

# Teaching-learning during Covid

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In academic circles it is widely believed that in the COVID-forced online teaching-learning scenario many students are under considerable mental strain. It has also appeared as a challenge for teachers while teaching and evaluating students' performance and merit in unaccustomed ways. At whatever level the teaching goals are achieved, it becomes necessary on the part of the teachers as arms of examining bodies to evaluate students so that the students do not have to lose an academic year because offline (in-person) examinations cannot be conducted in time due to the pandemic situation. In one recent instance, the second-year electrical engineering students of IIT Goa were asked by one of their teachers to first set questions based on lecture materials provided to them and then to answer the questions set by them within the given time. The course instructor believed this would show how well students understood what he taught. Surely, teachers have adopted many other novel ways, first for teaching and then for evaluating students in situations where some degree of flexibility is allowed by the system – a Board, a Council, or a University. India's National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) is expected to make our systems flexible in terms of the curricula / courses to be chosen by the students. It is hoped that following its implementation, NEP 2020 will also enable universities to adopt flexible methods for evaluating students' performance and for grading their merit.

Education at all levels aims to equip the students with knowledge, skill, values and attitude. While young school students are more likely to be influenced by what their teachers say and what they read in books, college/university students are generally more skeptical and judgmental in these information-soaked times. Thus, there is very little scope for teachers in the higher education sector for advising students like they used to do it in the pre-internet age. Under the circumstances, teachers in colleges and universities will be expected to become active facilitators of Learning Outcome Based Education (LOBE) in the realm of NEP 2020 which aims to make edu-

cation learner-centric. The Learning Outcomes-based Curriculum Frameworks (LOCF) to be adopted by universities in India are expected to enable students acquire 21st century skills including critical thinking, problem solving, analytical reasoning, cognitive skills, self-directed learning, etc. In order to inculcate these skills in the minds of students, the teachers themselves will also need to master familiarity with these skills. In addition, they also need to point out to their students the importance of the 4Cs – communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking for succeeding in the changed world. It is felt that for effectively taking part in these new ways of teaching, the teachers – particularly those of the older generations – may require training on emerging aspects of the teaching-learning and evaluation processes of the COVID era and also to comply with provisions of NEP 2020 in future.

Self-directed learning which was mentioned above as one of the 21st century skills allows learners take charge of their own learning process; and, under the present circumstances created by the pandemic situation, it may indeed be a realistic pathway to be encouraged because, if guided properly, the students enrolled in higher educational institutions (HEIs) can actually be expected to benefit from this approach. NEP 2020 aims to increase Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education to 50%. If this huge number of students enrolled in HEIs, or even half of these young people take to studies seriously in enabling environments, the country's education system will be deemed to have achieved success. Most, if not all, of these students will be ICT savvy (bright students are being awarded with computers by the government in Assam and internet access charges are among the lowest in India) and thus most of them will be suitable for taking part in self-directed learning which is less dependent on classroom learning. Students will determine what they will eventually do for a living to contribute ultimately to national development. There is no reason why students of government-funded HEIs of Assam cannot get the

necessary guidance / mentoring for the same from their teachers who normally are of good academic background.

In order to educate students of Assam studying in government-funded HEIs effectively, the following steps may be useful for the COVID as well as post-COVID situations. (1) Teachers must devote adequate time and interest to their job for securing the future of their students. (2) HEIs must provide ample opportunities to teachers so that they can access necessary resources and teacher-education programmes to prepare them well for teaching as per NEP 2020 which has many provisions to make higher education compatible with the extraordinary situation caused by COVID-19. Well-trained teachers can surely motivate students to learn effectively. Students need to be sensitized about objectives and probable outcomes of the courses on offer. (3) The Government must enable institutions to provide state-of-the-art facilities to implement relevant provisions of NEP 2020. For that purpose, each HEI may be asked to submit proposals for the upgradation of facilities and human resource. Universities need to be able to exercise autonomy while making efforts to educate students. We simply cannot afford to lag behind others in this competitive world; effective education and meaningful research only can help our nation to survive respectably in the competition.

Many of the recommendations of NEP 2020 and various guidelines brought out by the regulatory agencies like the UGC are well-intentioned and appropriate. Furthermore, as per provisions of the recent UGC document entitled Evaluation Reforms in Higher Educational Institutions, the HEIs should start giving at least 40% emphasis on internal and continuous assessment while leaving the remaining 60% to the terminal examination. It is recommended that for internal and continuous assessment under the ongoing COVID situation HEIs could choose suitable written and/or oral evaluation methods for internal assessment from: (i) open book / notes tests, (ii) self-assessment, (iii) essay / article writing, (iv) viva / oral tests, (v) home assignment, (vi) report writing, etc.