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Adoption of the New Normal by Indian Education Segment

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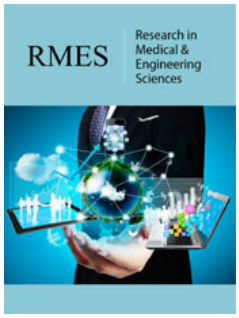

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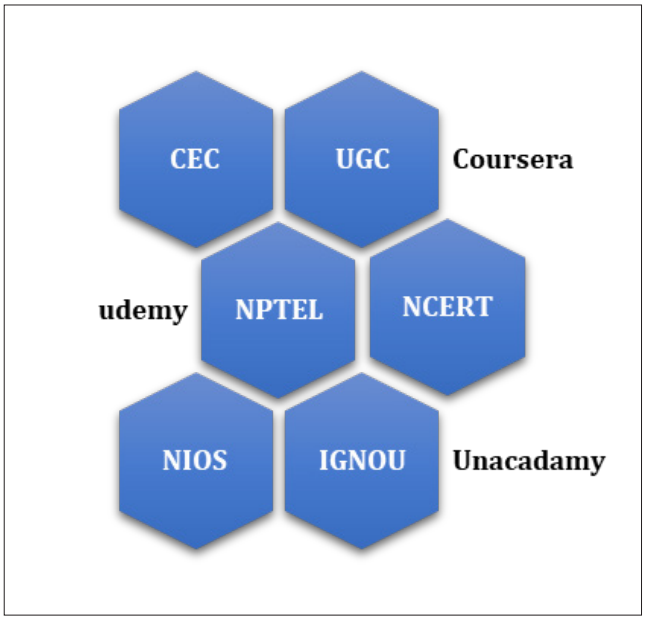
Introduction

The pandemic of 2020 has affected the world in one of the most adverse ways. Countries were in complete lockdown for weeks, each and every one's life has undergone changes since then. Like all, the education sector in India has also confronted and envisaged the impact COVID 19. Schools, colleges and universities haven't opened yet to contain the spread of the virus, even as crucial academic semester is being missed. UNESCO's data reveals that nearly 32 crore students are affected due to the closures [1]. Students have moved back to their native places leaving the institute and university campuses vacant. Hostels and accommodations of higher educational institutes, which fall in affected areas have been converted to quarantine facilities, a support that has been extended by private and public entities to the state and central government. Reopening of educational institutes is not yet feasible with COVID 19 virus still around. The situation has called for reforms in the teaching, learning and evaluation methods of the education system (Figure 1).



Figures 1: MOOC Providers of India.

Discussion

India has stood strong and tall amidst the COVID onslaught, and the stakeholders of education have made a seamless transition to online modes of instructional delivery, assessment. National agencies like, SWAYAM [Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds], and UGC [University Grant Commission] are making available Massive Online Courses that are free, with a focus on accessibility, equality and quality. The internet is flooded with informative content that can be categorized as easy, moderate or complex [2-5]. The content on various online platforms are ever evolving, with creators trying to be

unique and authentic in their own way, to ensure greater degree of personalization and reach. There are many government schemes that are helping not only faculties but students too, in creating, structured, high quality lectures and learning material in their respective fields. Technology-led reach and easy access has brought about a socio-economic difference in the lives of Indian learners [2].

Universities and colleges are conducting classes and laboratory sessions online using internet conference call software. Learning and evaluation for undergraduate and post graduate students, have shifted to the online platforms, as the academic year begins in India. The learner only needs to be equipped with active internet connection, appropriate devices and software's for assured access (Figure 2).

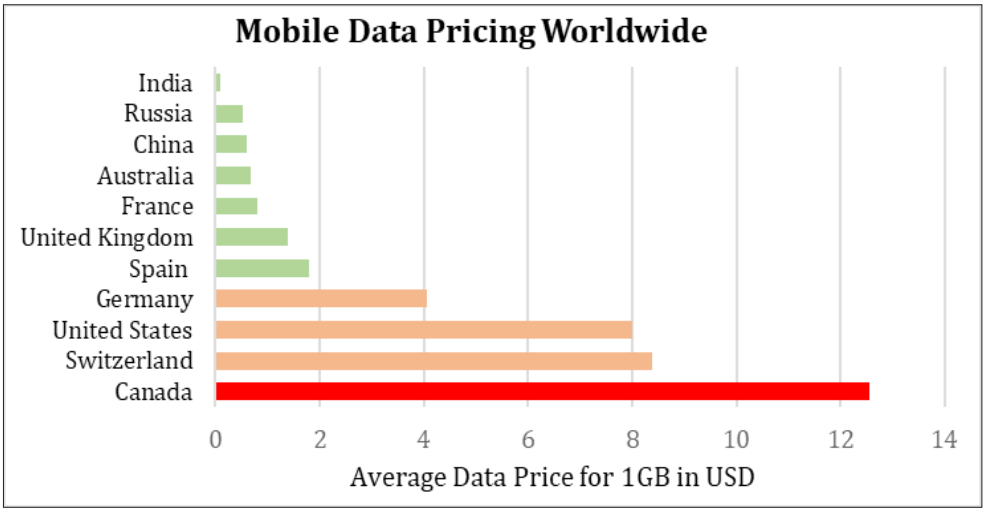


Figure 2:

The scenario

Nearly 56% students at higher educational institutes in India come from the rural or semi-urban parts of the country and hence are refrained from access to infrastructure and facilities offered by universities and colleges within the campus. The responsibility is now shouldered by the students to make arrangements for the required infrastructure to continue with their course and schedules.

According to a study and analysis conducted by cable.co.uk, between 3rd and 25th February 2020, that collected details from 5,554 mobile data plans across 228 countries, found that India has the lowest mobile data rates in the world [4-10]. India tops the list where average cost of one gigabyte[1GB] data is the least, at 0.02 USD, as compared to other countries. Though data cost is low, mobile network coverage in rural and semi-urban parts of India is feeble and unstable. TRAI [Telecom Regulatory Authority of India] states the tele-density to be only 21% in rural areas as for urban areas it is 90%. The widespread 4G technology telecom providers have not yet been able to provide coverage in rural areas, which in certain cases have only 2G network. Students when on campus had access to laboratories, computer labs, libraries, etc. with adequate facilities and connectivity, whereas now they are left with only their smart phones and may be a laptop. Many rural areas do not receive continuous supply of electricity even for 8 hours in a day, increasing their hardship.

A direct effect was seen in enrollment for MOOCs, it was expected that enrollments will rise during the lockdown as students will have a lot of time at hand to take up different courses of their choice. Rather a substantial drop has been seen in enrolment during the current semester, as compared to previous years. As students are away, creating a learning environment in the household, comes in as a challenge. Many a times resources are limited and have to be shared with others in the family mostly in rural India. As observed by the authors, 41% female students do not have their own devices for online learning. Even that is shared with others in the family.

Conclusion

In this new normal, where technology plays a vital role, aaccessibility of infrastructure and amenities for learning process, to students is of prime importance. With every aspect of teaching learning and assessment going online. Facilities available with students should be taken into consideration. This can be made possible, by putting directed efforts in the development of rural India. In terms of infrastructure, facilities and funds for better support, that will empower students and learners. As of now finding a cordial environment for learning, is grim. Those who have access to electronic devices, internet and conducive learning environment will gain in the new normal. India will be able to smoothly carry the education system on the online mode if all fragments of society have an evenly balanced expediency to resources.

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