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Lockdown of colleges and universities due to COVID-19: Any impact on the educational system in India?

Ravi Chandra Ravi

Abstract:

Pneumonia triggered by novel corona virus (SARS-CoV-2) in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 is an extremely contagious disease. The WHO has stated the outbreak of COVID-19 (corona virus) as a pandemic issue. Corona virus cases started increasing day by day in India, also from the time the first case was diagnosed on January 30, 2020. In this regard, there are so many colleges and universities across India which cancelled or rescheduled their academic activities such as conferences, workshops, and other academic and sports activities. Because the universities and colleges should protect and take care of their students and faculty in this regard. In this brief communication, I would like to give an idea on the potential impact of the dangerous COVID-19 outbreak on the education system and mental health of students and staff.

Keywords:

Corona virus, COVID-19, education, mental health, outbreak, universities

Impact on Education System

On March 16, the union government declared countrywide lockdown of schools and colleges. Due to this lockdown of colleges and universities, it is evident that the time had come to go with online teaching methods by the teachers. Many teachers and students have been interested and excited to go with the online delivery mode or with online teaching.^[1,2] The virtual teaching and learning method had started long back in India, perhaps after watching the success in Western countries, and now the country implements it. Over the past few years, the Indian government has been trying hard to make education accessible to every corner of the country. However, still, there are many parts of the country, which are in darkness about this kind of virtual education programs. Many institutions started implementing this kind of virtual teaching and learning

modules and encouraging both the faculty and students to participate in these kinds of programs. The future of virtual learning seems to be vibrant as number of students and faculty are showing interest in these teaching and learning methods.^[3,4]

However, everywhere there is a chance that some of the faculty may not have technically sound knowledge to deliver the online lectures. The conversion of the teaching system to online has raised questions to the faculty about their capability to deal with the existing technology, even though they are very much strong in the actual subject.^[5]

On the other hand, there is heavy demand for the computers and IT equipment at home, because all the working persons in home are in the work from home mode. Hence, many companies were asking their employees to be available and be on work from home mode.^[5,6] Hence, work from home is going to be difficult task for some of the faculty and students. There is another

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Department of
Conservative Dentistry
and Endodontics, GITAM
Dental College and
Hospital, Visakhapatnam,
Andhra Pradesh, India

Address for correspondence:

Dr. Ravi Chandra Ravi,
Department of
Conservative Dentistry
and Endodontics,
GITAM Dental
College and Hospital,
China Rushikonda,
Visakhapatnam - 530 045,
Andhra Pradesh, India.
E-mail: Raavi.ravi13@gmail.com

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problem that many universities may not have enough infrastructure or resources to process the online teaching immediately, and there is a possibility that some of the students do not have the access to the computer systems and do not have proper Internet facilities to attend the online classes. Especially in health universities, it is difficult to teach the students through online because learning in these health universities will happen through the lectures followed by explaining the subject in practical illustration in the laboratories. Due to this, the quality of online education is a serious issue and requires proper attention.^[7]

Suspension of Examinations, Online Teaching, and Learning

Most of the universities in India suspended the last semester, which are being compensated by online classes and constant assessments. There is a serious impact on assessment and evaluation due to shifting from face-to-face teaching methods to online teaching methods. Students and the faculty are uncertain about the online teaching and learning procedures, although the technology had been using from the past to support teaching and learning, but the assessment part is not well developed till now.^[8,9]

Faculty members have to prepare the assessment tools to properly fit the online mode. Faculty working in the health universities should face a problem in preparing this kind of assessment tools because they do not have that much knowledge in preparing these tools as like the faculty working in the IT and engineering colleges or universities, because the faculty working in the IT and engineering colleges have better knowledge about these things when compared to the faculty of health universities. Hence, the management of health universities should provide some technical assistance by providing some technical experts to guide their faculty in this regard. In addition, the students who are not having proper Internet facility will suffer a clear disadvantage in participating in this evaluation process.^[9-12]

Postponement of Continuous Education Programs and National Wide Conferences

The COVID-19 outbreak causes severe problems to everyone, and Nations across the globe are closing international borders to minimize the outbreak. Many health universities and colleges already postponed the postgraduate conferences in their specialties due to this outbreak. Universities are suggesting their staff members to put back their involvement in any event that would require them to travel across the country until there is a return to normalcy, and there are so many eminent speakers who will participate in these conferences, and

they will come from various countries across the globe. It is clear that staff members have mostly paid for their conference registration and flight tickets from their hard earned money. This situation had left them in confusion dealing with such situations. The organizers are also in the situation such that they should postpone the events at any cost.^[11,12]

Creating Stress Environment among the Faculty and Students

The COVID-19 outbreak has created problems and damaged the lives of many people across the world. The increase of cases worldwide and across India has created a sense of anxiety and uncertainty among the students and faculty and also the management of different universities about what is going to happen. This has led to immense stress among the faculty and the students and especially among the student parents and the management of the universities because, till now, there are no proper guidelines or any particular time when and how the spread of this coronavirus will be stopped. This kind of stress may also lead to unfavorable effects on learning and psychological health of the students.^[11,12] Students were also strangled in their universities due to lockdown and were forced to stay back at their respective universities, but many questions may arise in these kinds of situations like, whether the universities are taking proper health-care safety measures to the students, and about returning of the students for further studies back to the universities who reached their home safely.^[11]

The COVID-19 pandemic may have created a serious impact on the careers of the students who are going to be university graduates this year.^[13] These students may experience major problems in teaching and assessment in the final part of their studies. There is another concern that these students will complete their examinations and will be graduated late this year due to postponement of the final examinations. Further, the students who are graduated recently are going to face severe challenges of the global recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.^[14]

Crisis Management

Universities should frame a proper plan to deal with the pandemic crisis driven by COVID-19. The universities should frame a committee, and that committee should include members from different areas within the same university such as academics, human resources, facility management, health units, student affairs, enrolment services, and other relevant members. This committee should be divided and framed into small subcommittees and work for the proper welfare of universities, especially for welfare of the students.^[11-14]

The other important thing is they should avoid group meeting to prevent the spread of this pandemic corona virus. The use of proper online systems such as zoom meeting can prevent the spread of this virus.^[11]

Online learning and teaching could be a greatest opportunity as a result of this crisis. Students are young and energetic to learn through these online resources. Faculty also should motivate the students and make them participate in the online classes in this difficult situation. Universities and colleges should organize the training programs for the faculty to tackle the online teaching methods. There is an advantage with this, as the universities can upgrade their technical infrastructure and can make online teaching and learning as a stronger tool for future endeavors.^[11,12]

Faculty members, along with the heads of the departments, should prepare flexible assessment guidelines keeping in mind that every student should get benefited. If any student is not able to attend online courses due to health problems or due to any other disturbance, colleges or universities should remain flexible to make sure that he or she will not get any negative impacts in terms of the final grading. Some courses, such as laboratories, especially in the medical and dental colleges, cannot be taught online. In such cases, the faculty can simply divide and grade the students, depending on the work they have already done in the past.^[11,12,14]

If any student is experiencing a feeling of anxiety about COVID-19, they should be provided with proper psychological support on time.^[14] Colleges and universities should observe the matters relating to financial support and the general living expenses of needy students. Governments, universities, banks, can help the graduates in many ways, one of which include temporary deferral of student loan payments.

Conclusions

I would like to conclude this review stating that the universities and colleges should organize or implement measures to prevent the spread of this pandemic COVID19. Students and faculty should give some importance to online teaching methods during the routine teaching schedule that will help in these circumstances. Faculty members should keep updating with technology and be mindful of student's experiences to make education a continuous learning process.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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