

# Difficulties in Online Classes in Pandemic

Shobha Bhadoria

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 has resulted in schools shut all across the world. Globally, over 1.2 billion children are out of the classroom. As a result, education has changed dramatically, with the distinctive rise of e-learning, whereby teaching is undertaken remotely and on digital platforms. Research suggests that online learning has been shown to increase retention of information, and take less time, meaning the changes coronavirus have caused might be here to stay (The World Economic Forum, 2020).

While countries are at different points in their COVID-19 infection rates, worldwide there are currently more than 1.2 billion children in 186 countries affected by school closures due to the pandemic. In Denmark, children up to the age of 11 are returning to nurseries and schools after initially closing on 12 March, but in South Korea students are responding to roll calls from their teachers online (Farooq, et al. 2020).

With this sudden shift away from the classroom in many parts of the globe, some are wondering whether the adoption of online learning will continue to persist post-pandemic, and how such a shift would impact the worldwide education market.

Even before COVID-19, there was already high growth and adoption in education technology, with global edtech investments reaching US\$18.66 billion in 2019 and the overall market for online education projected to reach \$350 Billion by 2025. Whether it is language apps, virtual tutoring, video conferencing tools, or online learning software,

there has been a significant surge in usage since COVID-19 (Adedoyin and Soykan, 2020).

In response to significant demand, many online learning platforms are offering free access to their services, including platforms like BYJU'S, a Bangalore-based educational technology and online tutoring firm founded in 2011, which is now the world's most highly valued edtech company. Since announcing free live classes on its Think and Learn app, BYJU'S has seen a 200% increase in the number of new students using its product, according to Mrinal Mohit, the company's Chief Operating Officer.

Tencent classroom, meanwhile, has been used extensively since mid-February after the Chinese government instructed a quarter of a billion full-time students to resume their studies through online platforms (Toquero, 2020). This resulted in the largest "online movement" in the history of education with approximately 730,000, or 81% of K-12 students, attending classes via the Tencent K-12 Online School in Wuhan.

Other companies are bolstering capabilities to provide a one-stop shop for teachers and students (Adnan and Anwar, 2020). For example, Lark, a Singapore-based collaboration suite initially developed by ByteDance as an internal tool to meet its own exponential growth, began offering teachers and students unlimited video conferencing time, auto-translation capabilities, real-time co-editing of project work, and smart calendar scheduling, amongst other features. To do so quickly and in a time of crisis, Lark ramped up its global server infrastructure and engineering capabilities to ensure reliable connectivity.

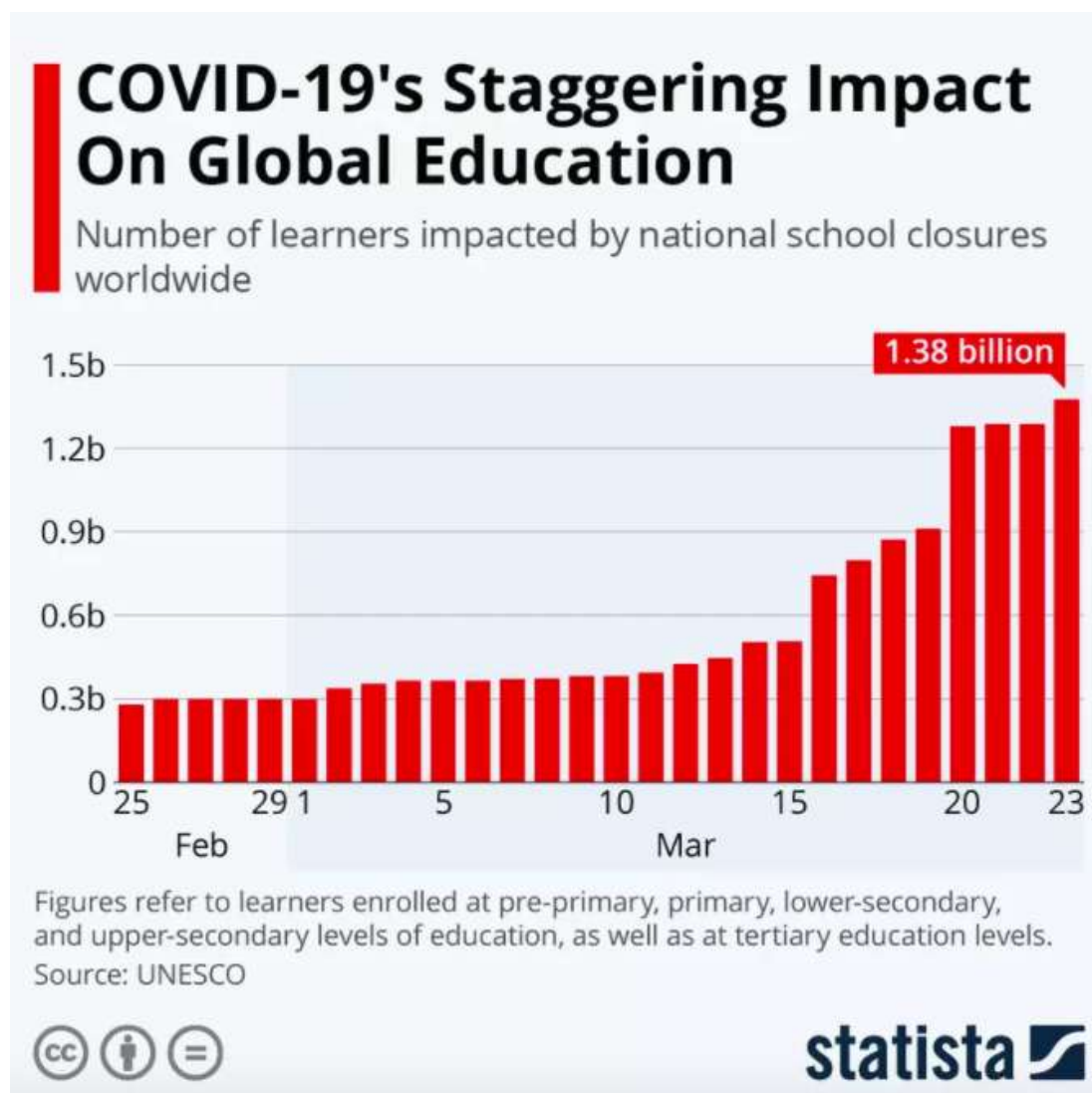


Figure 1: Impact of Covid-19 on education

Source: The World Economic Forum, 2020

Alibaba’s distance learning solution, DingTalk, had to prepare for a similar influx: “To support large-scale remote work, the platform tapped Alibaba Cloud to deploy more than 100,000 new cloud servers in just two hours last month – setting a new record for rapid capacity expansion,” according to DingTalk CEO, Chen Hang.

Some school districts are forming unique partnerships, like the one between The Los Angeles Unified School District and PBS SoCal/KCET to offer local educational broadcasts, with separate channels focused on different ages, and a range of digital options (Paschal and Mkulu, 2020; Adedoyin and Soykan, 2020). Media organizations such as the BBC are also powering virtual learning; Bitesize Daily, launched on 20 April, is offering 14 weeks of curriculum-based learning for kids across

the UK with celebrities like Manchester City footballer Sergio Aguero teaching some of the content.

#### Research Problem and Background

In a survey of more than 400 college students whose schools recently switched over to online education – conducted in March by Barnes & Noble College Insights – 60% of students said they felt at least somewhat prepared for the change (Farooq, et al. 2020). This was particularly true among students who previously took an online course. Still, 64% of survey respondents expressed concerns about being able to focus and maintaining the self-discipline needed to study remotely.

More recent polling from College Reaction/Axios in April showed that 77% of more than 800 college

students surveyed said they felt distance learning is worse or much worse than in-person classes. Here are some of the most common challenges undergraduate students are currently facing with online classes along with specific tips on how to address them:

- **Technical issues**

Unfortunately, experts say, technical issues are bound to happen in an online-only environment. Ashford says that while attending one of her classes live through videoconferencing, her computer suddenly shut down and she needed to restart the device (Adedoyin and Soykan, 2020). There are also moments when her Wi-Fi is spotty.

- **Distractions and time management**

While studying from home or wherever students may be, there can be more distractions than usual, especially with family and possibly younger siblings around, says Reggie Smith III, CEO and executive director of the non-profit United States Distance Learning Association. As a result of these distractions – and possibly having additional responsibilities – time management becomes more challenging.

- **Staying motivated**

Given that students may not be attending class at a set time on a physical campus, finding the motivation to get started on coursework can be difficult, experts say.

"When you don't see your home as a space of work, it's kind of a struggle to get in that mindset," says Emily Effren, a senior at Texas Tech University majoring in journalism as well as electronic media and communications. "But I have different places in my house, where my room will be my little oasis, but my downstairs kitchen table is where I'll sit down and get my work done."

- **Understanding course expectations**

The sudden switch to online learning has left some students confused about some course requirements for the rest of the semester. They may wonder, for instance, if a final group presentation is still happening given that students can no longer meet on campus, or if they need to complete labs for science classes (Adedoyin and Soykan, 2020). Students may also wonder whether their classes will have live lectures through videoconferencing at a set time on a certain day, or whether students are expected to learn the material on their own time.

- **Lack of in-person interaction**

The lack of in-person interaction with both instructors and classmates can be particularly challenging. Allison Proszowski, a senior at

Rutgers University—New Brunswick, is taking her spring classes online from her off-campus residence near the school. The chemical engineering major usually leads a study group for younger students on campus (Farooq, et al. 2020). On campus, "It would be about me and 20 students taking the class. So you have that in-person, face-to-face interaction; it's a smaller group, you talk to the students, they talk to each other," Proszowski says. "And now transitioning that to an online environment has just not been the same." The adjustment can be particularly difficult for students taking classes that are better suited for the face-to-face format, like those with science lab components.

"I'm a hands-on person," says Ashford, who now watches physics labs in a digital recording and then takes a quiz afterward. "I consider myself a visual learner as well, but I prefer to play around with the materials as well as converse with other students to understand the material better."

- **Adapting to unfamiliar technology**

Given the transition to online classes, Martin and her students are now adapting to some digital tools, she says. "I think all of us have had to learn to use technology in the last couple months that some of us have never heard of, some of us may have used just a little bit of," says Martin, who typically teaches classes on campus.

- **Uncertainty about the future**

The sudden switch to online classes for the spring semester – and the summer, in some cases – has caused anxiety and raised questions among students about their academic futures. Some are considering taking the fall semester off if their school continues to stick with online classes, for instance, while others are concerned about upholding a full course load while juggling family responsibilities at home (Friedman, 2020).

#### Aim and Objectives

The aim of this paper is to study the "Difficulties in Online Classes in Pandemic" where the developed research objectives are mentioned below:

- To understand the challenges posed by covid-19 pandemic in education
- To explore the difficulties in online education system
- To provide some possible solution(s) for the problems and future suitability of students

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Saikat, et al. (2021) stated that, for those who do have access to the right technology, there is evidence that learning online can be more effective in a number of ways. Some research shows that on

average, students retain 25-60% more material when learning online compared to only 8-10% in a classroom. This is mostly due to the students being able to learn faster online; e-learning requires 40-60% less time to learn than in a traditional classroom setting because students can learn at their own pace, going back and re-reading, skipping, or accelerating through concepts as they choose (Zhu and Liu, 2020).

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of online learning varies amongst age groups. The general consensus on children, especially younger ones, is that a structured environment is required, because kids are more easily distracted. The study by Falfushynska, et al. (2021) concluded that, to get the full benefit of online learning, there needs to be a concerted effort to provide this structure and go beyond replicating a physical class/lecture through video capabilities, instead, using a range of collaboration tools and engagement methods that promote “inclusion, personalization and intelligence” (Adedoyin and Soykan, 2020), according to Dowson Tong, Senior Executive Vice President of Tencent and President of its Cloud and Smart Industries Group (Farooq, et al. 2020).

Since studies have shown that children extensively use their senses to learn, making learning fun and effective through use of technology is crucial, according to BYJU's Mrinal Mohit. “Over a period, we have observed that clever integration of games has demonstrated higher engagement and increased motivation towards learning especially among younger students, making them truly fall in love with learning”, he says.

According to Crawford, et al. (2020), it is clear that this pandemic has utterly disrupted an education system that many assert was already losing its relevance. In his book, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, scholar Yuval Noah Harari outlines how schools continue to focus on traditional academic skills and rote learning, rather than on skills such as critical thinking and adaptability, which will be more important for success in the future. Could the move to online learning be the catalyst to create a new, more effective method of educating students? While some worry that the hasty nature of the transition online may have hindered this goal, others plan to make e-learning part of their ‘new normal’ after experiencing the benefits first-hand (Toquero, 2020).

Major world events are often an inflection point for rapid innovation – a clear example is the rise of e-commerce post-SARS. While we have yet to see whether this will apply to e-learning post-COVID-19, it is one of the few sectors where

investment has not dried up. What has been made clear through this pandemic is the importance of disseminating knowledge across borders, companies, and all parts of society. If online learning technology can play a role here, it is incumbent upon all of us to explore its full potential (The World Economic Forum, 2020).

The truth is, for many students, online learning is only a formality and not a real substitute for regular teaching. Some teachers only share material to students without teaching it. As per the study by Aliyyah, et al. (2020), online testing is sometimes based on the principle of “work it out yourself”. Students are not acquiring real, long-lasting knowledge. And some students don’t have the opportunity to leave their home during the two hours allowed during the curfew because they have to sit in online classes. Some students don’t even have proper equipment to attend online classes. They don’t have electronic devices such as computers, telephones and cameras (Dedeilia, et al. 2020). The number of these devices in households is often limited which can be very inconvenient for online appointments, classes, and meetings that take place simultaneously (Adedoyin and Soykan, 2020). Also, some teachers don’t consider the fact that during online testing, the student may lose the internet connection. Unfortunately, if this happens, the student gets graded based on the number of questions answered and recorded in the system before the connection was lost. Students also face problems managing their own time as a result of online teaching.

Online learning is new, unknown and different for students, teachers and parents. It’s especially difficult for lower grade students. Parents of these young learners more often have to spend most of their time, helping their children navigate through platforms, working with them on homework and explaining the curriculum (Toquero, 2020). This is true of parents who work from home, but what about those children whose parents go to work? How can these parents help their children? With this online learning, they need to find more time, concentration and focus to support their children to learn and master the subjects. Those parents who don’t have IT skills face greater problems, and need to seek help from relatives, friends, colleagues, etc. Parents and students from vulnerable communities also face difficulties, as many don’t have the means to provide their children a computer or smartphone to attend classes.

For now, everyone is going on as if the most important thing is to teach the remaining curriculum, to get the final grades and to finish the

school year formally. But is it really necessary for students? Is that the right way to deal with this new situation?

Certainly not! In this big picture, perhaps the biggest burden is put on teachers. They are in a situation where they are unprepared and without proper support. Criteria and guidelines imposed by the institutions are not sufficient to deal with the situation effectively. Existing assessment criteria that include tests and examinations are not suitable for digital learning (Kundu and Bej, 2021). No teacher can assess with certainty whether the homework assigned to students is written independently and assigning separate homework to each individual student is simply an overload and difficulty.

Teachers need serious preparation to use online tools and platforms. They are not all ready for the new situation, which further opens the issues with our overall education. We are all aware that if we want to improve the quality of education, we need to better use digital technologies, but we also need to provide appropriate support and training to teachers to support the quality of instruction (UNICEF, 2021).

When asked about their experience with learning online teachers say: "Most of the students are attending the classes and fulfil their homework but now we can't tell whether they completed the tasks independently or if it was a group effort. As teachers, we found ourselves unprepared. It is really challenging since we never had any training on distance learning."

### Methodology

This research adopted secondary research or desk research, which is a research method that involves using already existing data. Existing data is summarized and collated to increase the overall effectiveness of the research. Secondary research includes research material published in research reports and similar documents. These documents can be made available by public libraries, websites, data obtained from already filled in surveys etc. Some government and non-government agencies also store data that can be used for research purposes and can be retrieved from them. Secondary research is much more cost-effective than primary research, as it makes use of already existing data, unlike primary research where data is collected first hand by organizations or businesses or they can employ a third party to collect data on their behalf. In this research, the steps followed for research for secondary data-based analysis is given below:

Problem Solution(s)

### Technical issues

The most important step is to stay in touch with professors and inform them about what's happening, experts say (Farooq, et al. 2020). They will hopefully understand and be flexible about the situation, perhaps even recording class sessions as a backup.

"There will be technology issues, and I think it's important that every student understands they're not alone in that, to allow themselves the patience to work through the problem," says Dawn Coder, director of academic advising and student disability services at the online Pennsylvania State University—World Campus. She adds that there's usually a fix for whatever issue arises. A school's technical support services can be a valuable resource, Coder says.

### Distractions and time management

Try to think about building a schedule – figuring out when you're going to do what you're going to do and then sharing that with the other people in your house," says Beth Martin, senior lecturer in environmental studies at Washington University in St. Louis. Students should still prioritize their physical and mental health, even if life is busier than usual, she adds (Ali and Kaur, 2020).

Students should also try to identify a quiet time and place in their house to complete their coursework, if possible – even if that time is late at night, Smith says. If their other responsibilities become too overwhelming, students should consider talking with their academic adviser about course load options for the semester, he says.

For instance, some schools are allowing students to switch at least some classes to a pass-fail grading system for the spring, which could help ease some anxieties, experts say – though the policy changes vary across colleges (Abduh, 2021).

### Staying motivated

In addition to creating a daily schedule and finding a productive workspace, Coder says it can also help to simply focus on the ultimate goal. "At the end of the day, look back on the day and check mark off all of those items that you've completed. Knowing that you did will help to motivate you as well," Coder says. She adds that staying in touch with classmates, in addition to reaching out to faculty or academic staff as needed, can also help motivate students (Toquero, 2020).

### Understanding course expectations

Experts say students should be proactive in asking their professors questions about course expectations for the spring and whether there are any changes to requirements given the transition (Adedoyin and Soykan, 2020). Whether classes will be held live varies depending on the school, professor and discipline.

"Knowing the expectations as an online learner will help with time management because, again, you can plan out and schedule what's really needed week after week," Coder says.

### Lack of in-person interaction

Experts say students should take advantage of the tools at their disposal. While not ideal for all learners, the best alternative to actual face-to-face interaction may be videoconferencing programs like Zoom, Skype or FaceTime. Talking on the phone with classmates or a professor is also an option.

Proszowski says she has attended virtual office hours to speak with her professors directly. "You have your video on, the professor has their video on, and you can kind of talk to them and get a little bit of additional help," she says.

### Adapting to unfamiliar technology

Use the resources available through the school, Coder says. While this can include reaching out to technical support, students should determine whether they can save themselves time by looking up answers to their technology questions online or watching a video tutorial (The World Economic Forum, 2020).

### Uncertainty about the future

Smith recommends students speak with an adviser or student support services as needed to determine whether adjustments can be made to their spring course schedule or a future semester if needed. For example, he says, a student may want to take fewer course credits in a future semester if his or her school continues offering only online classes and the student finds this format challenging.

Regardless of the challenges that come with the transition to online classes, students should remember that assistance is available, Coder says.

"It can be a difficult transition," Coder says. "But it doesn't have to be because there are many people who are willing and able to help with it."

## III. CONCLUSION

While some believe that the unplanned and rapid move to online learning – with no

training, insufficient bandwidth, and little preparation – will result in a poor user experience that is un conducive to sustained growth, others believe that a new hybrid model of education will emerge, with significant benefits. "I believe that the integration of information technology in education will be further accelerated and that online education will eventually become an integral component of school education," says Wang Tao, Vice President of Tencent Cloud and Vice President of Tencent Education.

There have already been successful transitions amongst many universities. For example, Zhejiang University managed to get more than 5,000 courses online just two weeks into the transition using "DingTalkZJU". The Imperial College London started offering a course on the science of coronavirus, which is now the most enrolled class launched in 2020 on Coursera.

Many are already touting the benefits: Dr Amjad, a Professor at The University of Jordan who has been using Lark to teach his students says, "It has changed the way of teaching. It enables me to reach out to my students more efficiently and effectively through chat groups, video meetings, voting and also document sharing, especially during this pandemic. My students also find it is easier to communicate on Lark. I will stick to Lark even after coronavirus, I believe traditional offline learning and e-learning can go hand by hand."

There are, however, challenges to overcome. Some students without reliable internet access and/or technology struggle to participate in digital learning; this gap is seen across countries and between income brackets within countries. For example, whilst 95% of students in Switzerland, Norway, and Austria have a computer to use for their schoolwork, only 34% in Indonesia do, according to OECD data.

In the US, there is a significant gap between those from privileged and disadvantaged backgrounds: whilst virtually all 15-year-olds from a privileged background said they had a computer to work on, nearly 25% of those from disadvantaged backgrounds did not. While some schools and governments have been providing digital equipment to students in need, such as in New South Wales, Australia, many are still concerned that the pandemic will widen the digital divide (The World Economic Forum, 2020).

It is obvious that the situation affects everyone, and everyone needs to come together so that we can overcome the pandemic. However, we must not allow the situation to compromise the quality of learning for those whose hands the future of our country lies (Toquero, 2020). That's why

we, as young reporters, while considering the issue we were researching, are giving our own opinions and suggestions for improving online learning:

- Systemic solutions from the Ministry of Education and Science and the Bureau for Development of Education should develop a well-designed platform with a specific given curriculum, as well as a fair and effective way of assessment.
- Vulnerable families should be supported so that they have the means to acquire equipment and skills to be able to support their children learn online.
- Students and young people should be consulted. Future decisions should also take into consideration how students feel, their views, their conditions and needs. Students should have access to materials without feeling discriminated against, left to feel helpless when they have questions, or unheard when they have an opinion or request (Adedoyin and Soykan, 2020).
- Students should not be assessed with numerical grades rather descriptively.
- As the situation evolves, a more purposeful approach is definitely required, by including representatives from multiple areas in evaluating and sharing their experiences about what worked well and what didn't. It should consider the problems and solutions faced by students, parents and teachers.
- Achieve compromise, because only together and with joint forces we can get the best results out of this whole situation (UNICEF, 2021).

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