

New normal life Style of students of higher education in post COVID-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The academic life in the higher education institutions after the outbreak of COVID 19 has ruptured as both the teaching and learning communities have remained apart. After the closure of higher educational institutions, as a measure to contain the spread of corona virus disease, students remained at their homes experiencing uncertainty and possibly undergoing tremendous transformation in their routine life style. These two estranged teaching-learning communities with much impracticality have eventually resorted to the online mode of education for which they aren't fully prepared with. The present study is crucial from the viewpoint of closure of higher education institutions and the way in which it is impacting on the routine life style of the students. It also investigates about the strategies being adopted by the students to overcome such incomparable situation. For this purpose the information is gathered through online survey platform comprising of currently pursuing undergraduate (UG)/ postgraduate (PG) degree students from various colleges, mainly from South India on sample basis. A descriptive research design was considered keeping in view of the objectives of the study. The findings of the study reveal that these students' routine life style has been altered to a great extent and they are mostly worried about their present academics and career avenues ahead of them. At present their financial support system is also not so secure, the dietary practices are altered, they can't engage in socio-cultural activities including religious practices as before. In order to defeat the boredom the students engaged in academic activities, learnt new skills, cultivated new hobbies and assisted their families in their economic pursuits. Besides they hooked up to electronic gadgets to beat the free time. The study also recommends that the stakeholders of education system need to restructure the academic process so as to re-assure the students on their academics and career future. The promotion of online mode of teaching-learning process needs to be gradually incorporated in higher education system with the due consideration for its viability which could be panacea in combating such future circumstances. It also strongly suggests the concerning stakeholders to ensure the vibrant future for these students as they crossover the thresholds of higher educational portals.

Key words: COVID 19, Life style, Higher education, Strategies

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INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of COVID-19 disease has altered the human life on the earth so much so the widespread impact is vividly visible worldwide. The pandemic has slowed down the economies of the world, both developing and developed. The education sector can't be an exception to this world-shattering episode. The impact on education sector is radical and transformative as educators are struggling to put in place the immediate workable solutions which are indeed required to meet the present unforeseen challenges. As far as higher education system is concerned, it is supposed to be two way communication process with the exploration of classroom possibilities. Again both the instructors and the learners presently have gone extremely remote. Apparently this pandemic situation has been a leveler presenting all the stakeholders of education system (educators, learners, policy-makers and society at large) to execute a baby step experiment so as to understand the possibilities of switching entirely from in-person instruction mode to tech-mediated remote learning system.

This unique challenging situation in which the teaching-learning community is confronting with has triggered a learning revolution in educational setting. It has called upon the best of the ICT infrastructure, right technologies and approaches, best of the skills of the teachers to engage the learners who are absolutely away from the educational portals. Concurrently, the learners are also posed with unaccustomed challenges of connecting to their tutors who are dwelling away from their regular campus work after a sudden mandatory closure of classes. Now students are made to rely wholly upon whatever appropriate gadgets available at their disposal in order to stay constantly connected with the process of learning. Moreover the students from rural and remote areas are expected to link up to this unexplored exercise which is beyond and above the possibilities.

Students of higher education system, after the COVID-19 outbreak and the subsequent lock down, remaining at their residence such a long without being socially connected with their mates on campus has been unprecedented. The educational institution is intended for fulfilling both the academic and emotional needs of the students which ultimately supposed to result in increasing their performance and productivity. Now the students are likely to be most anguish as they have no institution based formal classroom learning, no co-curricular activities and not experiencing academic ambience at all. Though, technology has connected them online for learning purpose, many a time they lack interest, feel reluctant to be occupied over electronic gadgets for extended hours. Apart from being regular to online classes with great difficulty, the students may not know how exactly to spend their free time.

Need of the study:

A student's mission should be to make the best use of the available time and create value for oneself and also to the society. As unprecedented nationwide lockdown implemented, all of a sudden, students remaining at home environment for prolonged days may be undergoing tremendous transformation with regard to their routine life style along with lot of ambiguity before them. Further, with the COVID 19 related reports flooding and sometimes misleading in electronic and social media they have been likely to be experiencing immense anxiety. This situation is adding to the torment that carries psychological burdens and deepening the traumatic experience of the students. The present study is to be considered significant as it investigates the aspects those might have altered the routine life style of students pursuing higher education. It is also imperative to explore the ways and means as to how these students are adapting to constrains imposed on their routines and the strategies adopted by them to overcome such an exceptional situation due to this unanticipated situation.

Research Methodology:

Objectives: The present research is aimed at studying the changes confronted in the routine life style of students currently pursuing Undergraduate (UG)/ Postgraduate (PG) degree programme after COVID-19 outbreak and the subsequent lock-down period. It also investigates on the strategies adopted by them to cope-up with the situation which they are undergoing through these days of uncertainty.

Data collection and processing: Collecting data on web based survey is increasingly popular during these days. It has increased the possibilities of gathering first-hand information in large quantity through inexpensive means. Present study was a cross-sectional, observational study carried out having 234 samples comprising of currently pursuing Undergraduate (UG)/ Postgraduate (PG) degree students from various colleges, mainly from South India. A questionnaire was executed using 'Google form' - online survey platform to record the answers of the respondents with pertinent questions after the review of available literature on the selected topic was completed. A web-link of the questionnaire was created and circulated through Whatsapp/ E-mail media which are considered popular platforms today to discuss and share the information. The confidentiality aspect of the data shared by the respondents relating to their personal details was ensured. A descriptive research design was considered keeping in view of the objectives of the study. The tabulated data were analyzed and results were given in percentage.

Result Analysis and Interpretation:

Socio-demographic profile of Participants: As far as demographics of the respondents are concerned participants are predominantly from South India comprising of states; Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Of the total samples 28.2% are male students and 71.8% are female students. Further, the majority i.e. 68.2% of the respondents are students pursuing undergraduate programme, remaining 31.8% are postgraduate students.

Figure -1: Changes in the life style after COVID-19 pandemic outbreak:

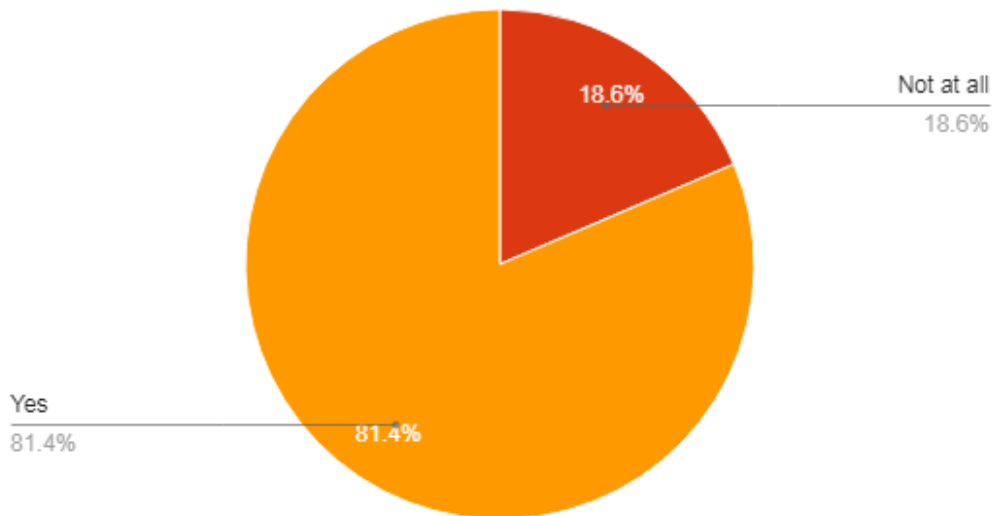


Figure 1: From the above figure it is apparent that the routine life style of the students is affected largely as 81.4% of the respondents have agreed with this fact. But only 18.6% of them have expressed their disagreement to it. From this it is obvious that student community of higher education sector is significantly affected and their life style is changed at present. It needs to be understood that these students were connected predominantly with academic domain previously, presently are encountering alteration in their routine life style as at present they are house-arrested due to COVID 19 pandemic situation and subsequent lockdown.

Table-1: Opinion on Indicative Factors which altered the Life Style during post Covid 19 pandemic

Indicative Factors	Extremely	Moderately	Not at all	Total
Academic Future	41.1%	53.3%	5.6%	100%
Mental state	26.7%	54.4%	18.9%	100%
Career avenues	40%	51.1%	8.9%	100%
Financial support system	42.2%	38.9%	18.9%	100%
Social activity engagement	42.3%	44.4%	13.3%	100%
Food consumption pattern	30%	51.1%	18.9%	100%
Religious activities/ practices	38.9%	40%	21.1%	100%

Table-1 depicts on the opinion shared by the respondents regarding indicative factors which affected the routine life style of the students during post COVID 19 pandemic. 53.3% of the respondents have opined that their academic future would be affected to the moderate extent but 41.1% have opined as it would be extreme for them and only for 5.6% it won't affect their future academic endeavors. With reference to the mental state of the students is concerned the table shows that for 54.4% of the respondents this pandemic situation affected moderately whereas for 26.7% it is extreme and again for 18.9% it likely to have no any effect as such. With regard to the career prospects are concerned 51.1% of them say that the change would be moderate, for 40% it will be extreme and only for 8.9% they disagree with the change. It can be understood here that the students pursuing higher education are presently undergoing an awful situation as their routine life style has been altered to a great extent. They are mostly worried about their present academic future and the career avenues ahead of them as well demanding for its due consideration.

In the wake of present pandemic situation with regard to the financial support system on which the respondents had been relying upon so far had affected extremely for 42.2% as per the opinion expressed by them which is a remarkable aspect in the study. For 38.9% of them it has affected moderately whereas 18.9% of them disagreed for any change. It is also evident from the above table that the social activity engagement aspect for 44.4% of the respondents affected moderately while 42.2% of them have opined that the change is extreme and for remaining 13.3% it wouldn't have any impact. As per the data on food consumption pattern is concerned 51.1% of the respondents have changed their dietary practices moderately, for another 30% the change is extreme while for 18.9% of them haven't felt any change as such. The lockdown has compelled

the people to follow the slogan, ‘stay home, stay safe’. Due to this compulsion, 40% and 38.9% of respondents have felt that their regular religious practices are affected to the moderate and extreme scale respectively. But 21.1% of them have disagreed about this change. Therefore it is clear, the students are affected to such an extent that their financial support system is also not so secure, the dietary practices are altered, they can’t engage in socio-cultural activities including religious practices as before which needs to be paid attention. All these facts show that student community is much worried not only in respect of their academics but also aspects related to their future life due this pandemic situation.

Table-2: Strategies adopted in an effort to overcome pandemic situation during lockdown posed by COVID-19

Strategies adopted to overcome the situation during lockdown	Yes	No	Total
Utilizing the precious time in augmentation of academic knowledge in terms of reading, writing, online classes etc.	82.2%	17.8%	100%
Cultivating new hobbies	87.8%	12.2%	100%
Dedicating time to family by assisting in daily chores	92.2%	7.8%	100%
Acquiring/ learning new skills (hard/ soft skills)	84.4%	15.6%	100%
Hooking up to modern electronic gadgets such as TV, laptop, mobile, etc.	83.3%	16.7%	100%
Assisting in the income earning pursuits of the family	54.4%	45.6%	100%

Table-2 depicts on the strategies adopted by the respondents in an effort to overcome challenges posed by COVID-19.

As per the data shown above, more than two third i.e. 82.2% of the respondents have agreed on the fact that they were utilizing the available precious time to enhance their academic needs by attending to the learning activities such as reading, writing, online classes etc. Whereas only 17.8% of them have disagreed to this fact. It can be understood here that the students after the closure of classes due to pandemic situation were insisted upon for the continuation of their academic pursuits through online mode of learning so as to accomplish their academic needs and requirements. Further, the present study shows that as many as 87.8% of the respondents have cultivated new hobbies while only 12.2% of them haven’t been to it. Due to the lockdown the students have had an opportunity to ponder over new hobbies such as cooking, drawing, e-content development for social media, yoga practices, etc.

Study data shows that the high majority i.e. 92.2% of the participants have dedicated their free time for family by assisting the family members in their daily chores such as cooking, gardening, agricultural activities, etc. It can be concluded that the students during the pandemic time were engaging in the affairs of the family as their free movement was restricted. Again it is an interesting fact to mention here in the study is that 84.4% of the respondents have utilized their time in acquiring new skills including soft skills and hard skills but 15.6% of them said 'no' to the query. As the family was united during the lockdown the elders in the family might have had an opportunity to inspire their younger ones and impart new skills which the elders might have thought essential for the future life of their next generation. At the same time the younger generation have had learnt many skills and experimented them which they might have imbibed through online/ social media platforms during their spare time.

In the study it is observed that 83.3% of the students had hooked up to the modern electronic gadgets such as TV, laptop, mobile, etc. Whereas only 16.7% of them haven't been to it as the opinion expressed. This fact shows that the student fraternity which is more inclined towards the modern system of communication has been predominantly engaging with electronic devices during the times of pandemics. Further, it is also evident from the above table that 54.4% of the respondents were assisting in the income earning pursuits of the family whereas 45.6% of them haven't done so. Students being at home had an opportunity to assist their family in terms of involving in the economic pursuits of the family may be in terms of engaging in agriculture, family businesses, part time employment, etc. This in turn might have helped the family members to a great extent during these times of economic crisis.

Recommendations and Conclusion:

The following suggestions have been made based on the findings of the study and also in the best interest of the student community:

- The stakeholders of education system need to restructure the academic process such a way that it should re-assure the students about their academic and career future.
- The promotion of ICT enabled online mode of teaching-learning process needs to be gradually incorporated in the higher education system in order to combat with such future circumstances. At least 30% of the curriculum needs to be included for the transaction of syllabus through online mode considering its viability aspect.
- Gradually shifting over to ICT enabled online mode of education would provide an opportunity to the students to have an off-campus learning experience. Alongside, it

requires augmentation in the basic ICT infrastructural facilities in which the role of all the stakeholders of education is expressively crucial.

- Concerned stakeholders of higher education system need to plan curative measures to end the present uncertainty among the student community as early as possible. They should be timely aggravated with the confidence that they need and to be ensured adequately with the vibrant opportunities as they crossover the thresholds of higher educational portals.
- The teaching community needs to be equipped with adequate knowledge and skills to develop the e-content and execute the online classes. They are also required to be trained in order to acquire appropriate competency in counseling the students and supporting them with needed guidance as students are much worried presently about their academics and career future.

Conclusion: In the wake of Covid-19 pandemic the campus life in educational institutions at present is in dismay. Therefore it is necessary to monitor the routine life style of the students who are away from the formal education setup. In order to support them during this awful situation and assist them in overcoming the pandemic stress, the stakeholders of education system should take necessary measures judiciously. Today, India is a country dominated by youth population. Therefore, it is imperative that these students should be guaranteed of their rewarding future ahead of them and also in the larger interest of the nation as well.

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