

## **COVID-19 in the Education System: Opportunities and Challenges**

**Dr. Padma Raut**

*Principal*

*Shri. Laxmanrao Mankar College Of Education Amegoan Dist. Gondia*

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### **ABSTRACT**

COVID-19 is caused by a novel corona virus known as severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The epidemic began in China in December 2019 and has since spread worldwide, culminating in the ongoing 2019–20 corona virus pandemic. The corona virus infection has been labelled a pandemic by the World Health Organization. A growing number of institutions throughout the world have postponed or cancelled all campus events such as workshops, conferences, sports, and other activities due to rising concern about the current COVID-19 outbreak. Epidemics have presented mankind with numerous obstacles throughout history, as well as numerous potential opportunities. The corona virus is no exception, and in this paper, we look ahead to the prospects for a better world that this lethal virus will provide us. The major goals of this article are to emphasise the challenges and opportunities that the severe COVID-19 pandemic may present to the educational system.

**KEYWORDS:** Corona virus, Covid-19, Education, opportunities and challenges, pandemic.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION:**

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. A novel corona virus called SARS-CoV-2 is the cause of COVID-19 and the outbreak first recognized in China in December 2019. The clinical spectrum of COVID-19 ranges from mild disease with non-specific signs and symptoms of acute respiratory illness to severe pneumonia with respiratory failure and septic shock. Frequently reported signs and symptoms include fever, cough, myalgia or fatigue, and shortness of breath at illness onset. The fever course among patients with COVID-19 is not fully understood; it may be prolonged and intermittent. Sore throat has also been reported in some patients early in the clinical course. Less commonly reported symptoms include sputum production, headache, haemoptysis and diarrhoea. The incubation period is estimated at approximately 5 days (95% confidence interval, 4 to 7 days). Some studies have estimated a wider range for the incubation period. Data for human infection with other corona viruses (e.g., MERS-CoV, SARS-CoV-2) suggest that the incubation period may range from 2-14 days. There have also been reports of asymptomatic infection with COVID-19.

### **II. What is corona virus:**

Corona viruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several corona viruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recently discovered corona virus causes corona virus disease COVID-19.

### **III. What is COVID-19:**

COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered corona virus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.

The global emergency of Covid-19 is an unprecedented shift in education never seen before on a global scale. Chris Lehmann, the founding principal and CEO of the Science Leadership Academy asks a poignant question in this time - "What does it mean to be a school when work is no longer mandatory?" (Lehmann, 2020a). In most schools, students are tightly monitored within a rigid system that is set up to control most of their activities. With this idea in mind, how do the diverse range of young people at home today suddenly learn to take control of their own learning? Fortunately, there are established quality resources available like Khan Academy that provide access to education at scale and have responded to the emergency with helpful advice. However, the mental and emotional shift for teachers, parents, and students is massive. While educators scramble to set up 'home schools', it is necessary to realise that a stressed mental state is not productive to teach or learn. Educators, parents, and students need to focus first on adjusting to new healthy

routines and environments, which will take time to develop. With little assurance when emergency homeschooling will end at this stage, we should take the time we need for our safety and well being first and foremost.

We are living amidst what is potentially one of the greatest threats in our lifetime to global education, a gigantic educational crisis. As of March 28, 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic is causing more than 1.6 billion children and youth to be out of school in 161 countries. This is close to 80% of the world's enrolled students. We were already experiencing a global learning crisis, as many students were in school, but were not learning the fundamental skills needed for life. The World Bank's "Learning Poverty" indicator – the % of children who cannot read and understand at age 10 – stood at 53% of children in low- and middle-income countries – before the outbreak started. This pandemic has the potential to worsen these outcomes even more if we do not act fast.

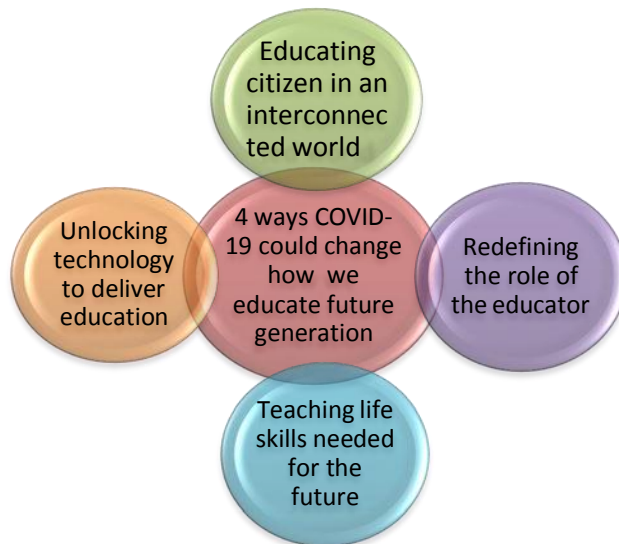
Moreover, most countries have very unequal education systems, and these negative impacts will be felt disproportionately by poor children. When it rains, it pours for them.

#### **IV. Ways COVID-19 could change how we educate future generations:**

In the midst of this COVID-19 crisis, we are sure that fellow educators, like us, are wondering what we need to be preparing our students for in the future. According to a Dell Technologies report, 85% of the jobs in 2030 that Generation Z and Alpha will enter into have not been invented yet. According to this World Economic Forum report, 65% of primary-school children today will be working in job types that do not exist yet.

The COVID-19 crisis may well change our world and our global outlook; it may also teach us about how education needs to change to be able to better prepare our young learners for what the future might hold. These lessons include:

##### **❖ Educating citizens in an interconnected world**



COVID-19 is a pandemic that illustrates how globally interconnected we are – there is no longer such a thing as isolated issues and actions. Successful people in the coming decades need to be able to understand this interrelatedness and navigate across boundaries to leverage their differences and work in a globally collaborative way.

##### **❖ Redefining the role of the educator**

The notion of an educator as the knowledge-holder who imparts wisdom to their pupils is no longer fit for the purpose of a 21st-century education. With students being able to gain access to knowledge, and even learn a technical skill, through a few clicks on their phones, tablets and computers, we will need to redefine the role of the educator in the classroom and lecture theatre. This may mean that the role of educators will need to move towards facilitating young people's development as contributing members of society.

❖ **Teaching life skills needed for the future**

In this ever-changing global environment, young people require resilience and adaptability – skills that are proving to be essential to navigate effectively through this pandemic. Looking into the future, some of the most important skills that employers will be looking for will be creativity, communication and collaboration, alongside empathy and emotional intelligence; and being able to work across demographic lines of differences to harness the power of the collective through effective teamwork.

❖ **Unlocking technology to deliver education**

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in educational institutions across the world being compelled to suddenly harness and utilize the suite of available technological tools to create content for remote learning for students in all sectors. Educators across the world are experiencing new possibilities to do things differently and with greater flexibility resulting in potential benefits in accessibility to education for students across the world. These are new modes of instruction that have previously been largely untapped particularly in the kindergarten to Grade 12 arena.

The following points outline major positive opportunities and significant challenges in education that have emerged since the Covid-19 pandemic started. It goes without saying that this situation is changing and evolving rapidly with new opportunities and challenges everyday contextual to different regions. However, the following points could be ideas we creatively think over in an iterative way to help us all adaptor this new situation as of early April 2020.

**Major Positive Opportunities:**

1. This is an excellent chance for teachers to form much stronger connections with parents. The teacher to parent relationship is said to be especially important for students with disabilities in this emergency (Nadworny, 2020).
2. Teachers have the chance to develop creative initiatives that help to overcome the limitations of being physically separated (e.g. play-based collaborative learning).
3. There has been a lot of evidence that teachers are actively collaborating with one another and at a local level.
4. There are unparalleled opportunities for cooperation, creative solutions, and willingness to learn from others and try new tools (Netolicky, Timmers, & Tuscano, 2020) because educators, parents, and students are sharing similar experiences all at the same time.
5. Many education related companies are offering their tools and solutions for free to help support teachers and students.
6. Our initial reaction may be to replicate the systems we are familiar with (e.g. school time-tables and routines) but digital learning provides the opportunity to learn in new ways that may rethink how we collectively think about the school system. Often the most innovative solutions come from a strong need to overcome a problem (Resnick, 2017) and constraints can fuel motivation to think of creative solutions.
7. Students now have the autonomy and agency to take charge of their learning to explore new ideas and experiences like never before. New interests and passions will emerge for many students and teachers.
8. Founder of Project Fuel, Deepak Ramola, which was selected for Hundred's most recent Global Collection said this time is a good chance to take pause and reflect (Ramola, 2020). Collectively, we have the time and space to imagine what we would like education to look like.

**Major Emerging Challenges:**

1. There are currently few impactful and scalable solutions for regions and countries that have significant problems with a reliable internet connection and access to digital devices. We also have an extremely limited understanding of how educators, students, and parents are currently coping in these places.
2. There is little to no evidence of cooperation between countries when this is an excellent opportunity to do so. In China, teachers quickly adapted to a new national cloud platform to serve resources to students for free (Schleicher, 2020). This readiness in China to use new solutions by teachers enabled the impact of the new situation to be mitigated on learning in schools, which is a strategy that other countries can learn from as they face the rapid spread of the virus (OECD, 2020).
3. Educators have been forced into teaching for a system that is not prepared. As a result, we are far from using best practices for 'online learning' and are scrambling for 'emergency online home-schooling' (Milligan, 2020; Lehmann, 2020b; Guzdial, 2002).
4. Co-operative and collaborative forms of learning are somewhat restricted. This is especially true for hands-on learning like music, theatre, dance, woodwork etc.
5. Intrinsically motivated learners may find they are relatively unaffected in their progress without needing supervision, however, vulnerable groups and those who find themselves struggling to work

independently will likely spend time being lost.

6. There are valid concerns about the increase of screen-time students at different levels will be now exposed to. Educators need to cater for activities that are offline.

7. Whole families are often at home while parents are working. There are practical issues around physical workspaces conducive to different ways of learning.

8. It is not clear the best practices for different age groups in their development in emergency online home-schooling. Moreover, how do we best cater for students with learning difficulties and special needs?

9. There are a plethora of tools and resources out there, however, there is little understanding of solutions that are the most effective and how to best implement them.

## **V. CONCLUSION:**

This new shift in education is far from business as usual and is rapidly evolving each day. In attempting to answer my question in the beginning paragraph - I think it is too early to tell how everyone will settle into these new learning environments and routines over time. There are wonderful opportunities we can utilise in this situation but there are also significant challenges that we require new innovative solutions to.

We fully admit to a major gap in our current understanding of the best solutions for this emergency in areas where there is limited or no internet and access to digital devices. The spread of mobile devices has reached a point of being almost ubiquitous in recent years, which suggests one obvious avenue for new solutions in this situation. Additionally, other older forms of communication like radio, television and SMS have been utilised in effective ways like 'Broad Class Listen and Learn' and Dost who were selected for our most recent Global Collection. However, it isn't yet clear how we can utilise these solutions in the context of this crisis within the timeframe of this report. Our hope is that in the coming months we will be able to gain some deeper understanding of this challenge with the help of our global networks and come back with the solutions that have been seen to be working effectively at scale.

For everyone right now, we need to make everyone's safety our first priority and learn what will enable each of us to establish a state of positive mental wellbeing. When we are free to go back to school, we must use this experience to positively change the way we think of education for the better. However, in the present, we should support and learn from one another in order to get through this pandemic together.

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