

Pandemic and Lockdown: Issues and Challenges – A study on sudden transformation of the Indian education system

Uma Devi Nandan

Keshav Memorial Institute of Commerce and Sciences, Hyderabad – 500029

ABSTRACT

‘Expect the unexpected’, is the new norm in today’s world. The sudden shift to the new normal is a challenge combined with a strong will, a fighting spirit, and uneasy adjustments. Like any other stream of life, education also suffered a sudden paradigm shift. The happy interaction and bright looks of the students and teachers are now a dream. The new normal shifted to students and teachers adopting ICT tools for continuing their teaching-learning process. Albeit the difficulty learning in ICT mode is already introduced to the students of the digital era as part of blended learning. However, the sudden shift to online learning posed challenges of connectivity, interaction, and the personal touch of the conventional classroom interaction between teachers and students, and student-to-student interaction. As the days passed by with no immediate cure for the pandemic, in spite of the vaccination drive: the education sector took a strong beating. Over 285 million young minds have faced the serious issue of a break in their education, the structure of learning and assessment has undergone a sudden shift from the traditional chalk-talk method. The change in teaching strategies has affected the students of all sections of society. Only students with a good financial background and urban background have adapted to the change with ease. The rest of the students, that is the urban poor and the rural students have seriously missed classes. It has directly affected the student’s future and the economic status of our country. This paper tried to study and analyze the issues and problems faced by students from various backgrounds and how they have tried to cope up with the challenge of achieving normalcy.

Received: Nov 14, 2022 | **Accepted:** Dec 12, 2022 | **Published:** Jan 5, 2023

Keywords: Pandemic, Net connectivity, ICT tools, chalk and talk method, blended learning.

Citation: Uma Devi Nandan (2023) Pandemic and Lockdown: Issues and Challenges – A study on sudden transformation of the Indian education system. KMICS Journal of Language Studies 1(1): 1-14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62011/kmicsjls.2023.1.1.3>

Competing interests: The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

Copyright: © 2023 Uma Devi Nandan. This is an open-access article. The use, distribution, and reproduction of this article in any medium is unrestricted, provided the original author and source are cited.

INTRODUCTION

“The secret of change is to focus all of our energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new” – Socrates. The covid-19 pandemic has thrown the whole world out of gear. This situation caused the population of the world to rethink, unlearn and relearn various strategies for existence. Like all other sectors of society, the system of education suffered due to the pandemic. The important backbone of nation-building was thrown a challenge at its face. Initial shock gave place to new thinking and soon adaptive strategies came into place. The new normal of online teaching soon became the beacon of hope to revive the lost academic schedules. Laptops, Smartphones, and various ICT tools like Google Meet, Webex, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Near Pod, etc. have now replaced the traditional Chalk-Talk method. Teachers soon started becoming learners to try and relearn the new techniques of reaching the students in the virtual mode, for teachers who have never had the experience of online teaching, this is perhaps ‘the most daunting task’ they have ever experimented with in their professional lives (Ko and Rossen 2010: 12). The virtual Learning Environment helped the teachers to learn strategies on conducting online classes, quizzes and taking of feedback from the stakeholders. Teachers now optimized their strategies of online teaching. The decision of the software giants to open up the market for ICT tools most of which are available for free and at a lesser cost made the task of teachers lighter. The process of virtual learning both by the students and the teachers started. Interestingly the interaction of the students with the teachers became mutual. Each started learning to master the tools from one other.

BENEFITS OF ONLINE EDUCATION:

The education system in the country has changed drastically with the advent of technology and its use in the classroom and outside the classroom. Now students can access their lessons in their own

pace and time to complete courses. A smartphone with the internet is making this possible. Audio-visual aids make learning comfortable for students. This is enabling the students to master the subject easily. Social media is a very good interactive tool for the exchange of ideas and information. Industry players penetrating the education system are enabling wider reach to students of rural and urban backgrounds alike at an affordable rate and wide range of choice. Students can now learn from experts in their respective fields. Access to education for all sections of society will be increasing the literature in our country.

PROBLEM OF STUDY:

Every mode of teaching has its own pros and cons even the paradigm shifts from the physical classroom to the virtual classroom experienced many impediments in proper outreach to the students. The impediments are the economic capability of the students, rural and urban divide, net connectivity, bandwidth, access to devices, peaceful environment, lack of control in virtual class etc. The beginning of the online classes saw the teachers facing problems of interacting with the students through their content and the digital divide. A major problem noticed is the loss of interest in students as their concentration levels suffer. Some factors are: The content of the presentation is not well understood as there is no physical atmosphere. In order to create interest in the class the content taught should be designed in such a way that the interest of the learner will shift from acquiring mere marks to understanding the subject. To design such content teachers, need to acquire various tools and also must invest considerable time. Acquiring tools involves monetary constraints and the time to master them. Given the sudden shift, it is difficult to find both money and time. The mental makeup of the teachers also takes time to change their attitude toward teaching in a conventional setting to the virtual mode. The problem of monitoring the student in the online mode due to technical difficulties is also one of the problems. Online learning involves students' and teachers' access to various devices and applications along with the proper supply of Electricity.

MODE OF COLLECTION OF DATA

The data comprised of primary and secondary. Primary data was obtained from students through google forms. Secondary data was of (1) the 'Telephone Regulatory Authority of India', (2) Data of 'Internet Penetration in the States of India from 'HT' Government website, and (3) NSO, which were published in Newspaper dailies

To understand these problems and challenges information of data from government websites of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, surveys from various agencies, media reports, and data from students across all streams are collected. Students were given feedback forms for the collection of their opinions. The resultant data is analyzed to arrive at a conclusion.

RESULTS

Analysis of the data

Analysis of the problems one by one is done in this section along with a discussion of the problem.

The Digital Divide: In spite of considerable progress in communication technology, the economics of possession of various gadgets and the knowledge to use them by all the citizens across the country is still a dream. According to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), the number of subscribers to the Internet is 719 million during the period of lockdown. Out of which wireless connections amount to 272 million. It means mobiles can be useful for listening to online classes. However, they are not the ideal medium for taking online exams or writing long assignments. One mobile phone of a parent cannot be shared by two siblings at the same time this is also a problem of access. 77.7% of students in India in the age group of 5-35 do not know how to use computers. Lack of access to the Internet with the fall in income levels during the Covid crisis is also the culprit for the digital divide. According to the TOI* calculations based on unit level data NSS 75th round, 55% of students among the top 20% of households by monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) knew how to use a computer and internet while these proportions were only 9% and 10% among the bottom 20%.

As per the data of the 'Telephone Regulatory Authority of India' during the lockdown period, the percentage of households with computer and internet facilities in different states are:

- Only 8% of all households with members aged between five and 24 have both a computer and an internet connection.
- The digital divide is evident across class, gender, region, or place of residence.
- Among the poorest 20% of households, only 2.7% have access to a computer and 8.9% to internet facilities.
- In the case of the top 20% of households, the proportions are 27.6% and 50.5%.

- A peaceful environment and a separate room to listen to an online class is a luxury many cannot afford.

Net connectivity: From the report of a site called ‘Speed Test’ the analysis of the net connectivity during COVID-19 times tracked a major problem in the connectivity of the internet. Net users increased manifold; the result is net congestion. The impact on the speed of fixed lines as of April 15th, 2020 showed a decline of 6%. The speed of mobile phones fell to 18%. This comparison is made with the data of 2nd March 2020 just before the lockdown. As per the report, the current broadband speed is 36.17mbps and the mobile download speed is 9.67mbps. This data shows the problems faced by the urban and specifically rural students who have very little access to internet connectivity due lack of sufficient cell towers and also the ratio of mobile phone users to the number of students in the family.

According to the data of Et Government Internet penetration in India is only 36%. Delhi stands at the highest percentage with 69%, followed by 49% in J&K, Haryana, HP & Punjab. In the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, it is 31%. Lowest being Odisha and Jharkhand with 25% and 26% respectively. This shows the variation in the capacity of Internet connectivity and its use. There is much to be done in this area where even the poor can afford to get internet access to let their children study online.

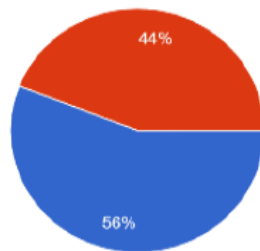
ANALYSIS OF FEEDBACK COLLECTED FROM STUDENTS.

A feedback form on the Online classes taken from the second year and Final year students at the Undergraduate level across Commerce and Science Streams received 193 responses out of a total strength of 480 students. The response to the feedback stepwise is as follows:

1. To the question of how they liked their online classes 56% of the students responded positively and the 44% responded negatively (Fig1). The positive response shown by the students shows their adjustment of their mindset temporarily to the concept of online classes.

Fig1: Students interest in online classes

Did you like your online classes
193 responses

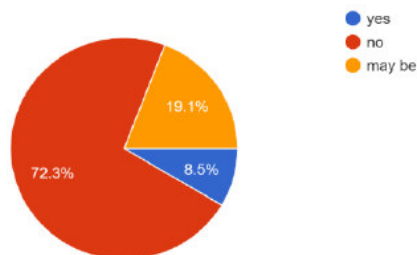


- Yes – likeness to online classes
- No- Not interested in online classes.

2. The response to the next question of their likeness for the whole course to be taught online an overwhelming 72.3% responded negatively this shows that the above 56% positive response is in the view of students a temporary arrangement only. They expect the classes to be taken in the traditional method of chalk and talk.

Fig No:2 Teaching the whole course in Online mode

Do you want your whole course taught online without visiting the college?
188 responses



Yes- They want to listen to the whole course online

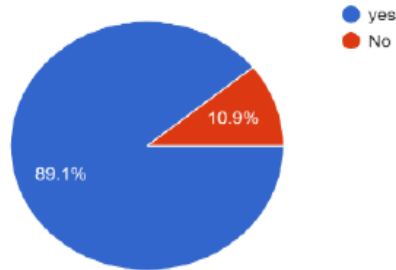
No- Not interested to listen the whole course online

May be- They are undecided.

3. Interaction with teachers and students is very important for the students to clear their doubts and express their thoughts on the subject. In the physical classes, this is part and parcel of the teaching process. Keeping this in view to the question of missing personal interaction with the teachers 89.1% of the students felt the need for personal interaction in the learning process while 10.9% of the students felt they do not miss the interaction. It might be that they are satisfied with online interaction.

Fig No:3 Personal Interaction with the Teachers

Do you miss personal interaction with your teachers
193 responses



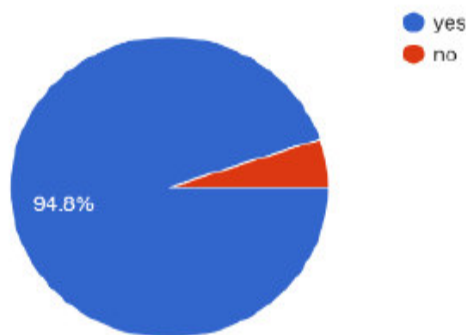
Yes- They miss personal interaction with the teachers

No- They don't miss the interaction with the teachers

4. Students and teachers are accustomed to the classroom atmosphere where the students sit in a formal atmosphere and the teacher present physically delivers the lecture. Eye contact and the gestures made by the students and teachers is the non-verbal communication taking place in the classroom. It is said learning and understanding take place more through non-verbal communication rather than vocal communication. That gap is clearly seen in the response of the students that 94.8% of the students miss their classroom atmosphere. However, even in online mode visuals of students and teachers can be seen but the personal touch is lacking.

Fig No: 4 Classroom and its atmosphere

Do you miss your class room and its atmosphere
193 responses



Yes- They miss the classroom atmosphere

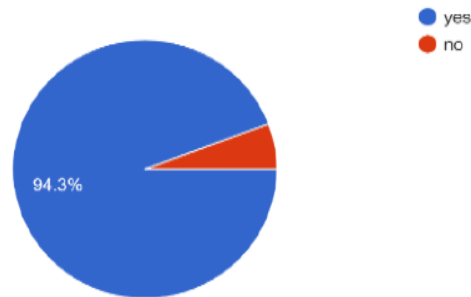
No- They don't miss the classroom atmosphere

5. In continuation with the non-verbal communication, the verbal communication of the students is at multiple levels- among their friends, classmates, and college mates is a source of more information (the Grapevine) which serves to build camaraderie among them. It gives a sense of belonging and a happy feeling. Such interaction is lost in the online classroom leaving them lonely

with an empty feeling. Obviously, the response of the students missing the interaction with their classmates is 94.3%.

Fig No:5 Interaction with classmates in the classroom

Do you miss the interaction with your classmates in the physical class
193 responses



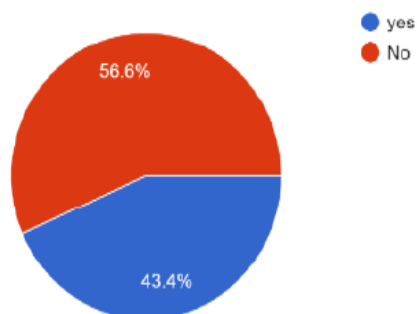
Yes- They miss the interaction with the classmates

No- They don't miss the interaction with their classmates

6. Recognizing this lack of physical interaction, a question was posed if they prefer a combination of both online and Physical classes. The response was negative where only 43.4% were in favor of the combination. This shows a strong sense of alienation in the students as they miss their physical classes. The hope that their classes will be restored soon has made them accept the online platform with patience and perseverance; mixed with lot of hope for normalcy. My opinion is confirmed with the next response posed in the feedback.

Fig No: 6 Mix of online and regular classes

Will you prefer a mix of online classes and Regular classes
189 responses



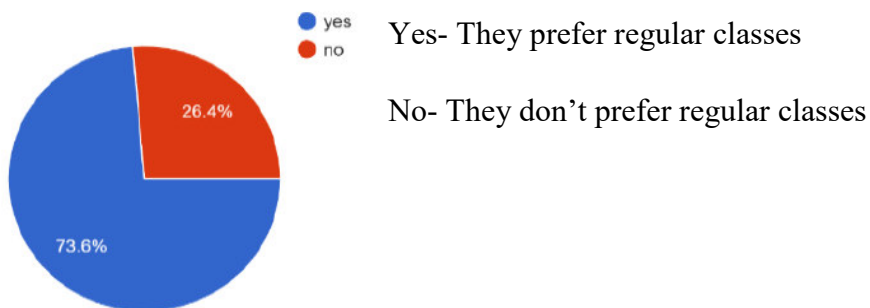
Yes- They prefer a mix of online and regular classes.

Yes- They don't prefer a mix of online and regular classes.

7. The overwhelming response for the preference to the regular classes shows that the students are eagerly waiting for their classes to begin hoping that the online mode is an adaptive and temporary measure rather than a regular mode of teaching. The forbearance they are showing is the result of the expectation of normalcy returning back soon.

Fig No: 7 preference to only regular classes

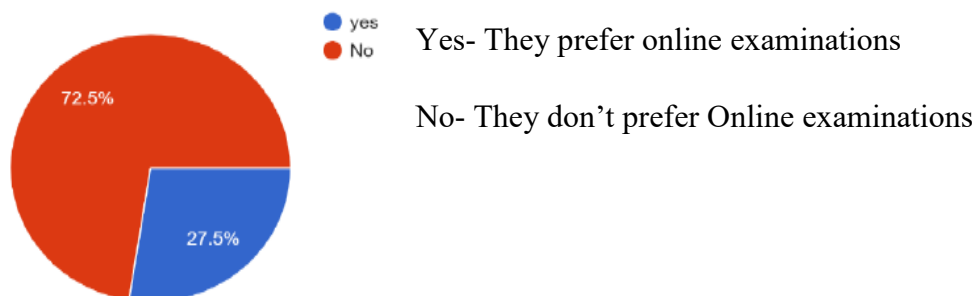
Do you prefer only regular classes
193 responses



8. Examinations are part and part of a student's life. They can be their Monthly assignments, Slip Tests, or their Regular Annual Examinations. Assessing the students periodically at various periods of time in various stages is very important. It helps the teacher to know the progress made by the students and awarding of final grades for promotion to their next classes. Students who are now learning in the new normal can expect an online examination of their skills at this juncture. However, the response of the students to the preference for the online exam was very negative. 72.5% wanted Physical Examinations in the regular mode rather than an online examination. This shows clearly that they are not completely accepting the new normal; where they are expected to give their exam in online mode. They are not mentally prepared for this kind of evaluation; the next response gives a clear idea about it.

Fig No:8 Preference for online examinations

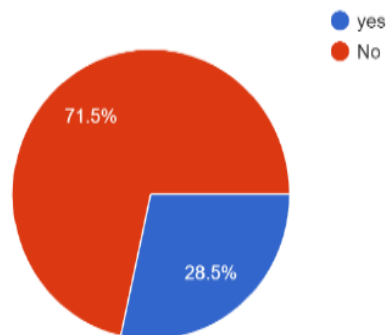
Do you prefer your examinations to be online
193 responses



9. The student's response to the adaptation of two modes of examinations (online and Physical) saw an overwhelmingly negative response of 71.5%. It means surely the students need mentoring in this aspect of adaptability.

Fig No:9 preference for both online and regular exam

Do you prefer a mix of online exam and Regular Exam
193 responses



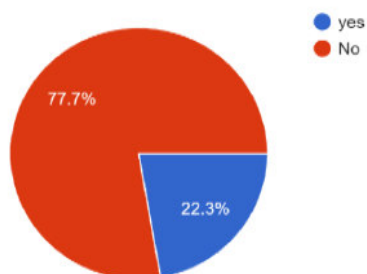
Yes- They prefer a mix of online and regular exams

No- They don't prefer a mix of online and regular classes

10. There is one more aspect to it that they have to possess sufficient resources to buy and use various gadgets for their own specific use. Most of the families as discussed earlier do not have the wherewithal to afford their own computer or a mobile phone/Tablet for their exclusive use. Most of the students share the gadgets with their Parents or siblings. The economic capability of the parents and the students is an important factor in the negativity shown by the students. 77% of the students responded in negatively about their inability to buy and use the necessary gadgets needed for online classes.

Fig No:10 Buying and Using necessary gadgets for online classes

Do you believe that all students can buy and use necessary gadgets for online classes
193 responses



yes – They cannot buy necessary gadgets for online classes.

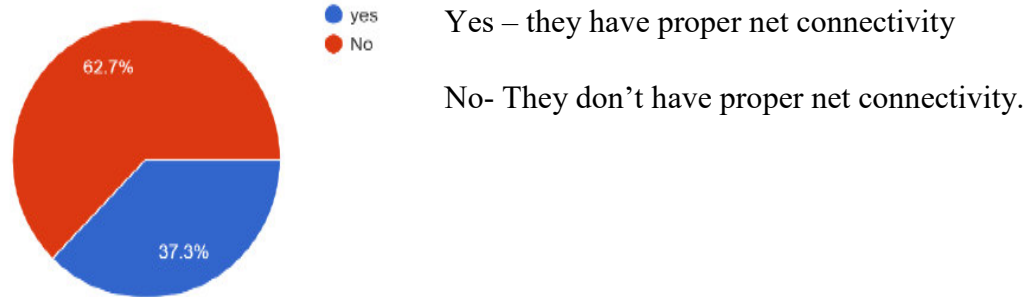
No- They can buy the necessary gadgets for online classes.

11. Relating to the same issue, the net connectivity required for successful outreach by students and teachers for the successful conduct of classes and examinations is an important issue. We can say that the negative response shown by the students is reflecting the grievous technical and economic problem in the country over the provision of such facilities needed for connectivity. Drastic measures should be taken to ensure that uninterrupted net connectivity is available. It

should be provided at an affordable cost to all the stakeholders for the smooth functioning of classes.

Fig No: 11 Proper net connectivity for online classes

Is there proper net connectivity for your online classes
193 responses

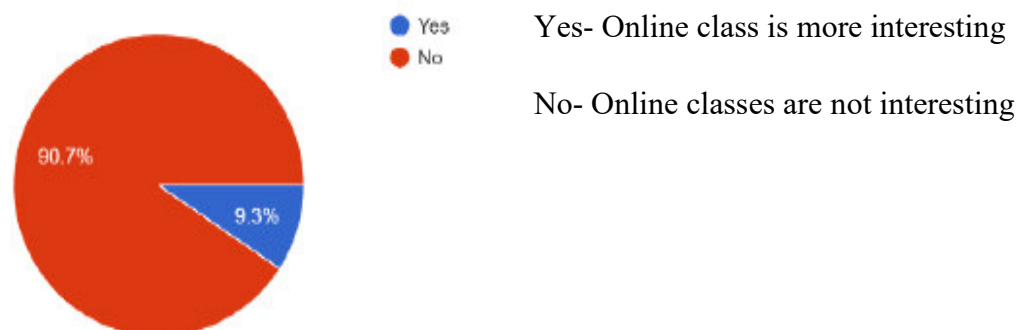


12. To the question of generating interest in the students for online classes, is an uphill task for the teacher indeed. The overwhelming response of 90.7% in the negative shows that teachers were unable to completely impress their students through online education. The reasons may be manifold. One of the reasons may be the sudden shift to the online mode. Even the teachers were not fully equipped and mentally prepared for this mode of teaching. They are new to this mode as previously online communication is very restricted. Teachers were then using online mode in a limited manner in a blended classroom, the sudden shift and the instability around is the major factor. As students and teachers are affected by the Pandemic directly and indirectly. The psychological stress created by the Pandemic is relatively more both in adults and children alike. Students and teachers are trying to accustom themselves to the new normal. Therefore, the negativity. Soon when the system comes into place all the stakeholders will learn to adjust to the online mode.

Fig No: 12 Online classes are more interesting than regular classes

Is your online class more interesting than your regular class

193 responses



13. The last question posed to them was to give their suggestions. Suggestions show that the students understand that this is the only way for now. They are slowly getting accustomed to the new normal. However, there are many suggestions regarding the circulation of teaching material, clarification of doubts, presentation, technical difficulties, etc. To sum up the responses I give you an example of what a few students posted as a response to a question in Google Forms:

Table No: 1 Response to suggestions: (taken from online feedback through Google Forms)

Response 1. Online classes are good but sometimes we are unable to attend class on time because of network problem. Students staying in village can't attend the class interactively due to these net issues.

Response 2. online classes are not interactive as regular classes.

Response 3. Respected Faculty are giving their best in explanation, no problem in explanation and cooperating with us if any network issue occurs.

Response 4. In my view, in this pandemic time, if maximum students can afford device to attend class (at least mobile) then it is better to adjust classes online for some days, rather than going to college and facing health problems. If the situation becomes somewhat better then we can come to college.

CONCLUSION

The study of the challenges and issues during the lockdown has brought many insights into the strategies that are adopted for coping with the new normal. At the same time, it also brought to light certain issues to be addressed.

The first challenge of outreach to the maximum number of students continuously in a comfortable manner is partly reached. The rest who are left out due to net connectivity and other issues like health need to be addressed. Here, all the stakeholders and the proactive governments must try to ensure good outreach through proper planning and development of infrastructure that is affordable and economical.

The Second challenge is to teach the subject effectively by the teachers in online mode. Most of it is achieved through the use of various gadgets and software available in the market. Still, some things need to be sorted out like economic feasibility and technological know-how for the students and the teachers.

The third challenge of disciplining yourself in the online class where complete monitoring of the class by the teacher is not possible. Self-motivation is the best way to overcome this challenge, As seen in the response students understood the difficulty and are cooperating with the teachers. There is a mutual understanding of the difficulties and adaptive measures are used successfully.

The Last challenge and also the major challenge is the missing of personal contact and interaction at various levels between students and teachers. This is something that cannot be satisfied but strategies can be put into place where even that is possible with all the norms of the pandemic being observed.

To conclude I would like to say that the Pandemic situation has come to us like a blessing in disguise. It is an opportunity that revealed the lacunae in planning, designing, and execution of various courses. It also showed us the outreach of education to all the corners of our country irrespective of the rich and poor divide and urban and rural divide. Now, this opportunity must not be thrown away by all the stakeholders. The psychological makeup of the stakeholders must also be changed from negativity and apprehension to a positive mindset. All stakeholders must embrace change and adapt themselves. It may take time but it is achievable. The lacunae of the digital divide and economic constraints, and syllabus design can all be discussed with the present data available and steps must be taken in the right direction for making India literate.

REFERENCES

Journals

1. Impact of Online Education in Indian Zahoor Ahmad Lone Assistant Professor Department of Computer Science Government Degree College Kulgam, Kashmir, India International Journal of Engineering Science and Computing, July 2017 13950 <http://ijesc.org/>

2. Martin, A. (2020). How to optimize online learning in the age of coronavirus (COVID-19): A 5-point guide for educators.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339944395_How_to_Optimize_Online_Learning_in_the_Age_of_Coronavirus_COVID-19_A_5-Point_Guide_for_Educators

3. Pedagogy before Technology: Re-thinking Education in Digital Era. Dr. Urvashi Sharma, Associate Professor, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi urvashi13@gmail.com, Anjali Siwal, Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, Delhi School of Economics University of Delhi, anjalisawal@gmail.com CASIRJ Volume 10 Issue 1 [Year - 2019] ISSN 2319 –9202

Newspaper Articles:

1. 9/21/2020 e-learning: COVID-19 Pandemic: Impact and strategies for education sector in India, Government News, ET Government

2. Carey, K. (2020). Is everybody ready for the big migration to online college? Actually, no. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com>

3. Issues facing online education Digital divide: Students who, in theory, have access to e-teaching will have to depend on inconvenient

methods such as mobilephones, INDIA Updated: Aug 17, 2020 02:13 IST, Abhishek Jha, Hindustan Times, New Delhi

4. *<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/nso-survey-finds-big-rural-urban-divide-in-computer-internet-use/articleshow/72215450.cms>