ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS' DURING COVID: SHORT AND LONG TERM MEASURES

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Abstract

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, whole world is currently undergoing temporary closures in order to mitigate the spread of the virus. The majority of educational institutions and governments are not prepared to handle the situation, as it was unanticipated. The COVID-19 pandemic is an opportunity to reconsider our approach to teaching, learning, and assessment at all educational levels. It is necessary to consider modifications in the education system in order to enhance transparency and trust in the examination and evaluation process. It is now necessary to equip the younger generation with the means to achieve a more promising future.

The students faced enormous challenges during the pandemic. Stress is evident among many students about their future. Students are going through very tough phase during this period. The paper may can assist institutions in comprehending students' issues and formulating examination policies. The paper also examines the use of Information Technology in examinations and the psychological readiness of students for the same. This research also aims to propose administrative, immediate, and long-term solutions that can assist in policy formulation.

Introduction

COVID-19 is posing an enormous challenge to the world. The recent situation has revealed some of the long-standing issues throughout the world. It gave shockwaves to the ill-equipped health systems globally. The pandemic made us realise how serious the issue is in our increasingly mobile, globalised environment. Still, Covid Vaccination is awaited. World is also facing economic problems, which affects a lot of emerging economics.

The happy embrace of disinformation and misinformation about the virus was to be expected, given a decade of rising populism and declining faith in experts. And the absence of a properly coordinated international response ought to have come as no surprise, given the celebration of "my country first" global politics in recent years.[1]

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[1] Susskind, D. (2020). Life Post COVID-19. Finance and Development Magzine.

Since March 25, 2020, the country has been under lockdown owing to the emergence of the new Coronavirus. This virus has infected over 270,000 people in India and over 7 million people worldwide, as of June 10, 2020. As a result, numerous examinations have been postponed. There are still numerous state board examinations that have not yet been completed. Certain state boards have halted the continuing assessment process, while others have advanced students to the next academic level without examinations. The same situation is with the examinations in the universities across the country.

The pandemic crisis has accelerated the pace of digital transformation, with further expansion in e-commerce and increases in the pace of adoption of telemedicine, videoconferencing, online teaching, and fintech.[2]

Issues of Assessment of Students

The evaluation process of education affects the time of its implementation during the educational process. There is an entry, formative and summative evaluation. The essence of each one of them is a comparison of student results with defined objectives, which may be patterns and standards. They must have a substantive definition of the content and time limit, and must be measurable. The objectives are based on internal (state of development of students) and external (educational and social) conditions. In order to achieve them it is essential to determine the methods, forms and material means of teaching.[3]

Most of the HEIs are following classroom teaching almost all over the country. There is increasing trend of using teaching aids such as LCD Projector, K-Yan, Google Classroom etc. but still it is not widely used by teachers and students. There are many universities and colleges in India which are still using traditional techniques of teaching. In many academic institutes although modern teaching aids are available but it is rarely used by the faculties. The assessment of learning has become a much sought-after topic in the last 20 years, where the concern lies in achieving quality assessment of learning. To this end, educational reforms have been generated that deviate from administrative matters that forget the central point, the academic, in which the concern should not be the introduction of the use of technologies, but how to carry out an evaluation that allows us to assess student learning and the role of all participants in the teaching-learning process to improve the achievement of the goals set. Assessment is an integral part of the educational process, and it is a serious didactic risk to

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[2] Rebelo, S. (2020). Life Post COVID-19. Finance and Development Magzine.
[3] Ďurišová M, et.al. Assessment of Higher Education Teaching Outcomes (Quality of Higher Education). Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences

develop assessment mechanisms that are fragmented or disjointed from the teaching modality. When this happens, assessment strains the learning process and takes on a punitive character that differs from its true meaning.[4]

Research Methodology

The present study is an attempt to find out the students' view towards the university exam during the Lockdown period. The research methodology of the current study is concerned to understand the mood of the students to face the university exams. The primary data is the base of the current study which was collected through structured questionnaire. The present study was descriptive type empirical survey based on primary data. The research models selected was of descriptive and quantitative in nature.

Scheduling and rescheduling of exams due to fear of an out breaking pandemic was evident all over the world and India was not the exception. Due to lockdown, most of the universities decided to reschedule the exam. There is lot of confusion among the students about the examination. Classes are suspended because of lockdown to safeguard the life of the students and teachers.

A survey of students was conducted to identify preparation for the university exam and understand problem faced by Higher Educational Institutes (HEIs) during the period of lockdown. The study also tried to find out role of universities, colleges and teachers during the period of lockdown.

The scope of the study is limited to university students in Maharashtra. Although data is collected through students, researcher has taken opinions of teachers, parents, psychologists and educationalists for comprehensive analysis. Due to limitation of time, it is not possible to take surveys of teachers.

Objectives of the Study

In the present study the researcher has tried to study problems of the students to appear for the exam. The study tried to cover students studying in different universities in Maharashtra.

The objectives of present research work are as follows:

1. To find out impact of Lockdown on the study of the students
2. To find out exam related updates and its source to the students

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[4] Marta Montenegro et. al. (2021). Assessment in Higher Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Review, Sustainability

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the present study are as follows:

1. The present study has geographical limitations. The study is limited to the state of Maharashtra.

2. The present study is based on the sample survey because of time and financial constraints.

3. Due to Lockdown Primary Data is collected through online questionnaire. The study may carry the limitations of collecting data through online questionnaire.

4. The study is related only for the period of lockdown

Primary Data

Primary data is the foundation of the current study. Primary data is collected by structured online questionnaire. The primary data help in collecting the information regarding the impact of lockdown on preparation of university exams of students in Maharashtra. During the study 82,036 respondents filled the questionnaire. But after analysis of data it is found that many students from junior college and non university students also responded the questionnaire. The researcher analysed the data and deleted irrelevant responses. At last for analysis 69,932 respondents taken into consideration. These students are from different universities in Maharashtra.

The statistical tools such as percentages, averages, comparative analysis, correlation, statistical tests etc. are used for the purpose of analysis and interpretation of data. Collected data is classified, tabulated and analysed by using different statistical tools by using data processing and statistical tools. The interpretations are drawn from the analysis to suggest recommendations to overcome the problem under research.

Findings of the Study

During the study, it is found that out of 69,932 student respondents there are 60,512 studying Under Graduate Courses and 9,420 students studying Post Graduate Courses.

Period of lockdown is the necessity of the government to fight with the Corona Virus. It is implemented unexpectedly. Students are worried about their exams. During that period, students need updates about the exam. During the survey, it is found that out of 69,932 student respondents there are 18,562 students responded that they never get any updates from the university or college, 16,980 students responded that they rarely get any updates, 17,268 students responded that they sometimes get any updates, and 4,732 students responded that

they often get any updates, and 12,390 students responded that they always get any updates from the university or college.

Students get exam related updates from different sources. There is much possibilities that student may get false information from the unauthorised sources. Recently it is found that a fake update of cancellation of exam was circulated in social media in Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University.

It is found that out of 69,932 student respondents there are 10,315 students responded that they get updates from the university, 14,213 students get updates from the college, 19,890 students get updates from the teachers, 19,713 students get updates from friends and 5,801 students get updates from others.

Students get information related with updates of exams by different official and unofficial channels. Getting information from authentic source may help students and avoid unnecessary confusion. Getting timely and authentic information about exam helps students to prepare for the exam. Students are allowed to select multiple responses. It is observed that out of 69,932 student respondents, 5,530 students got updates about the exam through SMS by the University, 48,285 students got the updates through Social media, 19,737 students got updates about the exam through University Website and 11,585 students got the updates about the exam through other sources.

The study mainly focused on one of the important issue i.e. students' concentration on the studies during the time of lockdown. During the lockdown students have much time with them but during this time are they able to concentrate on studies is one of the important issue. It is found that out of 69,932 student respondents there are 2,571 student respondents who believe that there study is not affected by lockdown, 7,742 student respondents who believe that there is minor impact on their studies during lockdown, 7,031 student respondents who gave neutral response to the question, 13,221 student respondents who believe that there is moderate impact on studies during lockdown. Majority of the students are of the opinion that there is moderate and major impact on studies during lockdown. There are very few students who believe that there study is affected due to lockdown.

Exam is always a matter of stress to the most of the students and lockdown made it more stressful. During the study it is found that most of the students are either not ready or partially ready to face the exam. There are very few students who are ready to face the exam.

During the discussion with psychologist, Dr. Balaji Bhosikar rightl said, "In such turbulent and testing times, it's quite natural to feel demotivated and a bit nervous. Especially when there are no clear instructions and only rumours. Obviously present situation has an impact on students' moral. Apart from that, for those who earn and learn, it's like a double whammy and seriously depressing. At a time when the very survival is at stake, it's not practical to expect from students their full potential. Whatever decision is to be made shall take into account not only physical but also mental preparedness of students. At the same time not demoralizing the students who have still managed to prepare and perform is equally important."

Anxiety and depression are of the major challenges among the students preparing for the exam. There is an inverse co-relationship between mental wellbeing and academic performance of the students. The study also tries to understand the comfort of the students to face the exam if there will be change in the pattern of the exam.

Government of Maharashtra set up a high-level committee headed by information technology Secretary Shri. Rajesh Agrawal to implement reform in examination system of the universities in the state of Maharashtra. Many universities are taking the use of ICT in distribution of examination papers, assessment and online examination. During the study comfort of students to face ICT based exam is assesses through question.

It is observed that out of 69,932 student respondents, there are 22,013 students are not ready to face exam based on ICT, 24,906 students are ready to face exam based on ICT and 23,013 students responded are undecided about their readiness to face exam based on ICT. It is found that students are almost equally distributed in their comfort to face the exams through computer and mobile. Now a days, many universities and colleges are arranging these types of exams. Many exams like MS-CIT, NET, NEET, PET are already conducted successfully by national and state agencies.

Lockdown adversely affected the psychology towards the examination. Students are not sure about the schedule of the exam. There are fake news in circulation which diverts the mind of the students about the exam. The study also tries to take the opinion of the students regarding promotion to next class without examination.

The data of students' opinion about promotion to the next class without the exam collected through the questionnaire is presented and analysed. It is observed that 53,999 students responded that they would like to be promoted to next class without the exam and 15,933 students responded that they would like to face the exam and don't want to be promoted

to next class without the exam. Government of Maharashtra has taken decision to promote students of class 1st to 9th in school and class 11th students in junior college. Because of this many students from the universities are expected to get same exemption and hence they are of the opinion to get promotion to the next class. But at the same time there is a positive sign that 22.78% students would like to face the exam.

Lockdown is strange movement for the students. After lockdown it is not easy for the students to cope with the situation. Studies show that there is confusion, anger, depression, stress, insomnia and emotional exhaustion during lockdown and it requires time to settle down. Study tries to understand the opinion about when they would like to face the exam after lockdown. It is observed that there are 3,602 student respondents who are of the opinion that exams can be taken as soon as the lockdown is over , 3,461 student respondents who are of the opinion that exams can be taken 8 days after the lockdown, 15,137 student respondents who are of the opinion that exams can be taken 15 days after the lockdown, and 47,732 student respondents who are of the opinion that exams can be taken one month after the lockdown.

Short Term and Long Term Measures to Face Inevitable Situations like Pandemic

Short Term Measures

i.   It is necessary to convey that universities are going to conduct the examination. This will help students to concentrate on studies and clear ambiguity among them about the exam. Universities can decide the change in pattern of exam, but it need to be communicated to students as early as possible.

ii. As suggested by the UGC vide its letter F.No. 1-1/2020(Secy) dated 5th April, 2020, there is a need of "Regular mentoring of students through interactions, and appeals/letters by the Universities/Colleges to remain calm and stress free. This can be achieved through telephones, e-mails, digital and social media platforms." The university and college authorities should arrange video conference meetings to boost the confidence of students.

iii. After lockdown, students need to get sufficient time to face the exam. Students want sufficient time to collect study material. If necessary, university may advice colleges to arrange Remedial Classes to complete or revise the syllabus. Efforts should be made to provide study material to students in electronic forms.

iv. There is need to motivate teachers and students to use online tools such as Google Classroom, Microsoft Team, Zoom, Youtube, Webinars, Moodles etc. for effective teaching learning activity.

v. Many universities are switching to online exams during COVID-19. If you're worried about this shift to online exams during COVID-19, fret not. History tells us it's a pretty untapped area, but there's potential to be uncovered. Online or digital exams can save lecturers ample marking time. They also enable students to bring-your-own-devices (BYOD) as the university would not be able to buy enough laptops for every student.[5]

vi. Examination is a form of assessment. Assessment can take many forms, including coursework, presentations, dissertations, lab reports, in class tests, project reports, class activities etc. Today we are all forced to rethink the whole exam system. There are alternative assessment methods which may help to assess the progress of the students especially when traditional exams are not possible due to pandemic.

We are slowly trying to accept that centre-less exams and tests from home could be the new normal. The global pandemic struck at a time when most of the annual exams were going on, and all entrance exams were lined up. As of now most boards have cancelled their exams, some have decided to pass students without any exams. ETS has already launched the take-at-home option for the GRE exam, the Graduate Record Examinations which is the standardised test route for many institutions across USA and Canada, taken by students from all across the world. Of course, trust is an essential component in the latter situation. In the longer run, more sophisticated systems will be required to actually implement centre-less exams. However, for assessments where marks will decide the future course of admission or eligibility, trust will not be enough. In this regard, Gurgaon-based edtech company AglaSem Edutech Pvt Ltd has already built and implemented a system that not only enables testing agencies to conduct centre-less exams, but also ensure it is cheating-proof.[6]

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[5] https://www.studyinternational.com/news/online-exams-during-covid19/
[6] https://indianexpress.com/article/education/test-from-home-can-centre-less-exams-be-the-future-6356364/

Long Term Measures

i. **Training of Teachers**

Development of quality e-content is a need of the hour. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has launched e-content for various subjects on DIKSHA app. Books of CBSE are also available online for students, parents and teachers. This will be useful for students who are now at home as their classes have been suspended for Corona Virus outbreak. In Maharashtra, Balbharti recently used QR Codes in each chapter and developed e-content for the same. Most of the government as well as private schools are adopting digital technology. But the speed of adoption and development of e-content in universities are still not much popular among the students.

There is a need to motivate and train teachers to prepare quality e-content of their subjects for Under Graduate and Post Graduate Courses.

ii. **Infrastructure Development to Prepare E-Content**

The universities are advised to assess infrastructural facilities available with affiliated colleges as early as possible so that they can think over different modules of exams. Colleges need to update their website to provide information to their students. The university should develop a mechanism to collect data from the affiliated colleges regarding completion of the syllabus.

In many universities and colleges there is lack of infrastructure which will help teachers to prepare e-contents. At the same time, there is need to assess use of technology by teachers in teaching. Availability of required infrastructure in colleges and universities may motivate teachers to develop e-contents for the students.

iii. **Technical Support**

To convert quality study material in e-content, there is a need of technical support. Many teachers have quality study material but do not have skills to convert it in e-contents. Technical support may help in preparing quality e-content for the students.

iv. **Development of Application**

UGC has developed many applications for promotion and development of e-resources. Some of the initiatives are Swayam, Swayam Prabha, e-PG Pathshala, UGC MOOCs etc. On the basis of these apps, Universities in Maharashtra should

take initiative to develop such apps for skill development of students. At the same time, initiative must be taken to develop application for webinars and online classes with the help of Tech Developers.

v. Financial Support to Teachers

Developing e-content requires infrastructural and technical support. Many times this type of support is not available with universities and colleges. Government can take a pilot project with selected teachers in Maharashtra to develop e-contents by providing them financial support. It will motivate interested teachers and help students in their studies.

vi. Develop Students to Prepare for Computer Based Exam

During the study it is found that students are not prepared for computer based tests. But it is time to change, and there is a need to take initiatives to develop ICT based tests for students. It may help to reduce exam related works. It also increases transparency in the exam and declaration of results in time.

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viii. Use of Computer Based System for Internal Assessment

University and colleges need to develop a platform to prepare computer based internal assessment system. There are many Learning Management Systems (LMS) available to develop such platform. This will increase transparency in internal assessment of the students. This will help students to be well acquainted with the online examination, and in case of emergency the same can be used for term end examinations too.

ix. Availability of Digital Resources through Library

It is a need of time to increase availability of digital resources through library. This will help students to get the help of books and other related content at distant location. Students need to be motivated to use open access and free learning resources. Universities and colleges need to update themselves by subscribing e-journals and e-books.

This research work was undertaken with a view to study the psychology of the students during this pandemic and the stress of university examination, to make suggestions to the policy makers. This short term research will further motivate the other researchers to undertake research on how to tackle with unseen calamity in the field of education, new teaching methodology, e-education etc.