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TEACHING/LEARNING IN THE POST-PANDEMIC SCENARIO

by

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ABSTRACT

Higher Education is rampantly evolving into a complex and diversified system as it endeavors to cater to the demands and needs of the youth, the employers and the society at large. In line with the Sustainable Development Goals, the Higher Educational Institutions strive towards creating healthy and inclusive global communities through quality teaching making Teaching/Learning prime domain that draws immense attention from all quarters. The quality of teaching has also hogged international limelight as its focusses on student learning outcomes.

During the pandemic, Higher Education witnessed an unrivalled use of technology in the Teaching/Learning process roping in consistent and ever-growing demands of change. Teachers who shuttled between traditional and flipped classrooms before the pandemic were robbed of their choice and were initially impelled to teach only through online. All educators had to combat with challenges such as adapting to new circumstances, policies, and governance. Nevertheless, it is quite clear and evident that there is no "turning back" entirely to the pre-pandemic teaching strategies. At the same time, there is also a better comprehension of the remote learning ineffective and challenges. Not just that, the pandemic that plagued the globe has taught valuable lessons regarding teaching/learning strategies and student engagement. This paper categorizes them as, the Lessons learnt by the Higher Educational Institutions, the Teachers and the Students and stresses upon the need to switch over to a hybridized mode of teaching/learning.

Keywords: Teaching, Learning, Post Pandemic, Higher Education, SDG

Introduction:

Higher Education is rampantly evolving into a complex and diversified system as it endeavors to cater to the demands and needs of the youth, the employers, and the society at large. In line with the Sustainable Development Goals, the Higher Educational Institutions strive towards creating healthy and inclusive global communities through quality teaching

making Teaching/Learning prime domain that draws immense attention from all quarters. The quality of teaching has also hogged international limelight as it focusses on student learning outcomes. Learning in Higher Education involves both formal and informal students' experiences. Formal Teaching/Learning experiences are limited to the four walls of a classroom, wherein the students engage in activities modelled on a teacher's framework or that of the others in an institution. Contrarily, informal learning is that which focusses on the rest of the other students' learning outcomes at a Higher Educational Institution.

Presently, Teaching/Learning has evolved into a major concern of the educationists at the Global level. With mounting pressure on the Higher Educational Institutions by the noted national and transnational Accreditation and ranking bodies and with the rising demands of the employers at all levels, the Higher Education is at the crossroads of change. Besides, due to the Covid-19 pandemic there is a paradigm shift in the mode of Teaching/Learning at the Higher Educational Institutions. Traditional Teaching/Learning modes were replaced completely by Online Teaching pedagogy, unlike the partial blend of technology in the pre-pandemic times.

During the pandemic, Higher Education witnessed an unrivalled use of technology in the Teaching/Learning process roping in consistent and ever-growing demands of change. Teachers had to equip themselves with all the required technical skills to teach, facilitate fun-filled learning, conduct online tests and exams and evaluate the same. In-person Teaching/Learning became obsolete creating newer avenues. Eventually, teachers had to be very creative, innovative and flexible to make the mute screens before them interactive. They were distanced from their students physically and psychologically. Further, the teachers had to acquire better time management skills to give the students their best and to build up a good rapport with them within the limited time at their disposal. Gradually, remote Teaching/Learning became the order of the day.

Teachers who shuttled between traditional and flipped classrooms before the pandemic were robbed of their choice and were initially impelled to teach only through online. However, after getting a grip of the technology, certain teachers introduced a less percentage of flipped classrooms asking their students to read and review the course material before they really taught them, unlike what they did in the traditional classroom. The pandemic wrought in a three-pronged change in Higher Education:

- ❖ The role of teachers
- ❖ The concept of a classroom
- ❖ The role of students

All educators had to combat with challenges such as adapting to new circumstances, policies and governance. Newer Teaching/ Learning strategies have become the in-thing at the Higher Educational Institutions set against the post-Pandemic scenario. The place of Remote Learning in Higher Education is gradually being occupied by physical classrooms – a sign of positive change in terms of Teacher- Student relationship. Nevertheless, it is quite clear and evident that there is no "turning back" entirely to the pre-pandemic teaching strategies. At the same time, there is also a better comprehension of the remote learning ineffectiveness and challenges. Not just that, the pandemic that plagued the globe has taught valuable lessons regarding teaching/learning strategies and student engagement. They can be categorized as,

- ❖ Lessons learnt by the Higher Educational Institutions
- ❖ Lessons learnt by the Teachers
- ❖ Lessons learnt by the students

The pandemic has unfolded varied levels of inefficiencies in teachers and their teaching pedagogy, inequalities in terms of students' access to knowledge, their learning patterns and their lack of essentials such as electronic gadgets and facilities for a hassle-free digital education. This shocking revelation should be borne in mind while engaging in the post-Pandemic scenario.

LESSONS LEARNT BY THE HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The Higher Educational Institutions were hit incredibly hard by the pandemic. Conscious efforts had to be taken by the Higher Educational Institutions to recognise the psychological conflicts faced by the faculty and students and help them battle them with ease. Johnson, N et al in their book ***Online Learning*** states "Administration departments of universities and HEIs which played a vital role in transition to digital pedagogy also encountered challenges in implementing procedures and policies, conducting and supporting online classes, monitoring examinations, and managing timely evaluation and results." (Johnson 20). He further explains that in facilitating the mode switching the administrators had to be more concentrated on inclusive learning and provide equity in learning opportunities to all the students.

The institutions had to encounter unprepared challenges such as decline in the students' enrolment due to financial crisis that rocked the families, unexpected death of close family members or loss of interest in learning. Therefore, it became mandatory for the Higher Education Institutions to support their students financially and emotionally. As a matter of fact, the rate of drop outs also kept increasing. Besides, tackling the students and staff who were inseparably glued to their mobiles also proved to be a great challenge. Albeit these, the Higher Educational Institutions have learnt the following lessons:

- Enhanced focus on their vision and mission
- Enriched attention to institutional standings
- Increased efforts to build their public role
- Creating economic, entrepreneurial and employment opportunities for the needy in the neighbouring communities
- More institutional and national efforts to be put in stabilisation of enrolment
- Fostering national and international collaborations catering to the diversified needs of the students
- Equitable access to education and educational facilities
- Stabilising the institutional finances
- Expanding of international learning experiences through virtual mobility
- Bracing up for the unprecedented situations to sustain academic continuity
- Refining and strengthening counselling and mentoring of students
- Promoting "Andragogy" (a term introduced by Malcolm Knowles in 1978) and "Heutagogy" (a term introduced by Stewart Hase and Chris Kenyon in 2000) in order to make the students life-long learners
- Readiness for change and the ability to adapt to it
- Responding to the social, emotional, wellness needs of the faculty and students

LESSONS LEARNT BY THE TEACHERS

The role of the teachers in the post-pandemic era has been redefined. The disruptive education was a bold and painful blow to many teachers. D. Chandrasekharam in his article states that in the new mode of education "the strength lies in the teachers an institute nurtures. Faculty need to change their mundane teaching methods and adapt to evolving technology-centered teaching. The faculty should establish themselves as "competent" individuals who can deliver what the students expect" (Times of India). He adds that faculty must show their

involvement in teaching so as to make the students learn the new mode of Teaching as well as the subject.

Jones and Kessler in their article assert that the shifting between the new methods of teaching has altered the traditionally held identity of a teacher. They also state that "teacher identity is socially constructed (involving institutions, discourses, relationships), impacted by discourses of power and knowledge (communicating what teachers should be and should do), connected to and enacted via emotions (which communicate import), dynamic (in constant negotiation with aforementioned factors), and reflective yet forward-thinking. These elements of teacher identity are heavily implicated by the shifting sands of the COVID-19 pandemic." (Jones and Kessler 6). With the roles altered and changes in teacher identity, here are some of the lessons that the teachers have learnt to cope with the mode switching in the post-Pandemic period:

- Create an influential, impactful, and impressive presence in the class
- Think differently and make learning interesting and easy
- Upskilling oneself at regular intervals to impart effective and quality education
- Continued exploration of newer and need-based teaching methodologies
- Stepping out of the comfort zone to willingly embrace challenges for a better tomorrow
- Perceive the course content and teaching methodology afresh
- Be connected with students
- Comprehending the need and significance of communicating with clarity
- Empathising with students' inabilities and incompetencies
- Adopting Hybridised mode of teaching by integrating technology
- Engaging students in a more meaningful and participative manner
- Ensuring that all the students have what they need for a better learning experience
- Eclectic blending of face-to-face and online learning

The redefined roles of a teacher in the twenty-first century, especially in the post-pandemic period, make the teachers to not only be teachers of a particular discipline but as teacher of arts, humanities, science and technology. K. B. Powar, Former Secretary General of Association of Indian Universities and Former Vice- Chancellor of Shivaji University, in his book proposes that "... the education process will, therefore, have to aim at training people in the science (or art) of processing information and transforming it into knowledge that promotes effective decision-making and its implementation." (Powar 77). It is observed

that the students at Higher Educational Institutions have been exposed to a massive ocean of information and the basic purpose of a teacher is to make the students aware of which information to be looked at.

Students
The students who got used to e-learning, at one point became too comfortable with it. They stepped into the physical classes with immense reluctance and apprehensions. Majority of them seemed to have lost interest in learning. Eventually, they were least motivated, creative, attentive, desirous and could barely comprehend a concept. In a survey conducted by REDS about the school students, Sabine Meinck et al., opine that during the pandemic "... in most countries, students recieved help from their parents or teachers on learning topics during disruption. Nonetheless, there were still a significant percentage of students who, at least sometimes had no one at all available who could help them with their schoolwork" (Meinck xviii). The students at the Higher Educational Institutions were even more at the loss as they had to primarily rely on their teachers at colleges/universities. These students have learnt several lessons from their loss such as to,

- Cultivate self-confidence, tolerance, adaptability, resilience, interdependence to learn effectively
- Adopt "Andragogy" (a term introduced by Malcolm Knowles in 1978) to conscious and reflective learning. Espouse "Heutagogy" so that they are able to learn on their own (self-learning)
- Be ready for change and the ability to respond to it positively
- Invest their time in learning using new technologies
- Try to get interested in using new digital tools for doing assignments and projects
- Enable their creativity in decoding the technologies used in flipped or online classrooms
- Learn, re-learn and produce learning materials for themselves

The study of the effects of mode switching during the pre- pandemic, pandemic and post- pandemic scenarios has revealed that in the fast-growing technological world, mode switching according to the latest updates is inevitable. The greater responsibility of putting technology to optimal use to teach the students of the current world lies in the hands of the teachers. In incorporating effective tools in mode switching and making the students learn, teachers must take precedence from their lessons learnt in the pandemic and immediate post-pandemic scenarios. As Douglas Bourn says "... if change is seen in terms of changes in

attitude and outlook...then education clearly has a central role to play. If education is seen more than the imparting of information and knowledge acquisition and included forms of internalization by the learners in terms of their thinking and views on the wider world, then it clearly has a transformative role" (Bourn 6). In the attainment of the fullest benefits of new modes of student-centric Teaching/Learning, the institutions and the teachers must work hand-in-hand in their march towards the common goal of making quality higher education a key to attain the Sustainable Developmental Goals.

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