



## REDEFINING CURRICULUM IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN POST COVID ERA

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### Abstract

Year 2020 was hit hard by Corona virus- COVID 19. The operations of whole world were paused. All social, economic and educational activities came to halt. Lockdown was announced in every part of the world. With the efforts of political, social, scientific and medical fraternity, the governments all over the world started unlocking. But the life changed completely for everyone. A new normal started setting in every sphere. Even education was not untouched. The author in this paper tried to analyse the future of higher education in post covid era through the lens of curriculum. She proposed certain changes in different components of curriculum, that is, objectives, content, methodology, learning resources and evaluation, to make it best fit for the future in post covid era. Expanding the objectives in higher education, preparing younger generation for, pandemics, emergencies and disaster management through education, introducing blended teaching, collaborative learning, flip teaching, developing creative and ICT skills so that they can learn by themselves during extraordinary situations, changes in content of different subjects, use of new learning resources and changes in evaluation system so as to adapt during pandemic like situations, are some of the changes proposed by the author.

**Key Words:** Redefining Curriculum, Higher Education, Post COVID era, Expanding educational objectives, Flipped teaching, Blended teaching, collaborative learning, developing the preparedness, future skills, pedagogical shift, evaluation, learning resources.

### Introduction

More than a year back a global tragedy hit the world starting from Wuhan in China then spreading like fire taking all the countries in its grasp. All major social and economic systems were severely hit, countries after countries were locked down for months together. People were forced to remain indoor to save themselves from a deadly virus. Even after a year, though the tally for those who were hit by the virus kept on ticking, different governments started unlocking slowly. But life was completely changed for everyone. Social distancing and masks were some of the new norms to be followed to remain safe. A

new term "NewNormal" was coined to express the changing way of life in every field. It started from NewNormal in business then extended to all other walks of life. The Urban Dictionary (2009) defined New Normal as the situation of being after some intense change have occurred. Here the expected, usual typical state is replaced by new ways of functioning after the event has occurred. The new normal encourages one to deal with current situations rather than lamenting what could have been done.

Likewise, education systems in the world started preparing from "NewNormal" in Post COVID era. Many types of researches were conducted regarding this NewNormal, about the education system and the implementation of the same. Sintema (2020) revealed that there is a likely hood of falling down of pass percentage of students of secondary school students in National exams if COVID 19 is not contained in a shortest possible time. Moreover, the school calendar was adversely disturbed by the early untimely closure of the schools. Wajdi et.al. (2020) also highlighted that COVID-19 affected the education system of all the countries with different income levels. UNESCO (2020) reports that 87% (1.5 billion) of the world's student population is affected by COVID 19 school closures.

While the adoption of on-line modalities became a necessity, the efforts also started to evolve an education system for future which may be a mix of the old traditional ways of instruction and newly found online modalities.

One of the most important aspect of education is the curriculum. The emerging trends of education in Post COVID era should be reconsidered with regards to Reframing Curriculum for future in the context of COVID 19.

There lie certain challenges as well as opportunities in the Post COVID era of education.

Neuwirth, Jovic & Mukherji (2020) highlighted the challenges through their paper by raising the questions that, how can faculty teach undergraduate students through virtual classrooms during a pandemic that is exacerbating inequality issues? How can students truly participate in a virtual classroom if they do not have computers, reliable wireless connectivity, quiet spaces and free time away from taking care of family members? The COVID 19 pandemic has required faculty and students all over the world to respond to an unprecedented challenge moving from traditional face to face curriculum to virtual classrooms through digital modes.

The curriculum of higher education should be redefined in a way to overcome these challenges and make most of the opportunities it unfolds.

This paper attempts to redefine the various components of the curriculum to make it best fit for the NewNormal in the Post COVID era.

Wikipedia defined Curriculum as the totality of student experiences that occur in the educational process. The term often refers specifically to a planned sequence of instruction or to a view of the student's experiences in terms of the educator's or institution's instructional goals. Curriculum may incorporate the planned interaction of pupils with the instructional content, materials resources and processes for evaluating the attainment of educational objectives. The components of curriculum are: Aims and objectives, content, Methodology, learning resources and evaluation.

### **Expanding the Objectives in Higher Education**

Based on Blooms Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, developing the personality of an individual is the prime objective of education. Development of Cognitive, Psychomotor and Affective domains of the personality of students are thought to be taken care through education. But in reality, classroom teaching emphasises more on lower educational objectives. Higher learning objectives, specially, Affective domain is hard to touch in classrooms. Skill based learning also takes back seat. But the pandemic caused due to COVID 19 can act as an opportunity to have a paradigm shift from lower to higher objectives. Classroom teaching in off line mode is not possible in the present situation. Everything, from teaching- learning to evaluation has shifted to online mode. In post Covid era also, it is expected that teaching will be a blend of traditional and online mode. So, a vast pool of online knowledge resources would be available to teachers as well as students. They will require to analyse and evaluate what is available, emphasize on the relevant and synthesize or create what is required. So, the focus need to be shifted from lower learning objectives, such as, Knowledge/ Remembering and understanding to higher learning objectives such as, analysing, evaluating and creating.

A shift is also needed to teach students different skills which help them to learn by themselves rather than by the content given by the teacher. Opportunity is also to touch the affective domain of students, so that, their attitudes, interests, abilities and capabilities are fostered and sustained.

### ***Developing the Preparedness***

Coronavirus caught the whole world unaware. Nobody was prepared for such a situation created by pandemic. It crippled the life throughout the world in every sense. Education process/system was the worst hit area and completely came to halt. It also highlighted the shortcoming of present education in India which put only a little focus on natural disaster preparedness. But now we should prepare the younger generation for health emergencies and pandemics as well. How to remain physically fit, emotionally

stable and motivated when there is restricted movements or restricted social interactions and unavailability of resources, must also be emphasised as the main objectives of education. Some basic courses like nursing and first aid can be essential part of the curriculum at higher level of education.

According to Caphay (2020) to make the curriculum relevant appropriate and responsive for post covid era the development of preparedness in the times of disasters, diseases and emergencies should be one of the goals of curriculum .In the existing curriculum goals there is focus only on the natural disaster preparedness but considering the new normal in post covid era there is a desire for more focused goal on preparedness in terms of global disease outbreaks.

Sintema (2020) emphasised the importance of preparedness to contain the effects of COVID-19 on education system and provide information to the Ministry of Education to step up the preparedness. It was also crucial for educationists' to plan and prepare for combating the effects of epidemic on their own education system.

### ***Developing future skills***

Creativity, critical-thinking, communication, collaboration, data literacy, emotional intelligence and effective team work would be some of the skills required in post covid era. To evolve new ways of working, designing new products and shifting to new delivery systems require human creativity. To interpret huge amount of data and studies available and to evaluate it before putting it to use require both data literacy and critical thinking. Pandemic has highlighted the need of emotional stability, empathy and connecting with others, working in collaboration to find effective solutions. If education ignore development of these important skills students will never be future ready.

### **The pedagogical shift**

The coronavirus pandemic may change the traditional classroom with physical boundaries to a virtual environment including various components that will probably be determined by students rather than only by the teacher (Engelbrecht, Llinares & Borba, 2020).

During COVID 19 online teaching has already brought a pedagogical shift from traditional methods of teaching to modern methods, learning from classroom to Zoom, seminars to webinars etc. In the light of changing scenario, the way a teacher teaches should also change so as to adapt to the new normal. The teaching methodologies must shift from teacher centred to learner centred. Some of the suggestive methodologies are

### ***Flip Teaching***

Flipped Learning Network (FLN). (2014) defined flipped classroom as a pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from group learning space to the individual learning space and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic interactive learning environment where educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in subject matter.

So rather than information flowing from teacher to student it reverse the process. Flip teaching can make the learning Deep. Students can critically analyse, then organise the information and synthesise it into new knowledge. The role of teacher will shift from merrily a provider of knowledge to the one who can steer the whole process towards more meaningful learning .It is also an excellent way of using technology not only to teach but also achieve the higher objectives of education like organization, analysis and synthesis .Luthra and Mackenzie (2020) in redefining the role of educator highlighted that the role of educator's will need to move towards facilitating young people's development as contributing members of society.

#### *Collaborative learning*

With the development of interactive digital devices, two way communication is now possible via internet. These devices can help the student collaborate with the teacher and peers for better learning. Collaborative learning develops higher thinking skills among the students by exposing them to diverse perspectives. It can also prepare them for future real life situations where there will be need of collaboration and team work. It can prove to be exceptionally beneficial to students at remote locations.

#### *Blended learning system*

It involves both traditional as well as online modalities. When coronavirus pandemic shifted the whole process of teaching to online mode only, people started talking about merits and demerits of online system. On one side, online teaching was the only possible option to continue the process of education, on the other hand, the emergence of sedentary lifestyle, health and psychological issues, loss of control over the learning process were highlighted by media as well as researches all over the world. So emerged the concept of blended learning, where online learning can be integrated into traditional teaching. Internet, social media platforms and other available digital environments can be blended with traditional classroom in meaningful ways.

Engelbrecht, Llinares & Borba (2020) reported that blended learning expands the learning environment into virtual space where traditional limitations are removed. Blended learning system combines the benefits of face to face interactions with providing opportunities to

students to learn according to their own needs and capabilities. They develop their own opinions and this brings maturity to their learning. But all these things require trained teachers who can use digital technologies efficiently.

Practical and lab work was the worst hit area of education during pandemic. So to be prepared for future in post pandemic area, digital simulations can be blended with hands-on practical work. Videos of demonstrations of the experiments can be made available to fill the gap in case of emergencies. These videos can also be used by the students before they enter the lab to actually perform the activity.

### **What to teach**

The content or subject matter to be taught at different levels is decided after much deliberation by the educational bodies at national level, but to be ready for the future, some changes can prove to be effective.

- Integrate the matter or content in different subjects in a manner to reduce duplicity. It will save time required to complete syllabus in each subject.
- Decide the content according to its significance and relevance to a particular subject. Include that content which relates directly to disaster preparedness, pandemics or health emergencies.
- Ethics should be included as a course where students can study about the ethical issues which arise during disasters for pandemics for example whom to save in case of social justice, digital divide arise due to pandemic.
- Media literacy is another very important course for or subject required for future

### **Learning resources**

Books are majorly used as learning resources at higher level of education. But covid has exposed the weakness of excessive dependence on this resource. During lockdown accessibility of textbooks was not possible. Students and teachers were compelled to embrace the digital resources and were majorly dependent on internet. But to find relevant content on internet, wasted a lot of time. It also added increased screen time, posing other challenges like health and psychological issues. One way of overcoming this challenge is to develop relevant e-content for e-books and make it available to the students easily through authentic sites or platforms. Government also responded to the situation during lockdown and many initiatives by MHRD like Swayam and MOOCS, e-vidya etc. proved beneficial for the students but there is need to do more. Knowledge sharing platforms should be encouraged to build up an environment for conducive learning. Open

and free resources can help build-up competences both among the teachers as well as the students. Teachers can harness the available technology and technological tools to create content for remote learning for students in all sectors. It also opens up new possibilities to do things differently and with greater flexibility resulting in potential benefits in accessibility to education for students across the world.

### **Evaluation**

The worst hit part of Higher Education due to COVID-19 was evaluation. It was the time when final examination was due. Off line system was suspended till the situation become normal. Hence, no off line university/ college exams were conducted. For outgoing classes, online examination was proposed, so as to make the students eligible to get their degrees in time and get admission in higher courses. The online system adopted was not transparent. Students were allowed to appear for exams, sitting at their respective places. No check on unfair means was effective. In some cases, students were awarded marks on the basis of previous achievement and in other cases students were promoted without taking any exam. But no formal solution has been thought off for the future. Open book examination, submission of projects, internship programmes can prove to be some of the powerful alternatives to evaluate the students.

### **Conclusion**

There is urgent need to revamp the higher education in light of the present pandemic so as to remain relevant in the post covid era. The major aspect of education, that is, curriculum should be revisited and redefined in terms of its components so that it can equip the students with skills to face challenges due to any such situations in future.

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