Efficacy of online mode of Learning: A Study

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Abstract: **During COVID-19 institutions started online learning throughout the world. This tested the preparedness of universities, colleges and schools to deal with a crisis that required the help of advanced technology including hardware and software to enable effective online teaching. Institutions faced hardships for delivering best content online, engage learners, ensure their presence and conduct online examinations. Thus COVID-19 while being a health hazard to humanity all over the world, has evolved institutions to invest in online learning. Still educationists debate on the efficacy of online mode of education. Parents rue the fact that online classes necessitated handing over smart phones in the hands of children. The radiation has caused certain health hazards. This study explores the perceptions of teachers, students and parents regarding its advantages, limitations and recommendations.**

The traditional Indian education system boasts off Gurukul system where there were schools inculcating education as per traditional-cultural ethos. Even the Gurukuls were not in abundance. They were rather few and far between. The students were sent to the Gurukuls. The instructor was called 'Guru' and the disciples were called 'Shishay'. There was no prescribed curriculum. The Guru would teach basics of culture, language and moral values to students in the beginning which would then proceed towards higher degree of understanding. More than learning the alphabet and fundamental mathematics, the emphasis was on inculcating moral ethical values among disciples. The Guru would give them lessen on basics of humanity, cultural ethos, family values and moral education. Practice of Yoga and physical exercises were performed early morning and in the evening. Preaching of religious texts also formed a part of teaching. Disciples trained in such Gurukuls were found to be brimming with human values. They would have great regard for their Gurus and parents and elders. There was brotherhood all around. Families used to spend quality time together and there was not even an iota of animosity or jealousy among them. Satisfaction used to be writ large at the faces of people. People were God-fearing and family values were always guarded against. Moral-cultural-ethical values used to reign supreme. The Gurus of Gurukul system were regarded in very high esteem.

It was only after the subjugation by the British that modern system of education was introduced. Precisely speaking, Sir Charles Wood's Dispatch is regarded as the father of modern education system in India. He introduced it in 1854. It is considered as the Magna Carta of English Education in India. Clearly the aim of this education system was to spread Western Education system to serve their economic interests in India. Earlier Thomas Babington Macaulay introduced English into education of Indians by deploying government resources in schools and colleges. It was done in 1834. Still the Charter Act of 1813 was the first noted step towards modern education in country by the British. The Act set aside an annual sum of Rs. 1 lakh to be used in educating the Indian subjects. These steps by the British gave a death blow to Gurukul system. After 1854, tradition Indian system of Gurukul started phasing out. Study of English language was made compulsory. New subjects of education were introduced. But one bad thing happened during those days. Teaching in vernacular languages got a severe telling blow. Thus, modern system of education was rolled out with great emphasis on the learning of English and the study of Western subjects of education. This system gave birth to the establishment of schools, colleges and universities. The education used to be imparted in class room settings. It is another matter that class room education has travelled a great distance from blackboards to smart class rooms.

COVID-19 has transformed the concept of learning. There is no doubt that online learning is the epicenter of this transformation. Digital learning has become necessary now-a-days. It has emerged as a necessary source for students and scholars. For most of education institutions in India online teaching was an altogether new way of imparting education. While some accepted it as a challenge others resisted change. Even those who resisted initially had to fall in line. Online learning needed students to have tablets, laptop top, desk top or at least a smart phone. Most of the parents had no option but to arrange a Smartphone for their school or college going children. Just 2-3 years ago, teachers would punish those students who dared to operate Smartphone while attending the class. It was regarded as an act of gross indiscipline. Smart phones used to be confiscated in such cases. Even parents would not allow their school going children to have a Smartphone. But all of a sudden the COVID-19 spread. Schools, colleges and universities were closed. Lock downs were imposed all round the world. The existence of humanity was at stake. This scenario gave birth to an altogether novel way of learning. As there were no signs of respite so the concept of online learning took birth. It needs to be remembered that online learning was the fall out of a precarious situation when wearing of masks and physical distancing was a necessity. Though there may be unending debate about the efficacy of online classes and online modes of learning and teaching but there lies a consensus that educational institutions were left with no other option but to go for online classes.

The major advantage of on-line classes is noted as easy accessibility. Teacher takes class by way of a number of applications available for this purpose. Students may attend the classes virtually from anywhere. They may use any device having internet connectivity. Hence remote learning is ensured. Teacher may make use of a variety of teaching aids like ppt for providing

education in a better way. It is flexible and budget friendly. But the biggest disadvantage is that it has raised doubts on academic integrity. In fact, online learning systems are web-based software for dissemination of education to a number of students simultaneously. It involves implementation of ICT advancements to direct, design and deliver learning content and to facilitate two-way communication between the teacher and his students. Institutions used Google meet, Zoom, Skype, WebEx, Adobe connect Edmondo and Moodle as learning management systems. However in India Google meet and Zoom were the most commonly used applications for online learning. Students could easily and conveniently access teachers. The teachers also faced little difficulty to take classes in online mode. Institutions organized workshops in order to apprise and train the faculty about the ways and means of conducting online classes. It ensured remote learning. It eased administrative tasks such as recording lectures and taking attendance. Curricular and extracurricular activities were also conducted through online mode only. So much so that university youth festivals were also organized in online mode which puts a big question mark on the effectiveness of online mode of education.

It is equally true that online teaching-learning has its own drawbacks. Holding practical especially for engineering, medical and science students was rather difficult. It was also difficult for the teacher to ensure that students actually listen to him. For students it was difficult to make notes. Moreover, poor internet connectivity made it difficult to ensure that the students learn without any difficulty. Many a times there were voice interruptions. Students felt that intensity of learning was missing in online mode of education. Teachers were also unable to access students' understanding during such teaching. It is also a fact that continuous exposure to the radiation emitted from Smartphone had its own share of health hazards. Irritation in the eyes, giddiness, headache and diminishing eye sight were some of very common complaints of students during those days. Another disadvantage included technical glitches. Poor internet issues arise many times during online classes. Having stable internet connectivity is a big problem in small towns and villages. Adolescents found it hard to resist the temptation for social media. It is a fact that the social media applications witnessed unprecedented spurt in social media users during 2020-21. It dented the value of teachers in the minds of students who came to regard the information available at internet as the most authentic source of information and education. Holding online examination might have been the compulsion of educational institutions but it increased the incidents of using unfair means. Cheating in examinations increased manifold. A survey report came with the observation that students have actually relearned whatever they had learned earlier. Actually, students have become weaker in studies. They used Smartphone more for entertainment and gaming than for educational purposes. Their IQ levels have actually gone down. It underlines the fact that online classes have served little purpose. Though online classes are still in vogue in many educational institutions but there can be no doubt that they have deteriorated the educational standards by a few notches.

Class room teaching or off-line classes are regarded as the backbone of education system. Though the fear of rod has gone but the teacher in actual class room set up is better placed to know which students has understood a particular lesson and which student doesn't. He may repast the same lesson time and again. He can help out weaker students by way of taking remedial classes. He can give extra attention to comparatively weaker students. Surprise tests can be conducted under the vigilant eyes of class teacher. There is less or no scope of proxy in actual class room set up. Punctuality and discipline can be ensured to a great extent. Students are fully attentive towards class only and there is less distraction. Online classes have more possibilities of distraction where students may surf on other online platforms or pay less attention in class.

Teachers inculcate moral-ethical values in a better way in off line mode of education which is out of question in online learning. Human values can also be inculcated and disseminated in actual class room teaching situation in a much better and effective way. Teacher can ensure that students pay proper attention to the lesson being taught and remain attentive all the time. Curricular and extracurricular actives can be meaningfully held in off line mode. In the universities, scholars can make use of library sources in a much better way. Of course books are available in pdf format also. They can be downloaded. But readability of such books is always in question among the students belonging to traditional Indian society. They may read research journals. They are at liberty to visit and consult their supervisors as and when required. It is true that supervisors are just a call away from their scholars in this era of technical revolution but it has to be confessed that doubts get cleared and queries get pacified in face-to-face situation in much better and effective way. Then in case of students studying sciences, engineering and medical science, practical are of utmost importance. Practical cannot be conducted in online mode of learning. In order to conduct practical students need to visit actual laboratories on regular basis. Clinical tests cannot be done in online mode. As ignorant doctors, engineers and scientists can take you nowhere so there is a justifiable need of conducting practical in actual labs. Just showing those videos of practical will not serve any purpose. Moreover, no teaching can ever replace actual class room teaching. Has the replacement been possible, there would have been no need for the erecting of educational institutes and employing so many teachers. Governments, all over the world, spend billions of dollars on imparting quality education. One must admit that quality education is just not possible through either distance mode or online mode of education.

Conclusion:
Intellectuals all over the world in the post COVID scenario debate over the issue of the efficacy of online learning. Undoubtedly both online and off line modes of learning have their respective advantages and limitations. There is always the possibility of less interaction between the student and the teacher in online mode of learning which gets doubled when the issues of control on the class and punctuality and disciple are taken into consideration. Students pay more attention and focus more on studies in off line mode. There is more interaction between students and teachers. Communication is easier, smoother and accessible in off line teaching Co-curricular activities can be organized in a better way in off line mode which gives ample opportunities to all the students to participate. Practical can be held in off line mode in more meaningfully. Online mode of education is good when there

is no other option but it must be desisted from at the cost of off line learning because off line learning is the backbone of education system.

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