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TRANSFORMATION OF ONLINE EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH ASIAN UNIVERSITIES (SRI LANKA, INDIA AND NEPAL) IN COVID19 PANDEMIC: THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which are online courses with no class size restrictions and offer free education via the internet, are one of the innovations that are constantly being produced in response to the need for high-quality education. MOOCs have garnered more attention in recent years since they give a lot more students a platform. Blended learning undoubtedly improved the quality of education, but it also has an impact on university students' academic performance and mental health. This research article's main objective is to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected online education at South Asian universities in the context of India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. To achieve this objective, in this research article, an attempt has been made to discusses various topic like key technological infrastructure and platforms being utilized by South Asian Universities to deliver online education and how do these choices impact the learning experiences, strategies used by South Asian Universities to maintain and enhance the quality of online courses, including assessment methods, feedback mechanisms and students' interactions. At the end, it was revealed that South Asian Universities take various initiatives to handle this situation very smartly and they got success in these initiatives.

Keywords: Online Education, Transformation, Key Infrastructure and Platforms, South Asian Universities

1. INTRODUCTION

More than 33 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been reported worldwide since the World Health Organization (WHO) designated the outbreak a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Bozkurt et al., 2020). According to the World Health Organization, there are over 6.5 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the Southeast Asia Region (SEAR), of which over 6 million cases are exclusively in India. On January 30, 2020, the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was discovered in the Indian state of Kerala, and on March 12, 2020, a 76-year-old man died in the Indian state of Karnataka (Mittal, 2021). Before COVID-19, the majority of our regional educational institutions were applying the face-to-face method. It is also referred to as the "chalk and talk" and traditional teaching methods. Using chalk and a chalkboard, teachers demonstrate subjects to students in this teaching approach. Students use the chalkboard to write important information about the subject and to take important notes (Isnani, (2017). Students review their notes and attempt to remember them after the lecture. Passing the test is the main goal of traditional schooling. There are advantages and disadvantages to traditional education. Traditional education has benefited a lot of students. Although traditional education is the most effective form of instruction, it does have some drawbacks that can be addressed with proper preparation and implementation of these regulations (Hooda and Vedpal, 2018). In contrast to contemporary methods

that demand active student participation, face-to-face instruction is usually used in Indian classrooms, where the "chalk and talk" method is frequently used to spoon-feed the curriculum. Students are able to actively participate in a variety of activities because to strategies including cooperative learning, blended learning, flipped classrooms, and smart classrooms. One method that engages students in a way that allows them to build their new knowledge by connecting it to what they have already learned is online instruction (Sharma and Poonam, 2015). Web-based learning, e-learning, digital learning, and a form of remote education are other names for online learning. It is offered online and uses exercises and resources found on the internet (Paudel, 2021). All course offerings, whether they are provided online or on campus, must adhere to the same stringent guidelines. The only distinction is that the course is taught differently. Generally speaking, pupils must have access to a computer system with quick Internet (Basilaia, Giorgi, Kvavadze and David, 2020).

2. REVIEW OF CONCERNED STUDIES

Chu and Li (2022) conducted a study which title was “The impact of online learning on physical and mental health of university students during the COVID 19 pandemic”. They came to the conclusion that there was a statistically significant difference in psychological discomfort or life stress between the online and in-class learning sessions. Livari and Sharma, (2020) said that We had to make a remarkable digital leap in pupils' foundational education because of the pandemic. The UN policy reports on education during COVID-19 state that governments worldwide found it difficult to keep the educational system running smoothly (UNESCO, 2020 and UNICEF, 2020). Because of the pandemic and isolation, many were suffering from depression, anxiety, stress, sadness, and loss. In addition, students had to cope with the stress and strain of schoolwork. Biswas and Biswas (2021) found that almost all students experience anxiety as a result of the epidemic. Most of the students suffered from severe anxiety, according to Dangi and George (2020). Some of the students showed signs of minor nervousness. Harjule, Rahman, and Aggarwal (2021) discovered that pupils' screen time increased considerably when they were learning online during a school closure. This increase was found to be one of the causes of several mental health conditions and anxiety disorders among Indian school-age children and their parents.

2.1. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH ARTICLE

Research Objective 1

How has the adoption of online education evolved over time in South Asian universities, and what factors have influenced its growth?

Research Objective 2

What are the key technological infrastructure and platforms being utilized by south Asian universities to deliver online education and how do these choices impact the learning experiences?

Research Objective 3

What strategies do South Asian Universities employ to maintain and enhance the quality of online courses, including assessment methods, feedback mechanisms and students interactions?

3. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH ARTICLE

Research Objective 1

How has the adoption of online education evolved over time in South Asian universities, and what factors have influenced its growth?

Explanation

The South Asian region has a very extensive higher education (HE) system. With 18 % of all tertiary education students worldwide, it is the 2nd biggest region in terms of higher education enrollment. Approximately 50,000 higher education institutions (HEIs) in the eight countries are home to more than 42 million students. Private universities, colleges, and standalone institutions make up more than 65 percent of higher education (HE) enrollment in India and Nepal, more than 40 percent in Bangladesh and Afghanistan, and 20 percent of all higher education institutions (HEIs)

enrollment in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The private sector is a significant player in technical education (TE) in the region. A sizable portion of students are also enrolled in external degree programs or remote learning courses.

3.1. ADOPTION OF ONLINE EDUCATION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, South Asian higher education institutions (HEIs) have shifted to varying degrees to online learning. Through National Research and Education Networks (NRENs), ongoing financed projects, or initiatives started by particular higher education institutions (HEIs), national governments are supporting these efforts to increase capacity for online education Cheung, (2018). The present range of efforts includes giving students access to digital lectures and materials, online course modules, web-conferencing for instruction and discussion, helping underprivileged students with technological access, and using virtual laboratories for hands-on experiments and demonstrations. Governments have more methodically organized academic work arranging classes and the course material to be addressed during closures as the lockdown has lasted longer. Since there is little information on the number of students enrolled in various distant learning modalities, students are largely responsible for using the digital tools that are accessible, which creates questions around accountability. To make it easier for instructors and students to use, governments in the South Asian region have worked to map and filter available content to programs and courses. Some HE systems and institutions are working to methodically plan, test, and scale distant learning solutions in the medium and long term.

3.2. FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCED ITS GROWTH

College and university closures have a direct impact on young people enrolled in higher education who are between the ages of 18 and 24. Losses in knowledge and skill acquisition may result from disruptions to organized academic and research activities. While students from wealthy families and those attending prestigious universities are more likely to have access to and use digital resources to keep up with their coursework during closures, the poorest 20% of households have the hardest time getting their children into college, and the odds are almost zero for poor girls. Particularly at danger are students who belong to underprivileged groups, such as women, young people from tribal communities, and those with health problems. Due to lower home incomes, increased opportunity costs for youth's time, and a decrease in HE supply, the unplanned break from their official course of study may put them at danger of dropping out of school. The higher education (HE) system at South Asian universities employs a sizable number of teachers. Higher education ministries and departments frequently (and in some cases explicitly) expect that instruction will continue during closures through alternate channels, such as online and remote learning. However, South Asian nations lack the infrastructure, content, and other essentials needed for alternative teaching and learning modalities. For example, less than 10% of families in India have internet connection. Additionally, there is little advice available to educators on how to approach teaching and learning in a methodical manner throughout the crisis. In addition to restricted access to digital content and broadband internet connectivity, teacher reactions during the crisis are hampered by a lack of training in digital pedagogy, student assessments, and remote student support methods.

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 2

What are the key technological infrastructure and platforms being utilized by south Asian universities to deliver online education and how do these choices impact the learning experiences?

1) Explanation:

When compared to other regions, the South Asia Region (SAR) has a vast educational system. With 18 % of all students enrolled in higher education worldwide, it is the second largest in terms of enrollment (World Bank, 2020). However, the worldwide school system is experiencing an unthinkable situation due to the inevitable emergence of the COVID-19 epidemic. Government rules regarding the pandemic's health issue are making it impossible for students at all levels to return to their regular studies at their individual educational institutions worldwide. Based on some factual data, the study used a comparative approach to show how education changed before and throughout the epidemic (Bazaluk, 2018). We have to make a remarkable digital leap in pupils' foundational education because of the epidemic (Livari & Sharma, 2020). The UN policy papers on education during COVID-19 and behind (UNESCO, 2020 & UNICEF, 2020) state that governments worldwide faced difficulties in ensuring the continuity of the educational system during

the closure of educational facilities. As a result, ICT-based approaches have taken over in this area, where teachers must switch from traditional to online lectures and instruction. Before and after the COVID-19 scenario, educational change where the virtual method takes place on antiquated approaches with modern tools and techniques like zoom, what-sup, MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), platforms etc.

2) India

As the regulator of higher education in India, the UGC determines how funds are distributed and makes sure that government policies are followed in institutions of higher learning that receive funding from the Indian government. When the lockdown began, UGC sent out letter no. D.O.NO. F. 1-3/2018 (SWAYAM/Miscellaneous) dated March 12, 2020, to colleges and universities with a list of online learning platforms (Notices, 2020). The University Grants Commission (UGC) of India and the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) have taken some steps together to ensure that students can continue their study during this lockout. MOOCs, Swayam, Swayam Prabha, e-library, e-books, e-yantra, NEPTEL, and virtual teaching and learning tools have all been introduced in this context. Students must get used to a variety of online platforms and tools, including Zoom, Facebook, Google Meet, YouTube Live, Telegram, and WhatsApp, in order to engage in remote learning during lockdown. ICT developed a unique platform called MHRD (e-Boucher: https://mhrd.gov.in/ictinitiatives) to support e-learning. This platform gathers all international publications related to advanced education and research.

3) Nepal

Nepal has been deemed the most vulnerable nation by the WHO because of its weak health and economic systems. Since March 23, 2020, all educational activities have been halted. In order to keep up with the situation, the Nepali government has made some new arrangements and modified its educational policies and practices. Lack of technological expertise and bad internet access made it difficult for students and teachers to use the online system at first, but after a few weeks, they were able to get over the problems.

4) Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's education ministry was the first to act to safeguard students from harm as a result of the pandemic. The government estimates that on March 13, 2020, Sri Lankan educational institutions were shut down. The Sri Lankan government has taken a few steps to reduce the cost of remote education. Both instructors and students incur a variety of costs when engaging in online learning. While universities used their own learning management systems (LMS), the government made it possible for academic activities to continue through the Zoom app through the Lanka Education and Research Network (LEARN). Some websites offer various online services and access without charging. Nowadays, universities in Sri Lanka consider distance learning to be a significant component of their curriculum.

4.1. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 3

What strategies do South Asian Universities employ to maintain and enhance the quality of online courses, including assessment methods, feedback mechanisms and students interactions?

Explanation

Teachers can design engaging digital course materials with the help of the Learning Management System (LMS). Additionally, learning management systems (LMS) make it simple to upload and distribute instructional materials, conduct online discussions and chats, administer interactive tests and surveys in the classroom, collect and review assignments, assess them, and give students ongoing feedback to help direct their learning paths. A more favorable and dynamic digital environment for teaching and learning is produced by ed-tech collaboration tools, which enable virtual communication between educators and students as well as between students themselves. According to Ali's (2019) study, 95% of teachers felt that incorporating ICT into their lessons made them more engaging. Additionally, both public and commercial organizations are offering MOOCs in a variety of subjects and in regional languages. They can support kids' learning outside of the classroom. Ed-Tech technologies can play a significant role in ensuring that everyone has access to high-quality education, especially in rural and urban regions where there are limitations in building appropriate physical infrastructure and hiring enough teachers. For the modern learner, Ed-Tech can provide individualized learning possibilities that are significantly more successful than traditional teaching approaches. The Government of India's National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) acknowledged the benefits of Ed-Tech while also recognizing its possible risks and hazards. According to NEP-2020, new technologies that incorporate AI, machine learning, block chains, smart boards, handheld computers, AI-enabled computerized tests, and other types of educational

software and hardware have the potential to significantly alter both what and how students learn in the conventional classroom. The main goals of technological interventions will be to enhance the teaching-learning and evaluation processes, assist teachers in creating study materials, and promote their professional growth.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Lack of technological expertise and bad internet access made it difficult for students and teachers to use the online system at first, but after a few weeks, they were able to get beyond these problems. Based on the debate above, the researcher came to the conclusion that the South Asian universities introduced the best educational system during COVID 19. Numerous online learning platforms, MOOCs, Swayam, Swayam Prabha, e-library, e-books, e-yantra, NEPTEL, LEARN (Lanka education and research network), and virtual teaching and learning materials have been introduced in this context. Educational channels were also developed by radio and television to keep the general public's learning activities going. In order to participate in remote learning during lockdown, students must become accustomed to various online platforms and applications, such as Zoom, Facebook, Google Meet, YouTube Live, Telegram, and WhatsApp. Among these initiatives, 50% made success. On the basis of review, the investigator also concluded that online education has affected the metal health and academic achievement of students of south Asian universities during covid 19 periods. Singh (2020), Harjule, Rahman and Agarwal (2021), Paudel (2021), Mittal (2021), Hutauruk, Gultom and Nasution (2021), Graham (2019), Livari (2020) are supporting the findings of this study. They also found that transformation of online education was exaggerated the mental health and academic achievement of universities students during COVID 19 periods.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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