



THE NEW NORMAL IN EDUCATION

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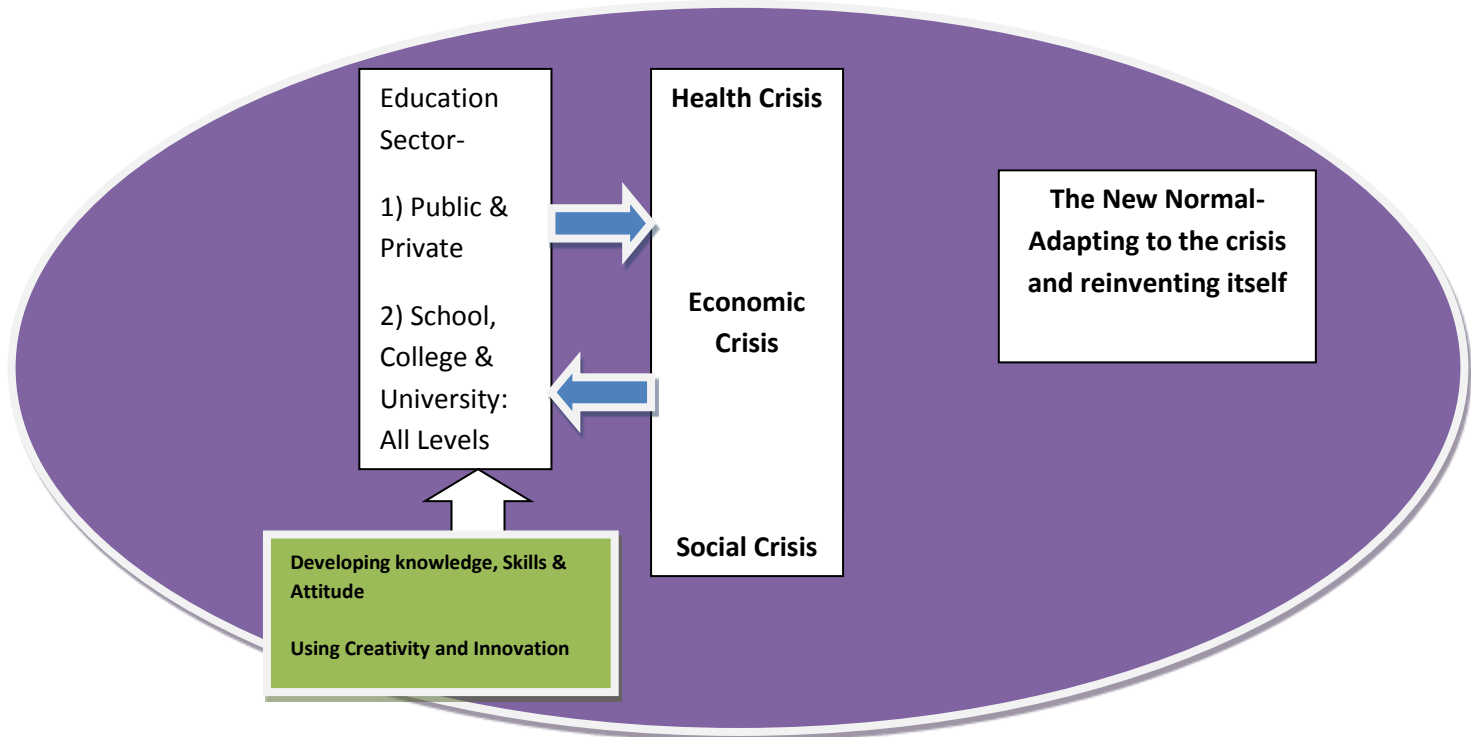
COVID-19 unleashed a societal shock that laid bare the harsh reality that what we consider as ‘normal’ is not ‘inevitable’. In fact, the situation we find ourselves in is the outcome of the decisions we take-as communities, as societies and as individuals. Clearly, what is considered normal today is likely to change and give way to what also is, well, normal for the changed circumstances! One area that has changed drastically is the education system as the pandemic has brought about a paradigm shift in teaching and learning methodologies, forcing educational institutions across the globe to re-imagine traditional classroom learning and transition to an online mode of teaching to provide uninterrupted access to education and knowledge. Learning has shifted from the classrooms (a shared public space) to online mode (a more personal area), and consequently the role of educators also needs to evolve. The exponential growth in the demand for online courses creates an urgent need for instructors to up skill, especially in the area of digital technology so as to keep up with their students, if not ahead of them. Teaching and learning both are becoming more personalized and this compels educators to adapt to innovative teaching methodologies that are tailored to suit the learner’s requirements. This paper attempts to answer the questions about what the dawning of this ‘new normal’ means for the future of education, how teachers & students must work towards identifying and overcoming the challenges that lie ahead, and what are the lessons learnt that will help to reshape the perspectives and practices in the post pandemic education system.

KEY WORDS: *online learning, new normal, digital technology, learning engagement*

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 unleashed a societal shock that exposed the harsh reality that what we consider as ‘normal’ is not ‘inevitable’. In fact, the decisions we take-as communities, as societies and as individuals lead to the situation we find ourselves in. Clearly, what is considered normal today is likely to change and give way to what also is, well, normal for the changed circumstances.

We live in a world that is in crisis...the new normal is about dealing with crisis proactively.



EDUCATION SECTOR: FACING A PARADIGM SHIFT

One area that has undergone drastic change is the education system as the pandemic has brought about a paradigm shift in teaching and learning methodologies, compelling educational institutions across the globe to re-imagine traditional classroom learning and transition to an online mode of teaching in order to provide uninterrupted access to education and knowledge.

THE CHANGING EDUCATION SCENARIO

1. Learning has shifted from the classrooms (a shared public space) to online mode (a more personal area)
2. The role of educators needs to evolve.
3. There has been an exponential growth in the demand for online courses
4. There is an urgent need for instructors to up skill, especially in the area of digital technology so as to keep up with their students, if not ahead of them.
5. Teaching and learning both are becoming more personalized
6. Innovative teaching methodologies that are tailored to suit the learner's requirements need to be developed.
7. Students and educators are feeling isolated and disconnected because of the virtual classroom.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This paper attempts to answer the questions –

- Q1) What does the dawning of this 'new normal' mean for the future of education
- Q2) How teachers & students must work towards identifying and overcoming the challenges that lie ahead
- Q3) What are the lessons that can be learnt which can help to reshape the perspectives and practices in the post pandemic education system.

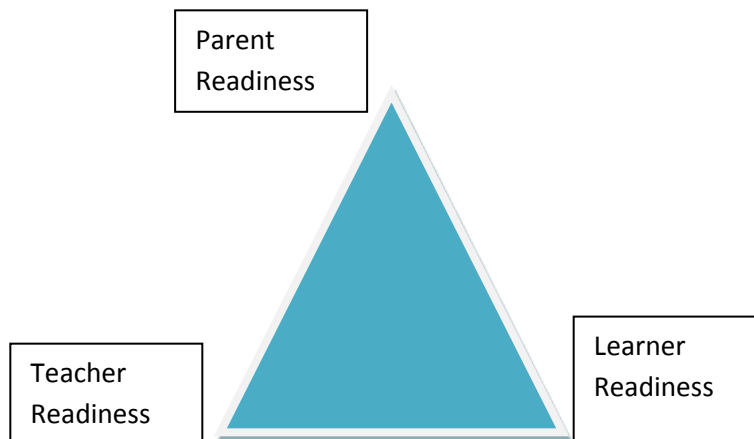
SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS TOPIC

The world is still reeling under the impact of the Pandemic that gripped us for the entire year 2020. This year 2021 seems to be falling into a similar pattern with the Covid cases showing a frightening jump every now and then,



in various geographical locations. While most sectors of the economy have been seriously hit by the pandemic, the education sector was greatly impacted. This why it is imperative to catalyze the global debate on knowledge and learning post pandemic and take a serious look at what needs to change & evolve in order for the education sector to work efficiently and effectively, benefiting students and teachers and of course society at large!

The main stakeholders of education must contribute towards the new normal of Education2020-21



The BIG CHALLENGES that the Education Sector confronts

1) The shock impact as a result of COVID-19 combined with the long-overdue exposure of the harsh realities of rich-poor divide, systemic racism, and inequalities in society have laid bare several problems in modern society. The biggest challenge is to create a more equitable educational system where good quality education is available to everyone . This is the foremost requirement and is going to be fundamental to what is going to be that next new normal.

2) One area that requires immediate attention is educational technology – both in terms of content and accessibility. For decades Education Technology has offered the promise of a more effective and equitable educational experience. A big challenge is to work towards the promise of technology and not only re-imagine education by using it but also consider ways in which to make the content of education more student friendly and interesting.

3) One of the hurdles that became glaringly obvious as the education rushed to adopt remote teaching during the pandemic was that there existed significant inequalities in access — access to computers, to reliable high-speed internet, and to the digital literacy and support required to take advantage of online learning. However, it is now being revealed that technology creates more, not less, equitable learning environments. While there are several heartening examples of efforts to address these inequalities as a response to the COVID-19 outbreak, inequalities still exist and remain inexcusable. In fact, the most at-risk students are often the least connected. The paradox is that a move to greater technology use in education only exacerbates existing societal inequalities. There is an urgent need to address this issue and work towards creating societies where quality education for all is a right not a privilege.

4) Traditional classrooms have disappeared and have been replaced by the virtual classroom. Learners are therefore isolated in their own space. This puts a greater pressure on teachers to acquire new skills of online engagement. Teachers are also confronting their own fears of the use of technology for interactive learning, especially from the point of view of integrating technology into their pedagogy.

5) A very big challenge for students is to be focused, independent and responsible. The virtual world is ridden with temptations and it will take great character to stay focused and on track!

6)The challenge for parents is also tremendous! They must resist the urge to intervene and make home learners too dependent on them and at the same time themselves be role models of discipline and focused hard work. Some parents will find that they are technologically changed vis-à-vis their children and this may cause them to feel overwhelmed or ignored and feel left out.



7) Even before the pandemic, concerns were often raised that a one-size-fits all curriculum does not work for all learners. This concern is magnified in the pandemic where online learning is a compulsion. Yet, as was done earlier, the diversified needs of learners are sacrificed at the altar of convenience and efficiency. The pandemic has highlighted the fact that it is not as important to complete the written curriculum as it is to encourage and guide students towards gathering knowledge and then applying it in the real world.

8) Education Authorities are confronted with the challenge of designing a sustainable framework. This new normal will hopefully drive education authorities to design a sustainable framework for a needs-based curriculum and provide an accessible source of learning modules. Multiple levels and types of literacy and modalities that are required to survive and contribute to the 21st century must necessarily be included in this curriculum. Once the curriculum is designed to create a renewed understanding of the why, who and what of education, the how will be a matter of technicality. In the words of Friedrich Nietzsche: “If you understand the why, you can endure anyhow.”

9) A less obvious hurdle is inequitable access to content due to the way that education technology is designed. Educational technology is often designed by technologists with input from a limited number of educators, which may lead to solutions that only serve students who benefit from online versions of traditional schooling practices. While educator input is important, there are several other voices- based in research or emerging from the community, that need to be heard in order to reduce inequity.

Designing for the diversity of students, requires active collaboration across the education sphere unlike what was being done previously. There is an urgent need to abandon the view that a small number of technologists can re-invent the future of education, and instead work towards integrating the perspectives and expertise of different groups so that we can reap the full benefits of educational technology for all students.

To unlock the potential of technology for all students, we must use varying perspectives to answer questions such as:

- How can we systematically increase the capacity of the teaching workforce to design and engage in high quality inclusive online learning experiences?
- What support is required to help every student reach their full potential?
- What direction should current and yet-to-be imagined education technology be focusing upon as we move forward?

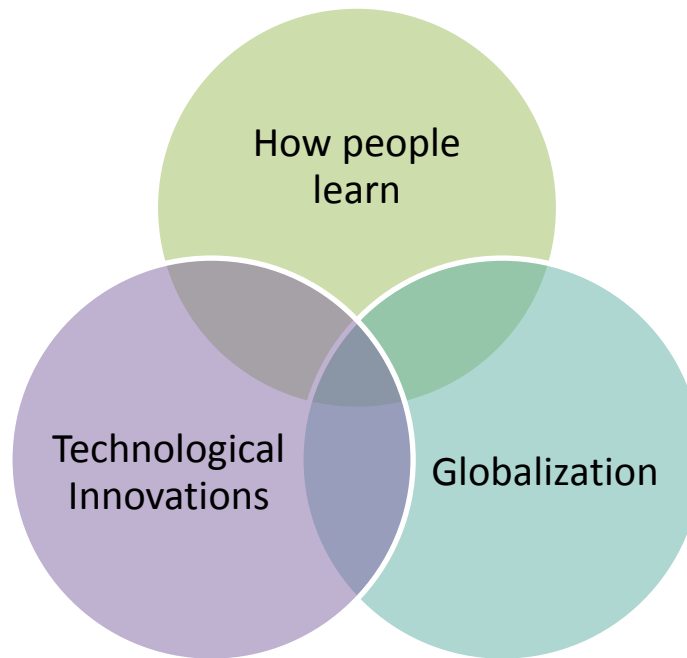
THE GAPS THAT EXIST IN DIGITAL LEARNING

Efforts in areas such as creating personalized, adaptive learning environments to practice specific skills have been seen yet; many of the promised opportunities of technology-led learning remain unfulfilled. These include:

- ❖ Building on student, community, and cultural sources of knowledge which leverage cultural differences and prior experiences instead of viewing differences as errors that need to be corrected.
- ❖ Project-based learning (using projects for learning in authentic settings that allow students to apply their skills and concepts to real life situations and be more meaningful)
- ❖ Collaborative learning (interacting with other students to understand concepts or solve problems that results in deeper learning, exposure to diverse ideas, clarification of misconceptions, and better communication and social skills)

Learnings-

- Educators need to change their perspectives & practices. There is a need to deliberate upon the why, who, what and how of education.
- The transformation of the education sector must go beyond crisis handling and move towards re-imagining education so that more equitable and high quality education is available for all.
- The pandemic disruption offers great possibilities in reviving the education system by using education technology to be more meaningful as well as to create a level playing field.
- Education inequalities across social, economic classes and regions have been witnessed especially in the developing world. The imperative for education stakeholders to transform the learning experience while creating equal opportunities for all is very great.



Our learnings thus revolve around these three elements

CONCLUSION

It is clear that the post pandemic new normal will require significant changes in the education sector in terms of educational content, reach, and practices. However, one bright spot that has emerged from recent events is that a broad-based willingness to rethink the existing ways of doing things has been seen: for instance, teachers did their best to stay engaged with their students even while learning shifted to remote-only, and many educational policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders are thinking about what equity in education means and how to achieve it. As we prepare to take on the challenges post pandemic it is clear that we must work together - education practitioners and leaders, learning science researchers, students and families, and governments. Collaboration in the creation of equitable and resilient learning systems is what shall be the new normal.

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