COVID-19 – eLearning - SWOT analysis

Part of: GS-IV- ETHICS and Problem solving (PT-MAINS-PERSONALITY TEST)

With the pandemic forcing everyone to seriously consider e-learning tools and resources, now is a good time to assess its strengths and opportunities, and adapt to the new normal

The coronavirus pandemic has shuttered educational institutions across the globe. Closure of schools, colleges and universities, shutdown of routine life of students and teachers, disruptions in education and the education ministry remaining incommunicado, have created an unprecedented situation and thrown many unexpected challenges to administrators, educators, teachers, parents and students. The situation has created the new normal. How to cope with the new normal is the question that everyone is now asking.

It is good to carry out a SWOT — Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats — analysis of the COVID-19 situation and its impact on education. This exercise can help us set new goals and objectives and move forward.

Strengths

As educational institutions across India have remained closed for weeks, parents are worried about their children’s education. Some parents have forced their children to take up some online courses, but students do not seem to show interest in learning online. Some educational institutions have asked teachers to prepare online material, but most teachers do not have the experience of preparing e-material. Some universities and colleges want to move classes/courses online in order to engage students, but do not know how to go about.

The situation described above may present a gloomy picture, but it shouldn't. Why? Looking at it positively, for the first time many teachers, parents and students have thought about the purpose of education and asked some useful and relevant questions.

The unprecedented situation has made them look at things critically. Here are some such interesting questions:

1. Will ‘education’ be defined in a different way, in the future?
2. Is there a need to learn differently?
3. Will the transition have a positive or negative impact on students and their learning?
4. How should students’ knowledge and skills be assessed?
5. Will online education be successful in our country where millions of students do not own computers and have access to the Internet?
6. How important is home learning?
7. How important is learner autonomy?
8. Is it good to depend on teachers and cling to the traditional way of learning?

Many more questions…

The pandemic should have a positive impact on our education system. It should not be the same after the situation eases. There should be some positive changes.
Weaknesses

The weaknesses in our system include lack of innovative thinking, inadequate infrastructure, untrained teachers, unequal accessibility, exam-centric assessment, and lack of learner autonomy.

How do these weaknesses act as hurdles now at the time of the pandemic and lockdown?

Remote learning, distance learning, home learning, online learning, e-learning, and webinar are the buzz-words that we hear today.

Recently, the Delhi government announced that it would conduct online classes for class XII students, but school teachers say that it is impractical since most students do not have access to the required facilities. Yes, we are challenged by these questions:

Can everyone in the country afford e-learning?

Is online education an elite concept in India? Will the digital divide further cement inequality and create an academic divide in the country?

Teachers working in elite schools in cities and big towns proudly state that they conduct classes online using and help students make use of the lockdown period in a useful manner. What about teachers working in government-aided and government schools in cities and towns and private schools in rural areas? Neither teachers nor students have access to computers and the Internet.

They may neither have the awareness of online tools such as Google Classroom available for such purposes, nor have the expertise to use them. Is it possible for such teachers to even think of conducting classes online?

Since our education system has not trained our teachers and students to think creatively and manage in a crisis situation, and has underplayed the importance of e-learning, they are unprepared for the transition from the classroom to online.

Opportunities

All systems have strengths and weaknesses. Maximising strengths and minimising weaknesses in order not to miss the opportunity to move forward should be the goal. The three main opportunities that we have are:

i) our students who belong to Gen Z,
ii) numerous web resources, and
iii) enthusiastic teachers.

Gen Z learners (born between 1997 and 2010) are true digital natives.

They are born in the digital era and are familiar with computers, multimedia content and Internet-based activities from an early age. As they live in the online environment, enjoy watching YouTube videos, love connecting with people through social media and speak the language of
technology, they need to be taught differently. Now is the right time to move our classes to a different platform, introduce e-learning and develop learner autonomy.

The COVID-19 lockdown has enabled teachers to become creative. They can now create e-material such as YouTube videos and PPTs and share the links with their students and engage them during the lockdown period. Some teachers are using video conferencing facilities such as Zoom and BlueJeans Meetings for online teaching.

These video conference facilities have features such as one-click scheduling, screen sharing and collaboration, Cloud streaming and recording, and so on. Some educators use Google Meet.

Look up more Google resources available for distance learning at Google for Education's Teacher Center online.

**Threats**

India is far behind some developing countries where digital education is getting increased attention. In countries where e-learning is popular, students have access to various online resources such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) which help students, teachers and professionals upgrade their skills. E-learning promotes learner autonomy and enables students to acquire knowledge and skills without depending on teachers. India needs to take the threat of many developed and developing countries leading the way in online education seriously and promote it earnestly.

To summarise, education must continue. Students should keep learning. The lockdown period should be productive. Educators should think creatively and introduce innovative ways of learning. In a country where access to the Internet and high-speed connectivity is a problem, and the digital divide is an issue, it is important to address the challenges. Those who are involved in education planning and administration should give a serious thought to reducing the digital divide in the country and popularise digital learning.