

## Empowerment of e-learning during lockdown

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### ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has triggered a nationwide lockdown. This is the best time for the youth as well as others to upskill themselves. Amid the lockdown, schools, colleges and Universities have switched to one or another way of e-learning to ensure minimum academic loss to these students. Government's e-learning platforms saw a fall of 1.4 Crore since 23rd March 2020. While common communication platforms such as WhatsApp and other chatting platforms to share assignments and notes among students, teachers and students have also adopted other new technology platforms such as Skype, Zoom, Google Classroom, Google Hangout, Piazza to hold online classes and deliver structured lectures. The online learning platforms faced lots of problems due to slow internet and buffering. To overcome this problem to some extent, teachers are also sharing slides or hand written notes apart from recorded lectures and live sessions so that students with uncertain network access can also get at least some material. Technology continues to advance rapidly even today, and this is perhaps the best time for professionals to expand their horizons and learn new technologies. The initiative will equip students as well as professionals who wish to utilize this lockdown period in upskilling themselves.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Technology, Professional, Lockdown, Chatting

Ever since countries all over the world have gone into lockdowns due to COVID-19, educational institutes have been no exception. Students and teachers have come across the perennial struggles of having access to uninterrupted and seamless quality of internet connection. To this universal problem, India has been no exception. A learning system based on formalised teaching but with the help of electronic resources is known as e-learning. The word "e" in e-learning specifies electronic. This means that e-learning is an electronic device or learning with the use of electronic devices or technology. While teaching can be based in or out of the classrooms, the use of computers and the Internet forms the major component of e-learning. e-learning can also be termed as a network enabled transfer of skills and knowledge, and the delivery of education is made to a large number of recipients at the same or different times. Earlier, it was not accepted wholeheartedly as it was assumed that this system lacked the human element required in learning. The introduction of computers was the basis of this revolution and with the passage of time, as we get hooked to smart phones, tablets, etc, these devices now have an importance place in the classrooms for learning. Books are gradually getting replaced by electronic educational materials like optical discs or

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Received: April 12, 2020; Revision Received: May 21, 2020; Accepted: May 25, 2020

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pen drives. The schools which use e-learning technologies are a step ahead of those which still have the traditional approach towards learning. It is believed that the human brain can easily remember and relate to what is seen and heard via moving pictures or videos. It has also been found that visuals, apart from holding the attention of the student, are also retained by the brain for longer periods. Universities and colleges were forced to abruptly close and ongoing teaching of various courses was abandoned midstream. As a result, managers of universities and colleges with thousands of stranded students have been left wondering how to fill the gap and at the very least maintain some semblance of normality. Various sectors, including agriculture, medicine, education, services, business, and government setups are adapting to the concept of e-learning which helps in the progress of a nation.

Government's e-learning platforms saw footfall of 1.4 Crore since 23rd March 2020. The popularity and usage of digital learning platforms backed by the government or the education ministry saw 5 fold rises. The sudden rise in the popularity of these digital learning platforms comes amid the Ministry of Human Resource Development's (MHRD) push to students as well as educational institutions to adopt online learning. Amid the lockdown, schools and colleges have switched to one or another way of e-learning to ensure minimum academic loss to these students. While common communication platforms such as Whats App and other chatting platforms to share assignments and notes among students, teachers and students have also adopted other new technology platforms such as Skype, Zoom, Google Classroom, Google Hangout, Piazza to hold online classes and deliver structured lectures. Lack of internet connectivity and other required digital infrastructure with students is proving to be an impediment to e-learning in many cases. To overcome this problem to some extent, teachers are also sharing slides or hand written notes apart from recorded lectures and live sessions so that students with uncertain network access can also get at least some material. Recorded lectures ensure that a short-term problem with network access does not block out a student. Faculty members are doing online chat sessions with students to answer any queries that they may have. Shri Pokhriyal said that for a large number of students who do not have access to computer and internet, the Ministry is promoting learning through the television. He further said that the SWAYAM PRABHA group of 32 DTH (Direct-to-Home) channels is devoted to telecasting of high-quality educational programmes on 24X7 basis using the GSAT-15 (Geo Synchronous Satellites) satellite and the contents are provided by NPTEL (National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning), IITs (Indian Institute of Technology), UGC (The University Grants Commission), CEC (The Consortium for Educational Communication), IGNOU (Indira Gandhi National Open University), NCERT (The National Council of Educational Research and Training) and NIOS (The National Institute of Open Schooling). Similarly, IGNOU's (Indira Gandhi National Open University) Gyan Vani (105.6 FM Radio) and Gyan Darshan, which is a 24-hour educational channel offering the best of educational programmes for pre-school, primary, secondary and higher secondary students, college/university students, youth seeking career opportunities, homemakers and working professionals. The Minister urged students to also make optimum use of these channels to supplement their learning.

### **10 online learning websites and resource provided by the Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry to study for free during the Corona virus lockdown:**

- 1. SWAYAM Online Courses-** SWAYAM Online Courses provides access to teaching-learning resources. These resources were earlier delivered on the SWAYAM platform. Students or learners who registered on SWAYAM (swayam.gov.in) in the January 2020 semester can continue their learning as usual.

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2. **UG/PG MOOCs-** UG (Under Graduate) / PG (Post Graduate) MOOCs (A Massive Open Online Course) hosts learning material of the SWAYAM UG (Under Graduate) and PG (Post Graduate) (Non-Technology) archived courses.
3. **e-PG Pathshala-** e-PG (Post Graduate) Pathshala hosts high quality, curriculum-based, interactive e-content containing 23,000 modules (e-text and video) in 70 Post Graduate disciplines of social sciences, arts, fine arts and humanities, natural & mathematical sciences.
4. **SWAYAMPBHA-** Swayamprabha is a group of 32 DTH (Direct-to-Home) channels providing high-quality educational curriculum-based course contents covering diverse disciplines such as arts, science, commerce, performing arts, social sciences and humanities subjects, engineering, technology, law, medicine, agriculture, etc to all teachers, students and citizens across the country interested in lifelong learning. These channels are free to air and can also be accessed through your cable operator. The telecasted videos/lectures are also as archived videos on the Swayamprabha portal.
5. **e-Content courseware in UG (Under Graduate) subjects-**e-Content courseware in 87 Undergraduate courses with about 24,110 e-content modules is available on the CEC (The Consortium for Educational Communication) website at <http://cec.nic.in/>.
6. **National Digital Library-** National Digital Library is a digital repository of a vast amount of academic content in different formats and provides interface support for leading Indian languages for all academic levels including researchers and life-long learners, all disciplines, all popular form of access devices and differently-abled learners.
7. **Shodhganga-** Shodhganga is a digital repository platform of 2, 60,000 Indian Electronic Theses and Dissertations for research students to deposit their Ph.D. theses and make it available to the entire scholarly community in open access.
8. **e-Shodh Sindhu-** e-Shodh Sindhu provides current as well as archival access to more than 15,000 core and peer-reviewed journals and a number of bibliographic, citation and factual databases in different disciplines from a large number of publishers and aggregators to its member institutions including centrally-funded technical institutions, universities and colleges that are covered under 12(B) and 2(f) Sections of the UGC (The University Grants Commission) Act.
9. **Vidwan-** Vidwan is a database of experts which provides information about experts to peers, prospective collaborators, funding agencies policymakers and research scholar in the country. Faculty members are requested to register on the Vidwan portal to help expand the database of experts.
10. **CEC-UGC YouTube channel-** CEC (The Consortium for Educational Communication) - UGC (The University Grants Commission) YouTube channel provides access to unlimited educational curriculum based lectures absolutely free.

### *Types of e-Learning*

e-learning is three types: Synchronous e-learning, Asynchronous e-learning, and The blended method.

- **Asynchronous e-learning-** The word asynchronous means not at the same time. In this type of e-learning, there is no need of a live interaction in between the instructor and the students. Some methods of Asynchronous e-learning are:
  - **Embedded Learning:** In embedded learning, the students have the access to the information which they require all the time. The information is posted to their house address or is emailed to them or by any other means is provided to them.

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- Courses: the students or the users of the services can get training for any task at any time. The advantage of this is that they can continue their course at a pace which suits them, unlike the practical classrooms in which the students have to learn at a predefined pace of the instructor.
- Discussion Groups: It is a group in which discussion occurs over time. Usually, a group is formed by the students and instructors which have the same interests and discussion rough messages can be accomplished here. This also useful when a lot of students have the same query and the same answer is to be sent to all students.
- **Synchronous e-Learning-** The word synchronous means at the same time. In synchronous e-learning, the student and the instructor have to interact at the same time using the facility of internet. They have to be connected in real time. Some methods of synchronous e-learning are:
  - Virtual Classroom: It is very similar to the physical or the real classroom. The difference is that the classroom is fictitious. It is over the net. In a virtual classroom, the students and the instructor enter into the conversation using the internet. They may enter into the conversation via chatting, messaging, calling, video conferencing or anything else.
- **Blended Method-** In the blended method, features of both the types that is synchronous and asynchronous, are included.

### *Advantages of e-Learning*

- Flexible- In regular kind of learning, the student may have a fixed routine in which they have to sit together and learn from the instructor. The duration of the class is fixed. The topics to be discussed in the class are also fixed. But this is not the case in e-learning. The routine of e-learning is very flexible. The students can learn when they want and wherever they want. It is up to them what they want to study and for how much time they have to study.
- Anytime Access to the Resources-Students need access to different kinds of resources. These resources can be notes, theories, diagrams etc. In e-learning, the resources are made available to the students at all the times of the day. So the students can use them anytime and anywhere they want.
- Immediate Result or Feedback- In the case of regular learning, the tests are taken by paper and pen. These papers are then checked by the teachers. And then the results are declared. This takes a lot of time and hard work. The students have to wait a lot for the results which become very stressful for them. It is not easy for the teacher also to check these papers. e-learning gives an advantage here. The tests are taken through online quizzes or some pre-designed software which first conduct the test and then check them. This reduces the work of the teacher. Also, the result is obtained in a short while, in some cases, it is obtained just after the test finishes.
- More Retention-In the case of regular learning. Learning is done by means of conversation between the instructor and the students. The use of smart technology is very less in regular teaching method. But in the case of e-learning, there is a generous use of digital resources included presentations, multimedia that includes images and videos etc. With the use of such resources, the students get to learn more. They understand better the things which they see rather than read. So it increases the understanding and retention ability of the students.
- Cost Effective-When a student is engaged in regular learning, they have to go to the institute regularly. They need a transportation cost. The teachers teaching the student get the salary from the institutes. This adds it to the cost. The maintenance cost of the institute also adds up. Classroom rent or institutional rent I also involved. On the other

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hand, in the case of e-learning, there is no rent involved. The students can have access to resources from anywhere they are so there is no transportation cost also. Many such factors which increase the cost are chopped off in e-learning. Therefore, e-learning is more cost effective.

- Greener Approach- The regular learning method uses pen and paper. Even the tests are conducted on a pen paper medium. These papers are made by chopping down trees. Moreover, the pencils are also made of wood. Also the use of transportation by the students and teachers causes pollutions. But in e-learning, everything is digital. There is no need for papers and pens. Everything is noted using electronic devices. The students do not have to go to the schools so there is no need for transportation. This shows that e-learning follows a greener approach.
- Fast Learning- In regular learning, the speed of learning depends on the number of staff available and the number of classrooms available and the limited time period of a class. But in the case of e-learning, the speed depends on as per the needs of the students.
- Easy Collaboration- When a number of students work together on the same topic, they face problems while they study together using the regular learning methods. e-learning gives them a good opportunity. They connect to each other at any time and anywhere. They can share resources, discuss and learn. Therefore, e-learning is very beneficial for all the students who wish to study in groups.
- Easy Updating- In regular learning methods notes have to be regularly updated by the students. This takes a lot of time. But in e-learning, notes are simply sent to the students. So they are automatically updated.

### *Disadvantages of e-Learning*

- No Control-In the case of regular learning, the learning controlled by the teacher. The teacher motivates the students to study. Also, the teacher makes a regular routine for the student. This makes learning necessary for them. But in the case of e-learning, it is just the opposite. The control is in the hands of the student. It is the student who decides what to study and when to study. In this case, the students become careless. They may neglect the fact that they have to study. There is no motivation for them. No regularity exists in e-learning. This is the major drawback of e-learning.
- Learning Approach-In the regular learning technique, the students interact with each other face to face. This interaction becomes enjoyable for them. If these students practice the case of e-learning, they feel that this approach is very dull. They find it very boring to study alone. So this is a drawback of e-learning that it does not provide a regular interaction between the students. Moreover, if there is no discussion between the students, they will think only in one direction. They will not get to know what other people feel at the same topic and they will not be able to compare their views.
- Technology Dependent-e-learning depends solely on technology. Computers are the basic necessity of e-learning. Internet becomes the second necessity. When someone wants to join e-learning, he needs to possess a computer or a laptop, an internet connection with a good speed, some specific software which are required to run special kinds of multimedia or e-resources. This becomes the investment for e-learning. But these gadgets may experience some faults. In the case of a fault, e-learning could not be continuing for a short while. These devices have to be rectified first and then the process of e-learning could start. Moreover, these devices require maintenance.
- No Practical Work- In the regular method of teaching, regular practice session is organized for the students. Therefore, the students get to know how they can use the theoretical knowledge, which they are learning in the class, in the practical world. But

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in the case of e-learning, there is no practical session for the students. The students may be provided with videos in which the practical use of their knowledge is shown but that is not enough. The practical cannot be fully explained until they try it by themselves. This is a great drawback.

- Useless for Disabled In e-learning, there is no or very limited provision for the students with the disabilities. It is not so useful for the students with disabilities. For example, e-learning is useless for the students who are blind. The deaf and dumb students also do not have much advantage of e-learning. But in regular methods, there are proper provisions for the students with disabilities. For example, the blind students are taught with the help of braille.
- Resource Incompatibility-Every student's computer has different specifications. The resources which are sent to the students are the same that is they have the same formats. So a resource which is working properly on one computer may be incompatible with the other one.

e-learning penetration in corporations is increasing, regardless of the company's size. Since class-based training is more expensive, proportionately, for small and medium-sized firms, these firms are increasingly recognising e-learning as a convenient and cost-effective mode. Online learning has widened the scope of education and transcended it beyond classroom boundaries. With high internet penetration in the last two years, it has taken over the traditional methods not just in the urban landscape but also in rural areas. Professionals will need to equip themselves with relevant skills before their current skills become obsolete. Moreover, the government is adopting a series of measures to bring a technological revolution to accentuate e-learning which will ultimately lead to a major shift in the Indian education sector, experts added. e-learning platforms are bringing a measurable difference in students' engagement and performance. It is reducing gaps in the delivery of education and giving a new dimension to the education space.

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### *Acknowledgements*

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

### *Conflict of Interest*

The author declared no conflict of interest.

**How to cite this article:** Ghosh. S (2020). Empowerment of e-learning during lockdown. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 8(2), 398-403. DIP:18.01.253/20200802, DOI:10.25215/0802.253