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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## A NEW PATHWAY - PEDAGOGUE IN TRANSITION DURING PANDEMIC

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### ABSTRACT

Novel Covid – 19 pandemic, is the one aspect, which halted every walk of human life in every corner of the world, but at the same time, opened up new avenues of living which otherwise would never have been explored. Pedagogue and teaching-learning process too received intellectual churning during pandemic which resulted in surfacing of a cream of innovative and technology based teaching - learning practices. Online or virtual mode of teaching which emerged as a boon during the lockdown, took over the baton to continue the rally of education to the next level. The present study endeavors to explore the pros and cons of online mode of learning and also to identify the challenges of assimilating the virtual mode into the physical mode of learning.

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## INTRODUCTION

'Change is the only constant' said Heraclitus. Change could be either evolutionary or revolutionary. Right from the days of Sophists in Greece and oral culture in India to the modern times, pedagogue underwent a gradual and a progressive change playing its role in moulding the human civilization. But, for the first time in history, humankind has witnessed a paradigm change in pedagogue during the initial decades of 21<sup>st</sup> century because of the novel Covid - 19 pandemic. This unforeseen situation has thrown the education system into a furnace to emerge out in new shape demanded by the situation. As quoted by Neel Burton "the highest purpose of education is to unlearn what we once took for granted, to replace certainty with subtlety, prejudice with compassion, and destiny with possibility", the Covid – 19 pandemic situation has triggered a fission process in the intellectual corridors to reorient the education system so as to traverse through the odds unleashed by the pandemic and identify the possibilities of navigating new trends in teaching and learning process. For the first time in the human history, all the nations are compelled to gear up for the same cause. India being no exception and with 130 crore population, rose to the occasion and maneuvered to take teaching and learning process from between the four walls of the class room to the door steps of the students during the lockdown. 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the day lockdown was imposed in India, remains as an epoch in Indian history, for the reason that, though the dark clouds of Covid hovered over the country, it heralded the new

beginning of exploring the untraveled avenues of all walks of life including the education system thereby developing alternatives to the frontal teaching mode.

**Changing contours of Higher Education:** Distance learning is not a new concept in India. Different models of learning beyond the class room like MOOCS (Massive Open Online Courses), Open Universities, Distance Learning schools etc have coexisted with conventional learning for many years. But, the Covid – 19 pandemic has completely halted the conventional way of learning, opening the new gates for digital or online education. Lockdown and social distancing measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic have led to closures of schools, training institutes and higher education facilities in whole of the country. There is a paradigm shift in learning process from class room learning to cloud learning. The online learning, distance and continuing education have become a panacea for this unprecedented global pandemic. E-learning tools such as Google Class Room, ZOOM, Microsoft Teams, YouTube links have played a crucial role during this pandemic, helping schools and universities facilitate student learning during the closure of universities and schools. But, as every change comes with its own advantages and disadvantages, so is the case with online learning process.

**Significance of Online Learning:** The process of transitioning from a traditional teaching method to the innovative online method requires the academic institution in general and the faculty in particular to meticulously plan activities, tasks, and evaluation methods. This also

requires the formulation of a supportive policy by the government with scope for alterations with the changing tides. Despite the challenges faced, the significance of online learning can be as follows:

1. Online platforms facilitated the continuity of learning process during lockdown. It also salvaged the education system from the loss of an academic year. Absence of this facility would have resulted in a sudden halt in learning process leading to irreparable catastrophe.
2. Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) found a new boat to sail in the form of digital learning mode. CBCS facilitates the students to score credits in different subjects and in different institutions spread out in the country. But, the students were required to travel long distances and had to face difficulty in finding the hostel facility. Thanks to online mode of learning that it eased the implementation of CBCS.
3. Online learning allows differently abled students with more freedom to participate in learning in the virtual environment, requiring limited movement.
4. Pandemic has caused lot of psychological trauma and emotional stress to the vast majority of population in general and to the students in particular. Uncertainty, fear of death, and bleak future created havoc on the psyche of the students. This problem to the maximum was mitigated by the online education, which engaged the students and kept their hopes alive by keeping them in touch with their teachers and peer circle.
5. Online platforms widened the scope of acquiring knowledge. It helped to make available to the students, the lectures of experts from any part of the country, rather any part of the world, which was even unthinkable with traditional learning.
6. Online learning offers teachers an efficient way to deliver lessons to students. Online learning has number of tools such as videos, PPTs, PDFs, podcasts etc which a teacher can use as part of their lesson plans.
7. Time, space and economy are the other advantages of online education. This system provides for the travel less learning process, allowing the students to attend classes from their homes, which saves their travel time. It is economical too because it saves the travel expenses and online material will bring down the paper cost.

**Challenges of Online Learning:** Though online technology ushered new paradigm of learning, it cannot be adjudged as the paragon of learning initiatives. It has its own drawbacks which can be summarized with the following reasons.

1. There is no one-size-fits-all pedagogy for online learning. There are a variety of subjects with varying needs. Different subjects and age groups require different approaches to online learning. The online teaching infrastructure presently used could not be mastered to adopt it to different situations. The limited exposure of teachers to online teaching, the information gap, non-conducive environment for learning at home could be seen as the drawbacks of online teaching.
2. One of the biggest drawbacks of online learning is that the students find it hard to focus on the screen for a longer duration. Social media on the other side adds fuel to the fire. The academic literature is replete with research findings that lectures adhere to the 10 to 15 min attention span. Davis Barbara Gross in his book "Tools of Teaching" stated that "...student attention during lectures tends to

wane after approximately 10 – 15 minutes<sup>1</sup>. The over ambitious mechanism of adopting the same timings of physical classes to virtual mode was taxing on the students.

3. Sense of isolation is also one of the key challenges of virtual class room. Joseph Powell rightly stated that "it is absolutely human certainty that no one can know his own beauty or perceive a sense of his own worth until it has been reflected back to him in the mirror of another loving, caring human being". Very truly, in an online class, there are minimal physical interactions between students and teachers. Peer affinity that used to give confidence and comfort is missing in the virtual class room.
4. Internet connectivity is one of the major challenges of online learning. While internet penetration has reached the major cities and towns in India, in rural areas internet connection with required speed is still a long time dream. According to a report by Deloitte, the Broadband penetration in India's rural areas continues to be poor at 29.1% against national average of 51% with 687 million subscribers as of March 2020<sup>2</sup>. This gap has to be bridged for the successful implementation of online learning.
5. Mahatma Gandhi stated, "By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in the child and man; body, mind and spirit". All-round development, which is the primary goal of education, is possible only through face-to-face learning process. Online mode facilitates the communication of subject knowledge to the students, but falls short in ushering the holistic development of the student.

## CONCLUSION

The one factor that influenced every aspect of human life in every country is the Novel Covid – 19 pandemic. Education Sector too was unprepared for the unforeseen situations caused by the pandemic. But, history since 5 million years has shown the adaptability capability of human beings. Accordingly the pedagogue too, with the initial hiccups, has adapted to the changing scenario by coming out with alternative sources of learning. Online initiatives were successful in keeping the gates of education open during lockdown. The experience with online infrastructure has enriched the teaching – learning process by bringing in innovative practices like Webinars, Online examination and evaluation, MOOCs etc. Online learning process has been so deeply assimilated into the education system, that the Post-Covid situation demands for a well articulated curriculum plan to embrace both physical and virtual learning. Different teaching platforms need different types of techniques to communicate the subject. The experience of online teaching during the lockdown brought to light certain challenges like student attention capacity, health hazards of viewing the screen for longer duration, internet connectivity etc that need to be addressed. A thorough research is imperative on the impact of online teaching on emotional, physical and psychological health of the students. eLearning doesn't just happen; it requires careful planning and implementation.

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