness in the Post COVID Times

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ABSTRACT: The time of Pandemic was extremely tough for the world as it was a totally unexpected phase which brought forward a never before seen or imagined state of affairs in front of all of us. Every section of our lives suffered severely from it. It was the education sector which could not just cover the academic loss by employing the tools of Communication Technology, but also formed a firm and creative foundation of the Blended Learning Strategy for the coming times. The impact of Blended Learning Strategy may be acknowledged in fostering the ways of teaching and learning in the Post Covid times thereby raising the bar of effectiveness of the various teaching programs. The incorporation of Blended Learning Strategy shall not only make the studies interesting, but more interactive than ever as well. The horizon of knowledge can also be thus anticipated to touch global boundaries thereby enriching the education sector with uniformity across the borders.

I. INTRODUCTION

Covid 19 has shown us an unseen, unimagined and unwanted facet of life and of the world. When our brains were busy creating new technological reforms everyday and getting our worlds transformed beautifully into a digital setup where everything danced upon the touch of fingertips, a villainous virus entered our worlds silently and turned everything upside down. The first ever experience of facing a nightmare when people caged themselves within their houses to save their lives was appalling for one and all.

Be it businessmen or servicemen, teachers or students, all preferred to give up the lust of wandering around fearlessly, and chose to do nothing rather than succumbing to the tiniest invisible yet virulent creature known as Novel Corona virus. The decision of Government to shut down all the public institutions might be regarded as the toughest one to go with, at both ends. When the tax payers could not make any money, what would the Government do? And how would the commoners sail through the tough times, especially the daily bread earners, in the time of complete lockdown? Nonetheless, survival is more important, even at the cost of daily wages. So, everything came to a halt when the world was hit by the corona virus.

The temporary shutting down of schools at such a time was also a quite welcoming step, even when nobody was actually happy with the students' loss of study. A general notion regarding the importance of school education that there can be no replacement of classroom teaching got successfully replaced in the turbulent times of Covid 19. When the traditional way of teaching in the physical classrooms was no more possible practically, and when no one actually could figure out the duration of such times, technological advancement came as a rescue. Mseleku (2020) establishes in a study, "*The Covid-19 outbreak has introduced a lot of challenges for higher education institutions across the world. Lockdown and other Covid-19 regulations has forced a sudden shift from face to face learning to online learning in many academic institutions. While this shift was considered a possible solution to higher education crises in the era of Covid-19, it is shown in this study that this shift came with numerous challenges for students and academics. As discussed in this study, these challenges include; difficulties to adjust by lectures and students, connectivity issues, uncondusive physical environment, mental health related issues, lack of basic needs, lack of teaching and learning resources. Despite these challenges, this study shows that there are Covid-19 induced opportunities such as innovation and capacity development.*" The uprise of new media was a troubleshooter. While sitting at homes in front of the PCs', laptop screens or tapping the screens of mobile phones, the online community got reconnected again, and this was when the situation started getting better. The virus was not in a jolly mood yet, and had decided to play its filthy-dirty game in continuation, but the world had learnt to combat the financial and academic loss through the virtual meetings. New media platforms became increasingly used day by day owing to their user-friendly interface.



II. ADOPTION OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The notion of getting the implementation of innovations was not for the first time; time and again the education sector has evolved as per the needs of the changing scenario of the world. The adoption of smart classrooms, interactive teaching practices and virtual conferences has been a common scene for more than a decade, in the academic world. The adoption of tools of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the tough times came up a crisis shooting mechanism, which was very much the need of the hour. The blending of the New Media resources in general and Social Media resources in particular for the cause of education was the game changer, which brought about a new confidence, and gave a way for study and exploration of the subject matter on the broadest canvas. The age old physical classroom structure but had to be replaced by the all new virtual classroom system, where the students and teachers could hear and see each other only on their phone or laptop screens.

The all new mode of teaching had its own pros and cons, but in any case it was the only way out to pursue studies in the tough times of pandemic. Since no one on either end was prepared for such a critical phase, there were a lot of hardships. May it be on technical grounds or semantic basis, the disturbances were huge. The sudden shift from traditional pattern of teaching to digital mode was not easy to be adapted with, as many students and a lot of teachers also did not have a steady access to internet till then. Along with, the gadgets required for the online classes were also not available to all at that point of time.

The 'New Normal' seemed normal from nowhere and was potent enough to play with the sanity of minds in the very beginning. Network issues, handset issues etc. were somehow resolved and the teaching activities began. Every day brought in a new challenge. Developing interest while teaching or learning when no one actually sat in front or by the side was a deal. Students often joined their virtual classrooms and used to turn their microphones off. Leaving the classes and not responding to their instructor's words was a common scene, as they would lay down an excuse of poor connection. The same behaviour was at times displayed by certain immoral teachers as well.

Not having a personal or isolated space at home was another big problem, as it was really not easy to keep video cameras or microphones on while being at homes. Many a times teachers or students also experienced certain embarrassing situations when due to some human error the mikes or video cameras captured some unwanted trace of their lives and brought the same in front of the audiences leading to the delivery of some improper messages. Nevertheless, the teaching practices went on.

In the context of academics, the entire time of pandemic was managed with an urge to to limit the viral transmission and to save the precious time of students.

Blended Learning Strategy

Although the implementation of the New Media tools was more like a temporary gear at that point of time, yet it opened some new windows for the academic world to let in the new air of technological advancements. Post the Covid phase, the teachers have got a choice – to continue with the New Media resources along with their traditional patterns of teaching. Flores and Swennen (2020) discuss in their work that, *"If one thing becomes clear it is that more and more organised research is needed to contribute to a body of knowledge, theoretical and practical, for teacher education to use in the changing educational landscape."* This new choice i.e. the incorporation of the New Media resources into the traditional teaching strategy is regarded as 'Blended Learning Strategy'. The Blended Learning Strategy is not only very flexible in nature, but highly yielding as well. It has rendered the teacher a set of all new options to add to his past practices of physical classroom teaching viz.-

- 1.) The teacher can message/inform all his students at once, from anywhere, regarding any activity. Although there was a provision for such a messaging previously also, yet it was not well-exploited as a part of the teaching practice prior to the time of Pandemic.
- 2.) He can make learning more interactive by clubbing e-resources which were previously an attribute of the smart classrooms only. With the help of smartphones, teachers can display a lot of study-material with greater ease now. The Audio-visual aids supplemented with the teachers' words make things clear in a more precise way and let them learn the subject in a pragmatic manner.
- 3.) He can record his own lectures in the form of videos. He can use his videos as per his discretion whenever required. Such videos may also be used time and again by students for the purpose of topic revision or for grabbing the missed lectures.



4.) He can keep the Power Point Presentations on various topics saved for the class, which may help him ready for the class anytime. Along with, students also tend to develop greater interest and retention while being taught with Power Point Presentation Slides.

Similarly, students may also take advantage of the Blended Learning Strategy as it has a lot of potential for learning in a better way viz. -

- 1.) The students are capable of doing self-study if they miss any important lecture of their subject teacher. For the same, they may refer to their own teacher's lectures available online or even some other subject experts from across the world.
- 2.) The students are in a capacity to attend online lectures from anywhere as per their choices. They can get enrolled to various online courses being run at any part of the world.
- 3.) The online resources are comparatively cheaper as the students do not need to rush anywhere in the quest of knowledge and information.
- 4.) The students can conveniently save and share the course modules shared with them during the online classes.

Along with the positive points of the traditional mannerism of thinking, the online mode of teaching and learning brings its own perks. So, when the online mannerism gets clubbed with offline mode, the Blended Learning Strategy brings forth the new dimensions of teaching. Blended Learning Strategy empowers the teacher to demonstrate the lecture in front of the students in a powerful manner when with the help of audio-visual aids he can make his lecture interesting and hence more engaging.

While he can motivate his students during his physical classroom and let them do better work through his constant monitoring and guidance, he can also receive their feedback and clarify or improve the things where and when needed. The elements of care and concern keep flowing spontaneously while talking with the students effectively.

Along with this practice, the online resources being employed enable him to pinpoint upon the further details of the subject mater. Bottom line is that Covid came as a giant in our lives which created huge disturbance in every nook and corner of our world but the education sector found an opportunity in crisis by learning to use the online resources. Popa et al. (2020) conclude in their study that *“Even if the crisis moment specific to our times (COVID-19) will disappear, “Pandora’s box” has been opened, which leaves room for multiple institutional evaluations and a review of the professional development of members of the teaching staff, by reconsidering the role both of digital competencies and didactic ones. One of the professors stated, “There is a positive aspect in this whole story. Let us say that [COVID-19] ends, and it does not happen again, but you remain with so many online materials that, of course, you can process, improve. But you will not start from scratch again.”* And having mastered the same during that period, the teachers and students have been accustomed with the use of online resources so far. Now when the days of physical classrooms are back, adding on those online resources along with the traditional teaching shall prove to be more effective for the betterment of education. According to the research work of Almonacid-Fierro et al. (2021), *“The Covid-19 pandemic has brought humanity new learning: the urgency for everyone to adapt to information and communication technologies (ICT). The unexpected situation caused the abrupt interruption of classes, demanding quick decisions and establishing options that are still in doubt of success. Given the new reality imposed by Covid-19, it is necessary to question not only access to technologies, but also the possibility of offering teachers and students conditions to promote student learning, particularly in a discipline such as Physical Education.”*

III. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The disturbing phase of Covid 19 was welcome from nowhere. It let all the spheres our our world shut down and created a big mess in our lives. But the education sector grew out in a better way by finding an opportunity in the time of crisis. It made a perfect use of online resources and dissolved the barricade of distance between academic institution and teachers-students. Carrillo and Flores (2020) interpret in their work as, *“In pedagogical terms, the need of a comprehensive and solid view of the pedagogy of online education seems obvious. This should integrate technology as an inherent part of the online teaching and learning process and take into account the pedagogical possibilities associated with online tools, i.e., the suitability and affordances of the various technologies or online resources (e.g., blogs promote discussions and facilitate reflective practice; videos help develop practical knowledge about the profession and connect educational theory with practice; online forums enable the sharing of narratives that enhance the skill of noticing; breakout or chat rooms foster belongingness and high levels of support and cooperation among group members) to make sure that the chosen tools or resources help learners achieve the desired results.”*



The teacher and the taught took online classes from wherever they were and learnt to utilise the available technological help in the best possible manner. It led to rise in the knowledge and awareness of teachers and students both, and created a supportive atmosphere for acceptance of smart teaching and smart learning on the mass level. The study of Karalis and Raikou (2020) highlights, *“Each mode of teaching has to offer some strong elements to education, but in no case should it be considered one superior to the other. It is clear that face to face education could in any case be benefited and enriched with elements of online education, since, as it can be seen, students’ views are positive towards the latter, while the students find it easy to use ICT.”*

Now when the Covid 19 is gone, the same resources are equally available, this time we need not to depend entirely on them, but to blend them smartly into the already set pattern of education. This Blended Learning Strategy works as a game changer and shall definitely let the education sector get benefited hugely with this. The study of Agasisti and Soncin (2021) suggests, *“There are several lessons learnt from this experience that will affect future activities – as online and blended learning can innovate and improve teaching, administrative tasks can be delivered effectively virtually and new opportunities for research emerge – but the main focus remains on relations. Relations give value to the educational experience of students and to the way in which research and innovation is generated. Thus, community engagement is crucial because is made of personal relations that need (also) physical presence to exist. Finding the right balance between online and on-site will be the real strategic challenge for the future.”*

The much needed reforms in the education sector shall be achieved with the help of amalgamation of offline and online resources and shall keep widening the spectrum of learning. As per the study of García-Peñalvo et al. (2020), *“This digital transformation should be part of a strategic plan that outlines and defines the critical processes required for establishing new educational and operational models that guide the orientation and value proposition. A higher education institution should have a comprehensive plan with viable initiatives focused on people and empowered by technology. Besides, the use of technology is the medium for introducing improvements and needed change. The University digital transformation means embracing the digital society in which we live, creating a more transparent place, which promotes equality, inclusion, participation, and social implication.”*

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