



COVID 19 and Higher Education in India

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A Survey Report COVID 19 and Higher Education

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A SURVEY REPORT

COVID 19 AND HIGHER EDUCATION¹

Sudhanshu Bhushan²

Time is running out for Indian higher education institutions to adjust to meet the Pandemic threat appropriately. Institutions of higher education in many developed countries have responded to the uncertain threat by switching to online mode, providing student support and announcing financial stimulus package. Institutions of higher education in India, too, need to respond recognising the varied contexts. There is a leadership challenge to come out with innovative solutions - prepare for online teaching, try out mixed approaches to teaching, remove the fear among parents, open institutions with guidelines strictly being followed, avoid overcrowding in the campus, put study materials as per revised curricula and seek financial stimulus package - to minimise the threat of closure. Our All India Survey notes that time is running out and institutions should quickly respond. There is a message to the teachers that they should develop the skill to deliver online course. A message to the institutional leader is to try out an innovative solution. UGC should come forward to have effective consultation with the university to facilitate the preparation for online or offline teaching and advocate the Central Government for a reasonable financial stimulus package. Central Government needs to assess the situation and allow the opening of institutions at an appropriate time. In the meantime, a stimulus package should help build the capacity of higher education institutions to function well during pandemic.

¹ I am thankful to Dr. Satyanarayan Kothe for his advice on sample sizes and his editing of the first draft. Pawan helped me right from developing questionnaire and sending it to respondents to the final composing. I am thankful to him.

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1. Introduction

Pandemic has created the threat and uncertainty on various fronts. The higher education sector, too, suffers from that. The state of indecisiveness exists everywhere. Many advanced countries suffer from the threat of heavy losses where international students are large in number. However, the superior IT infrastructure, online resources and advanced management capabilities offer them a range of choices from offline to online, even though they very well realise that alternatives are not up to the satisfaction.

When we come back to the higher education scenario in India, there is a considerable differentiation of higher education. There are teachers who are well equipped to offer an online course with a good IT infrastructure and facilitation from the institutes. However, the majority of teachers in colleges and departments of universities lack IT support and infrastructure. There is differentiation on account of management types from government, aided to unaided institutions where there is a threat to the security of the job, which may also make the teaching-learning process vulnerable. From rural to urban, there is a range of institutions where situations to deal with the pandemic vary. For example, there are overcrowded colleges with lack of space to maintain social distancing, in case a decision is taken to open the institutions. On the other hand, students are also differentiated in terms of income and geographical location and they differ in terms of their abilities to access online classes. Many parents may not permit their daughters and sons to join the institutions and attend classes.

In the meantime, the Central Government has issued orders for the closure of all educational institutions from 24th March to 31st July 2020 in different phases. The mandate of the University Grants Commission is to maintain standards of higher education. It issues regulations to maintain standards in higher education. Classes for the winter semester could not be completed. Hence UGC constituted a committee and based on the recommendations suggested few alternatives such as the offer of an online course, examination and make use of various platforms to choose the course materials and make use of MOOCs. So far 25 or more advisories were issued in order to cope up with the situation. The latest UGC guideline approved by the Government of India reported that end semester examination of the previous semester is compulsory and should be held in online, offline or both by September 2020. As noted above, due to the differentiated higher education and the weak IT

infrastructure, there was not much that could be done for an effective alternative till 30th June 2020. There was also opposition from experts, teachers and students that online course delivery and examination cannot be an effective alternative. There is so far uncertainty as to what the Central Government will decide from August 2020 onwards with respect to the opening of institutions.

There have been several responses to the Covid 19 and consequences on higher education. These responses vary from the inaccessibility of students to the online courses to the loss of the spirit of university as democratic institutions as some of the vibrant campuses were converted into isolated localities where no outsiders could enter. Such was the fear of pandemic. Not the least, the academia who is known to be the torchbearers of knowledge came back to the state of inactivity, except of course a minority of them who were active in terms of the completion of pending research, or webinars. However, there was a complete lack of resilience on the part of academic leaders to come out with innovative solutions which could be scaled up.

I conducted a survey on Covid 19 and Higher Education to assess the state of affairs to conduct the online course and also solicit views of academia on the way forward to fight the threat and to make institutions of higher education a resilient one. There were responses from 543 teachers across 419 institutions of higher education³. The sample size is justified to have statistically significant results at the aggregate level from the population of 40,000 institutions.

The objective of the report is to understand what have been the responses from institutions of higher education internationally? The present report also tries to understand the responses so far from Indian academia and experts on higher education. Besides, I would like to assess what our survey informs? The recommendations are suggested based on the survey.

³With few faculties being repeated the total sample size is 543 faculty.

2. International Scenario

There are several surveys on the issue discussed and some of them are important ones. QS survey results are as follows:

- i. The data suggest that the impact of coronavirus is likely to be an issue of timing. It implies that university leaders are likely to keep planning flexible.
- ii. Forty-two per cent of international students stated that they had no interest in studying online.
- iii. Students informed that there should be greater communication between students and university to instill confidence. Fifty-two per cent of respondents believe that universities should set up a 24-hour helpline for students.
- iv. University authorities reported that the biggest challenge is maintaining educational progress with innovative educational solutions, like going online; the financial hit of fewer students.
- v. University reported their response as switching scheduled course online (50 per cent). Deferring admission and examination was another response to the pandemic.
- vi. Pedagogy of teaching is moving from a lecture-listen model to an interactive, learn-by-doing model.
- vii. Strong leadership with flexibility and the ability to quickly adapt to changing crisis conditions will serve higher education institutions well in the coming months

Inside Higher Ed conducted a survey that includes a total of 172 respondent - President or Chancellor from US universities.

- i. Eighty per cent of respondents are concerned about the mental and physical health of students and employees alike. Sixty-two per cent noted that they have invested or plan to invest in additional physical or mental health resources.
- ii. Ninety-eight per cent leaders noted that they moved the majority of all in-person classes online. Ninety-three per cent said they implemented work-remote policies for staff. 100 per cent said they would move to online courses in future.
- iii. Eighty-one per cent leaders noted that maintaining student engagement and 75 per cent noted training faculty less familiar with digital delivery are two important

challenges for them. Only 59 per cent consider that during Covid 19, ensuring high academic standards is a challenge.

- iv. Forty-one per cent of presidents and chancellors noted the possibility of holding in-person classes. Eighty-nine per cent of them were concerned about overall financial stability, 88 per cent stated about a decline in overall future student enrollment and 81 per cent about the ability to afford to employ staff and faculty.
- v. Sixty per cent noted the need for additional operational and financial support to successfully navigate beyond the COVID-19 crisis. Fifty-three per cent stated they need support for faculty training and development.
- vi. Eighty-nine per cent institutions noted the need for a financial stimulus package to compensate for losses and seventy-one per cent said the need for flexibility on regulatory limitations in providing remote learning (regular and substantive interaction).

Times Higher Education (2020) carried a survey of 200 university leaders from 53 territories. Fifty-three per cent reported that 100 per cent university's teaching has been/will be moved online. Thirty-three per cent reported that more than 75 per cent university's teaching has been/will be moved online as a result of COVID-19. Those who do not plan to move online, the predominant reason is not lack of finance or technical know-how and availability, but it was so because some disciplines or modules cannot be taught online. Over 80 per cent reported that they have achieved the transition successfully. However, only 9 per cent strongly agree that the quality of online teaching is as good as pre-Covid teaching. Seventy-nine per cent of respondents noted that they would be seeking course assessments from students for courses that have had to move online. Sixty per cent said that continuous assessment is acceptable alternatives to online final exams in at least some disciplines. They also noted that all applied disciplines and professional courses are not easy to transition to online teaching and learning.

From the perspective of students, survey reports that online education is not the choice of the majority of students. The university leaders also noted that online education is not the perfect substitute for in-person teaching. Students also desired that during Covid 19 situation, there should be greater communication with them. Leaders also felt that physical

and mental health of students is an important concern for them. It was noted that during Covid 19 situation, there is an urgent need of leadership which could be capable of innovative solutions and use a flexible approach in decision-making. So far as the transition to an online course is concerned; university leaders felt that there are two important challenges - Student engagement and their accessibility to online courses and preparing faculty for making a transition to the online course. With respect to the course assessment, the method of continuous assessment was preferred rather than online examination. However, it was also pointed out that government financial stimulus package for this transition is necessary. In terms of the pedagogy of teaching online, it was noted that interactive and discussion mode is essential. Majority of university leaders noted that online transition is a difficult proposition for many applied and professional courses, including science course where laboratory experiments are necessary.

Notwithstanding the above, survey results point out that the majority of high-grade institutions have no other alternative but to move to online teaching in the next semester, which will also go along in-person teaching. There are other surveys which note the importance of round the clock help desk to answer every conceivable question relating to academic, administrative and finance issues. The desk facility will be centralized and co-ordinate with all staffs in the university. A university in South Africa has ensured that students from low socio-economic backgrounds are provided with hardware and data so that they can get on with the work. While the online alternative is being tried out, there is a confession that the campus environment is lacking in this transition. IAU (2020) survey note that as far as research is concerned, 80 per cent of HEIs reported that research has got affected by the COVID-19 pandemic at their institutions. The most common impact of COVID-19 has been the cancelling of international travel (at 83 per cent of HEIs) and the cancellation or postponement of scientific conferences (81 per cent of HEIs).

Moreover, scientific projects are at risk of not being completed at a bit more than half of HEIs (52 per cent). Chronicle Higher Education survey in the US context notes that low-income students at the university were 55 percent more likely to delay graduation than their more affluent peers, and 41 percent more likely to change their major. An important finding is that Covid-19 nearly doubled the divides between lower- and higher-income students' expected GPAs, with the gap increasing from 0.052 to 0.098 on a four-point scale.

The above findings alert the policymakers towards issues of a financial stimulus package, teacher training and IT infrastructure support for online transition, facilitation in terms of help desk and accessibility of technological equipment to low-income group students. It also seeks regulatory guidelines that offer flexibility to the institutions to adopt a blended approach and last, but not the least, a leadership capable of innovative solutions.

Financial Stimulus Package to Higher Education

In the United States, a US\$2 trillion emergency relief package passed in March includes US\$14 billion targeted to higher education. Universities UK has requested the governments of Great Britain package of measures to stabilise the university sector. These relate to research support, stability to UK students entering 2020-21, and support to skilled employees, address losses in income and cash flow and mitigate the impact of international students' downfall in enrolment. The Australian Government announced an emergency package for the country's universities that includes funding for new short retraining courses designed to help with re-skilling unemployed Australians, a funding guarantee of AUS\$18 billion for domestic enrolments (regardless of actual student numbers), and another AUS\$100 million in regulatory fee relief and deferrals. (ICEF 2020).

3. Response to Covid 19 in India

The PM e-Vidya Programme, announced by the Government of India, will provide enhanced learning opportunities to 3.7 crore students in higher education and expand e-learning by liberalizing open, distance, and online education regulatory framework, the top 100 universities will start online courses. PM e-Vidya will be a "multi-mode online programme" to be launched immediately. This programme will help them access the educational content through television and radio during the nationwide lockdown. Union HRD Minister at G20 Extraordinary Virtual Education Ministers' Meeting noted the scheme of one nation one digital platform, one class one TV channel, 100 top-ranked universities to begin the online programme in universities, along with existing SWAYAM MOOC courses, preparation of e-learning resource in eight languages, study material for differently-abled students and scheme for psychological support and wellbeing (MANODARPAN).

UGC issued a notification on 19th of March 2020 to defer all the examination and evaluation works. In another notification on 21st March, 2020, UGC advised faculty members to 'work from home'. During this period, it suggested to prepare online course, online teaching and online evaluation. It suggested preparing online course and instructional material for the next semester. It asked the faculty members to carry on research and write papers, prepare innovative questions for question bank and prepare innovative projects on "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat" and other projects. There was a notification on 25th March to take the advantage of various electronic resources and platform in developing and using online courses. Besides in a letter dated 28th March, 2020 there is an appeal to enforce quality mandate through its 11-point action plan. These relate to student induction programme, learning outcome-based curriculum framework, curriculum for life skills, social and industry connect, human values, research, sustainable campus development, inculcation of human values, Faculty induction programme, evaluation reforms and mentoring for NAAC Accreditation.

Students' group Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) submitted a memorandum of suggestions on reforms to the Prime Minister in view of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the immediate future, the group calls for the universities to release new academic calendars, holding practical examinations only after the theoretical examinations, allowing for online

submissions of research and doctoral thesis, foregoing the demand for fees altogether for students belonging to economically weaker sections of the society, giving concessions in respect of hostel and mess fees, periodic sanitization of hostels and increasing the scholarship and doctoral fellowship amount in the upcoming academic year, among several others. National Students Union of India demanded that Government of India should waive off the interest on the EMIs of the education loans taken by students, the rent of the hostels and PG's should be waived off, tuition fees should be waived off during the period classes were not held. Other student organization, Student Federation of India, have also demanded the provision of a minimum amount of sum to the student's bank account to meet basic needs. Students want clarification on JEE 2020 and NEET 2020.

Various webinars have come out with innovative suggestions that are worth noted. For example, in a webinar organized by the Observer Research Foundation, there was a suggestion for a paradigm shift from transactional to a solution-oriented approach. Some of the Indian students who were wishing to go abroad but have postponed going abroad for the study could be given the same experience if Indian universities could partner with renowned foreign universities with a hybrid of online and on-campus learning in flexible ways.

4. COVID Survey on Higher Education: Findings

Amongst the many suggestions, UGC has issued advisories to prepare the online course and instructional material for the next semester and asked universities to make use of online resources available on various platforms. International surveys also point out towards an immediate switch to online, notwithstanding the fact that it is not considered as a perfect substitute for in-person teaching. What online course offers as an alternative for Indian higher education? An answer to this question depends on field reality.

1. What happened from April to June 2020 with respect to the online classes and the end semester exam of the previous semester? When do teachers expect to resume classes?
2. What is the minimum IT infrastructure support?
3. What is the preparedness of teachers?
4. From the students' perspective, the issue of benefits in terms of online access to teaching resources acquires importance.

Randomly, 20 colleges for every state were selected. We further picked up randomly 2 to 3 respondents' emails for every college. The Email request with link to the questionnaire was sent to the respondents who were Principals or Heads of the Department or the faculty members. Further, emails were sent to all the participants of our department's workshop in last one or two year. In this way, approximately 1500 mails were sent for filling up the questionnaire. We received responses from 543 respondents.

Sample size in our survey is as follows. From the point of view of total population of nearly around 40000 institutions, a sample size of 543 responses from 419 institutions is expected to give results which can be statistically significant. The limitation of the study is that sample size by type of institutions (government, aided and unaided) and category (rural/urban) is not large enough to have statistically significant results. However, the purpose of the survey is to give some indicative results and suggestions for action.

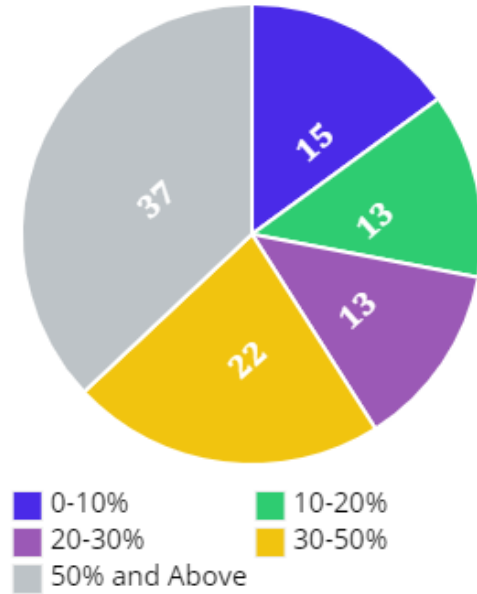
Sample size in our survey

	<i>Government</i>	<i>Non-Government</i>		<i>Total</i>
		<i>Aided</i>	<i>Unaided</i>	
<i>Urban</i>	142	129	59	330
<i>Rural</i>	105	92	16	213
<i>Total</i>	247	221	75	543

4.1. Status of online classes

4.1.1 Online Classes Held During April to June 2020

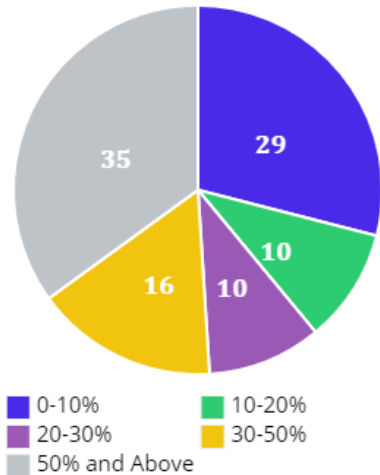
Classes held in Indian Higher Education Institutions during April, 2020



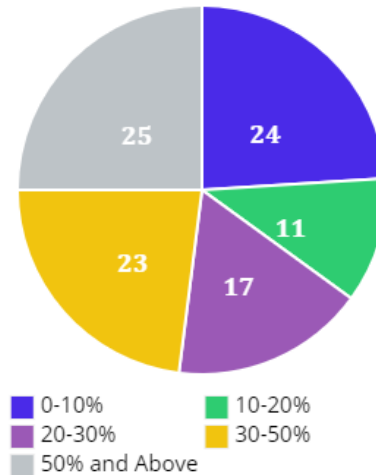
During April 2020, 37 percent institutions of higher education noted that 50 percent and above online classes were held. It also implies that in a majority of higher education institutions (63 per cent) less than 50 percent online classes were held. During May and June, almost similar situations with respect to online classes existed.

4.1.2 Online Classes differences in Urban-Rural Institutions during June, 2020

Online classes held in Urban institution during June, 2020



Online classes held in Rural institution during June, 2020

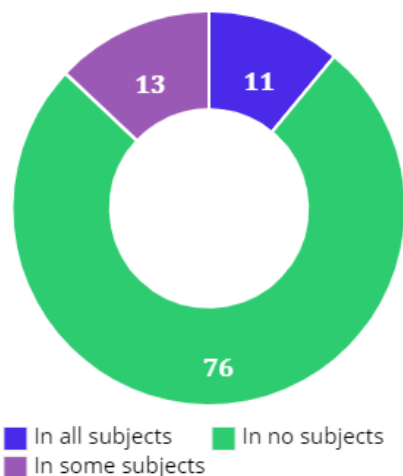


In the rural institutions, it was reported that 75 per cent of institutions conducted less than 50 per cent classes in online mode as opposed to 65 per cent institutions in the urban region.

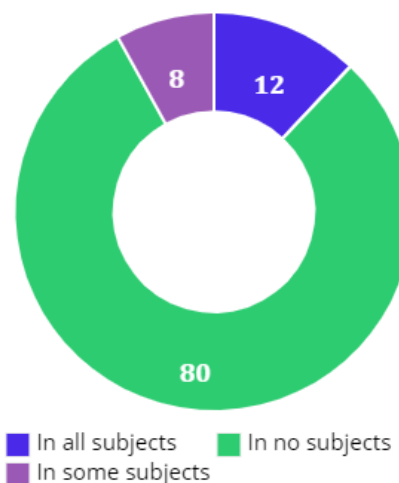
4.1.3. End Semester Examination

In 76 per cent of institutions in the urban and 80 per cent institutions in rural area end-semester examinations could not be held during April to June 2020.

Previous semester examination held during April to June, 2020 (Urban)



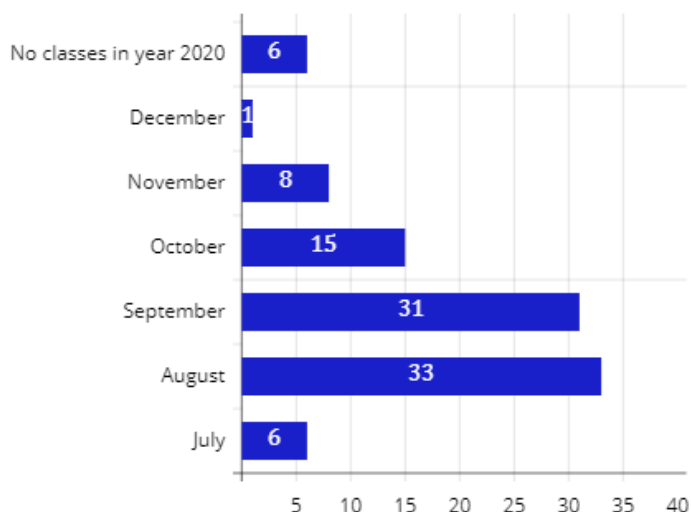
Previous semester examination held during April to June, 2020 (Rural)



4.1.4 Teachers' Perception to Resume Classes

Thirty-three per cent of the teachers expected to resume classes in August 2020 and 33 per cent of the teachers expected to resume classes in September 2020. A slightly smaller percentage of teachers expected to resume classes in October 2020. Thus nearly 80 per cent of teachers expect classes to resume from August to October 2020.

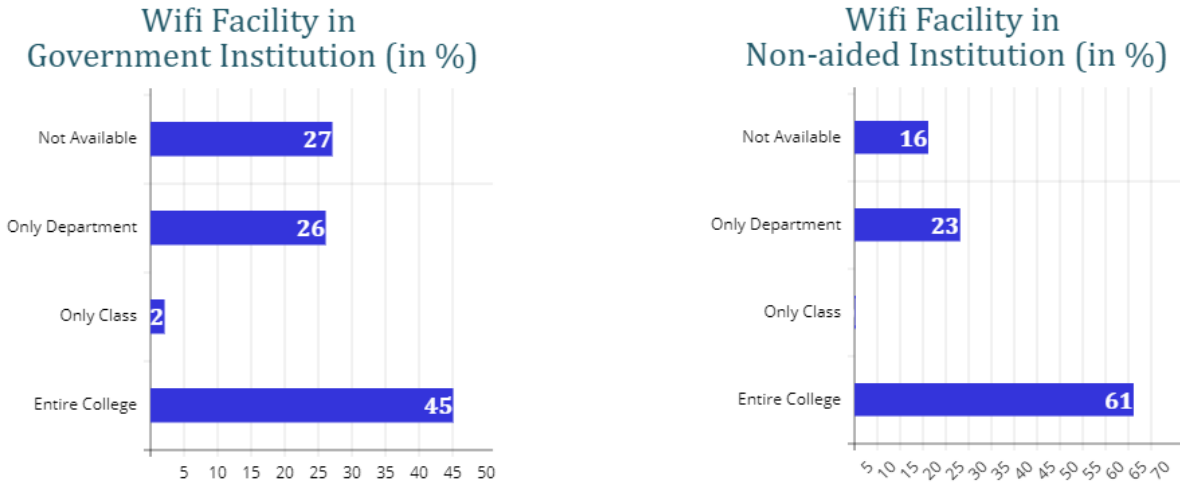
Teachers feedback on expected month to resume teaching (in %)



Above results confirm that Covid 19 caused disruptions due to the closure of institutions. In a minority of institutions, only an online substitute could work. In rural institutions, an online alternative was minimal. In particular, end semester examinations were not held in a majority of institutions. Teachers do expect that institutions will be opened from August to October 2020.

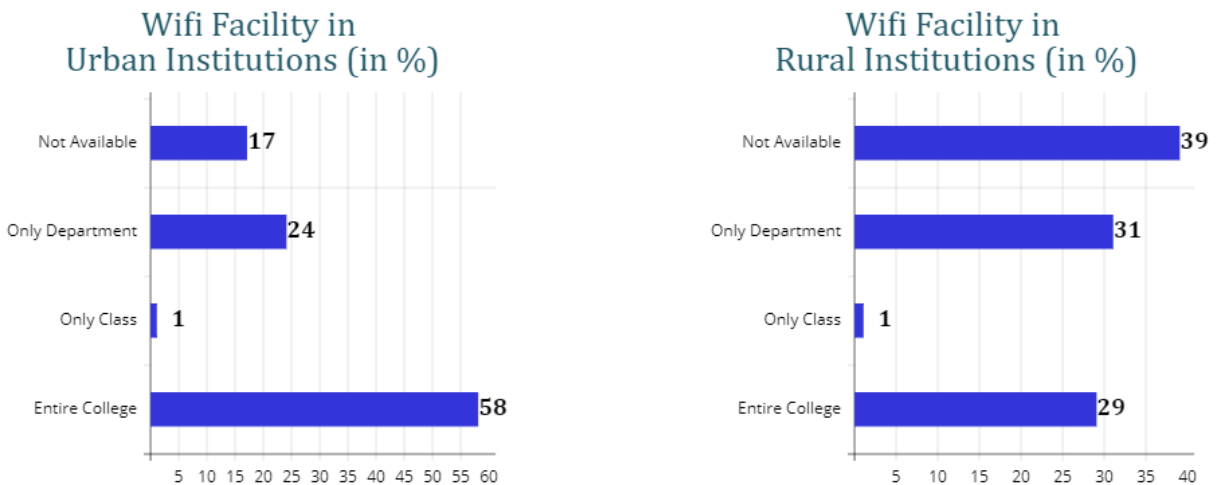
4.2. Online Classes: Future Possibility

4.2.1 Wi-Fi Facility by types of Institutions



Wi-Fi facility is necessary for online classes to be held. It was reported that Wi-Fi facility is not available in 27 per cent government and 16 per cent private institutions of higher education. Twenty-eight per cent institutions in government and 23 per cent in private have Wi-Fi facility restricted to class or department. There is an estimated 39 per cent of rural colleges which do not have the Wi-Fi facility in the college. Assume, as per AISHE report, that 22 per cent of colleges are government or constituent colleges. Out of 40,000 colleges, roughly 8000 colleges are in the government sector. Hence approximately 2100 colleges do not have Wi-Fi facility. These colleges need immediate attention to have the Wi-Fi facility under the financial stimulus package.

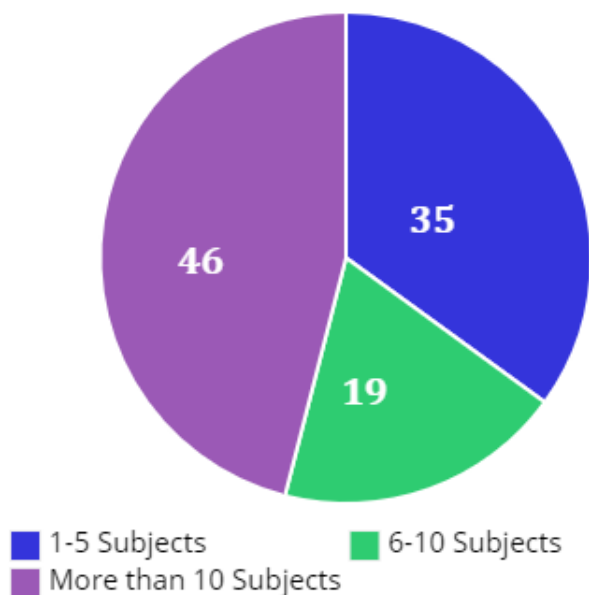
4.2.2 Wi-Fi Facility in Urban and Rural Institutions



4.2.3 Subject range in which online classes can be offered

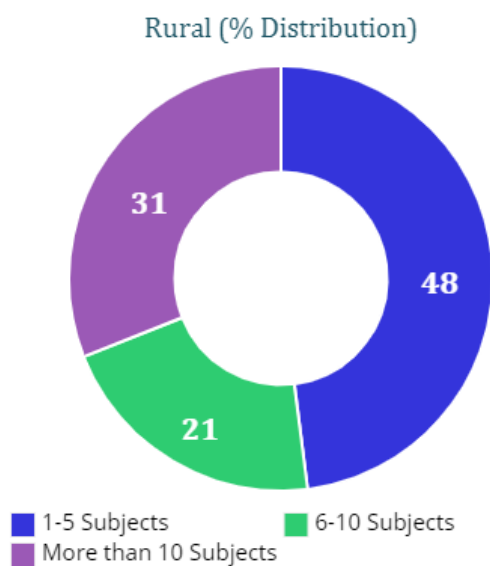
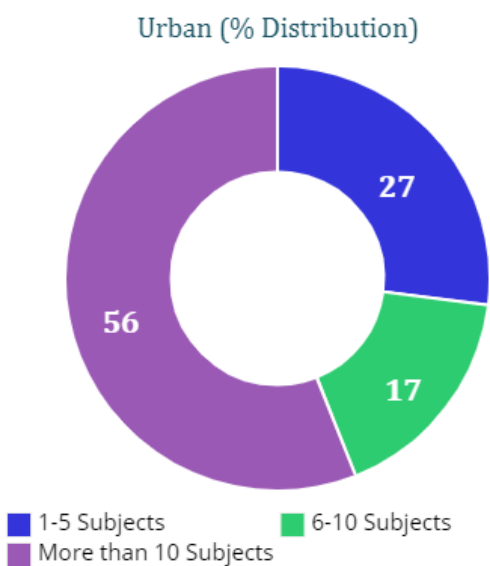
Overall, 35 per cent Institutions reported that they could launch online classes in 1-5 subjects, 19 per cent reported to start online classes in 6-10 subjects and 46 per cent

% distribution of subject range in which online courses in next semester can be offered



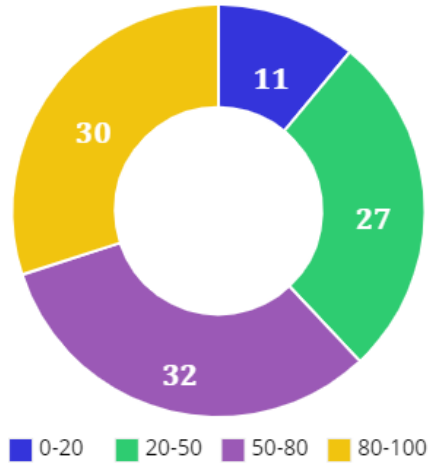
institutions reported that they could offer online courses in more than ten subjects in the next semester. Thus almost 54 per cent institutions do not feel confident to start online classes in almost all subjects. The urban-rural difference is huge in terms of the range of subjects to be offered online in the next semester. Almost 48 per cent institutions in the rural area have low capacity to offer online courses (range of 1-5 subjects)

4.2.4 Distribution of subject range in Urban-rural Institutions in which online classes can be offered



4.2.5 Teachers competence to offer online courses

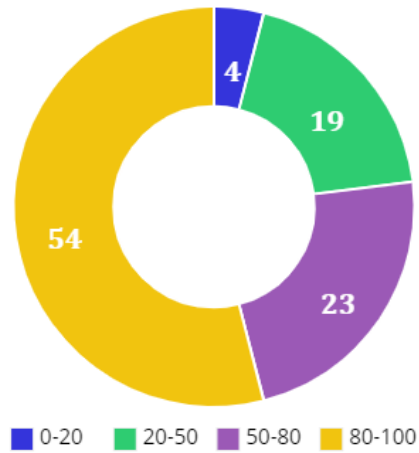
% of Government teachers competent to offer online course in different ranges of subjects



management wise is not given. 66.4 per cent enrolment of students are in private colleges. Assuming the same percentage of teachers in private colleges, 9.34 lakh teachers are in private institutions of higher education. 4.8 lakh teachers are in government colleges. If roughly 70 per cent of teachers have low capacity to offer online courses in government institutions, then nearly 3.4 lakh teachers might need the training to increase competence to offer online courses.

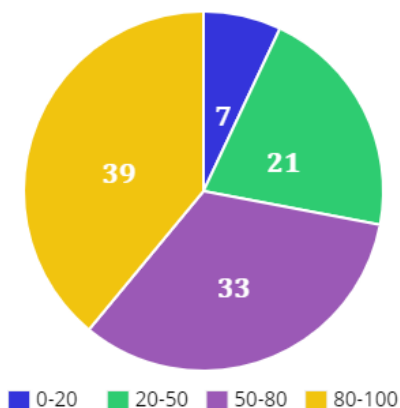
Thirty per cent institutions in government and 54 per cent in unaided colleges reported that 80-100 per cent of teachers are competent to offer an online course in their institutions. Only 22 per cent of teachers in the rural area reported high capacity to offer online courses so far as teacher's competence to offer the online course is concerned. The total number of teachers in India are 14,16,299. Distribution of teachers

% of Non-aided teachers competent to offer online course in different ranges of subjects

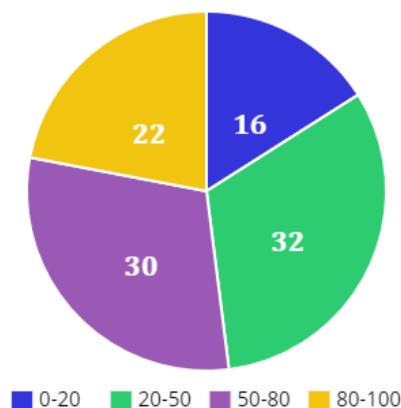


4.2.6 Teachers competence to offer online courses in Urban and Rural Institutions

% of Urban institutions teachers competent to offer online course in different ranges of subjects



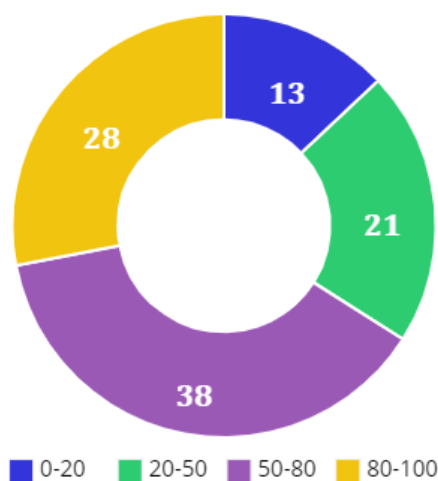
% of Rural institutions teachers competent to offer online course in different ranges of subjects



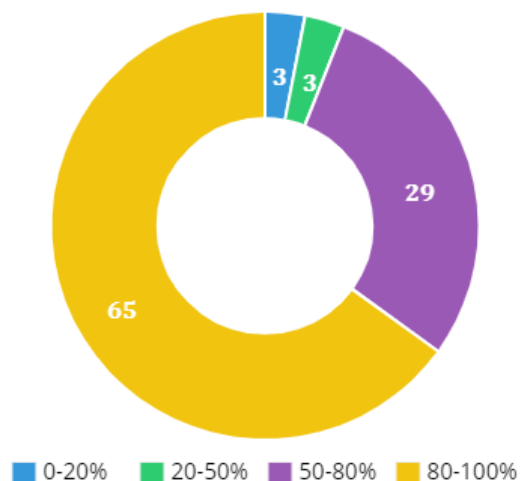
4.2.7 Students' access to online courses: Smartphone

Whether students will be able to access an online course or not depends on smartphone or laptop availability. Twenty-eight per cent institutions in government and 65 percent in private reported high availability of smartphone with students (with 80-100 per cent students). Thirteen per cent institutions in government and 3 per cent in private reported low availability of smartphone with students (with 0-20 per cent students). The urban-rural differences may be observed in institutions having low availability of smartphone with students.

% institutions in which smartphone availability in different ranges of students (Government)

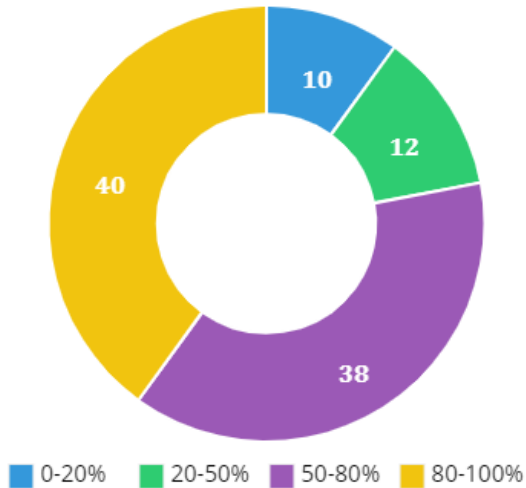


% institutions in which smartphone availability in different ranges of students (Non-aided)

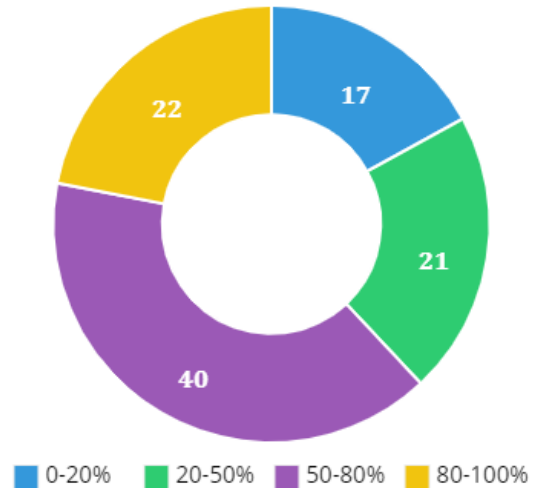


4.2.8 Students' access to online courses: Smartphone in Urban and Rural Institutions

% institutions in which smartphone availability in different ranges of students (Urban)



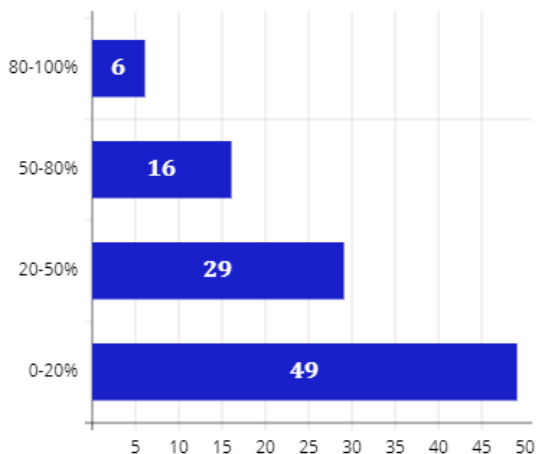
% institutions in which smartphone availability in different ranges of students (Rural)



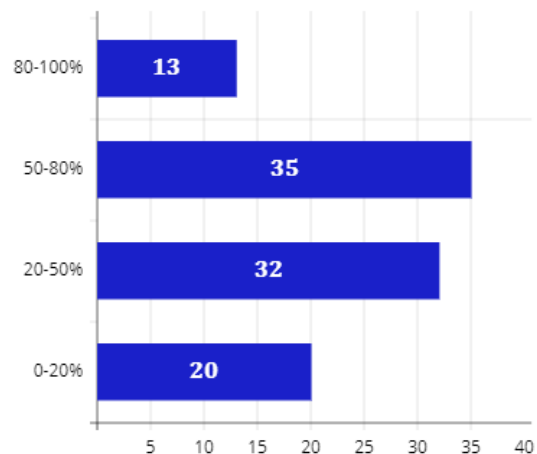
4.2.9 Students' access to online courses: Laptop

Six per cent institutions in government and 13 per cent in private reported high availability of laptop with students (with 80-100 per cent students). Forty-nine per cent institutions in government and 20 per cent in private reported low availability of laptop with students (with 0-20% students). The urban-rural differences may be observed in institutions having low availability of laptop with students. Thirty-eight per cent institutions in urban and 62 per cent in rural institutions have low availability of laptop with students (with 0-20 per cent students).

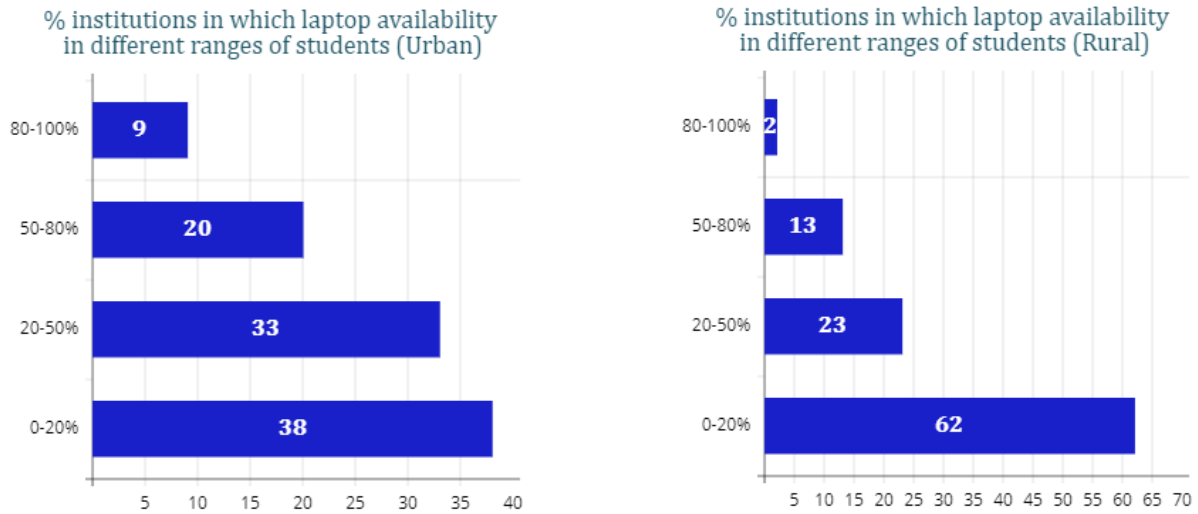
% institutions in which laptop availability in different ranges of students (Government)



% institutions in which laptop availability in different ranges of students (Non-aided)

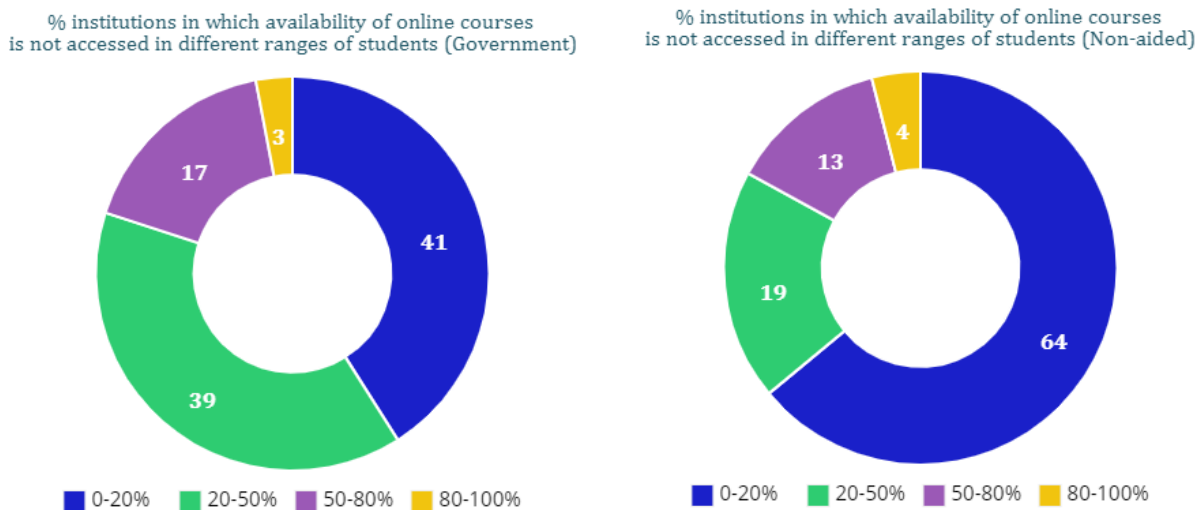


4.2.10 Students' access to online courses: Laptop in Urban-Rural Institutions



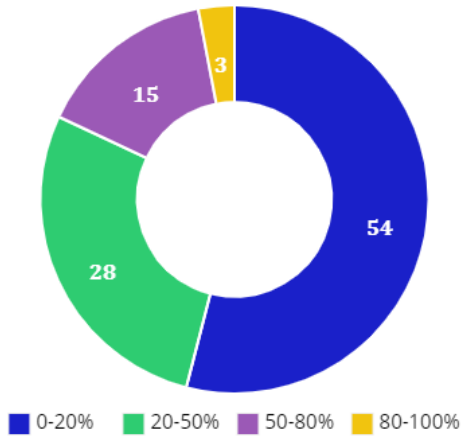
4.2.11 Students' access to online courses

Forty-one per cent institutions in government and 64 per cent reported 0-20 per cent of students would not have the accessibility of online courses. Thirty-nine per cent institutions in government and 19 per cent reported 20-50 per cent of students would not have the accessibility of online courses. Fifty-four per cent institutions in urban and 36% in rural institutions reported 20-50 per cent of students would not have the accessibility of online courses.

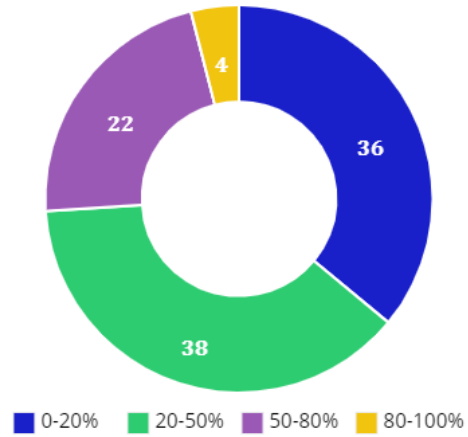


4.2.12 Students' access to online courses in Urban-Rural Institutions

% institutions in which availability of online courses is not accessed in different ranges of students (Urban)



% institutions in which availability of online courses is not accessed in different ranges of students (Rural)

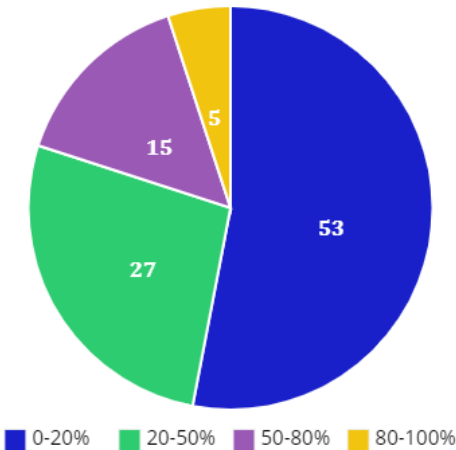


4.3 Teachers use of online resources

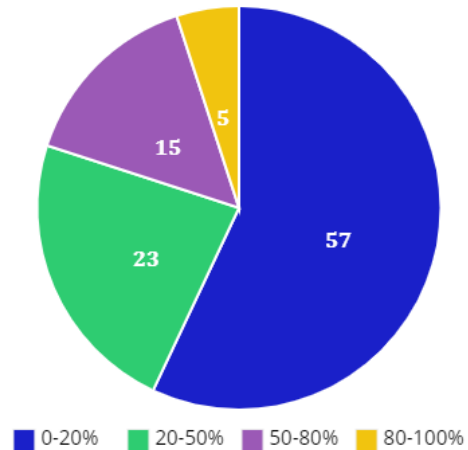
It is also important to note that Teachers' use of online resources available on various platforms is very limited. Fifty-three per cent institutions in urban and 57% institutions in the rural area reported that 0-20 per cent of teachers use Swayam E Pathshala online resource. Only 5 per cent institutions in urban and 5 per cent institutions in the rural area reported that 0-20 per cent of teachers use Swayam E-Pathshala online resource.

(i) Teachers use of Swayam E Pathshala online resource

Urban (in %)

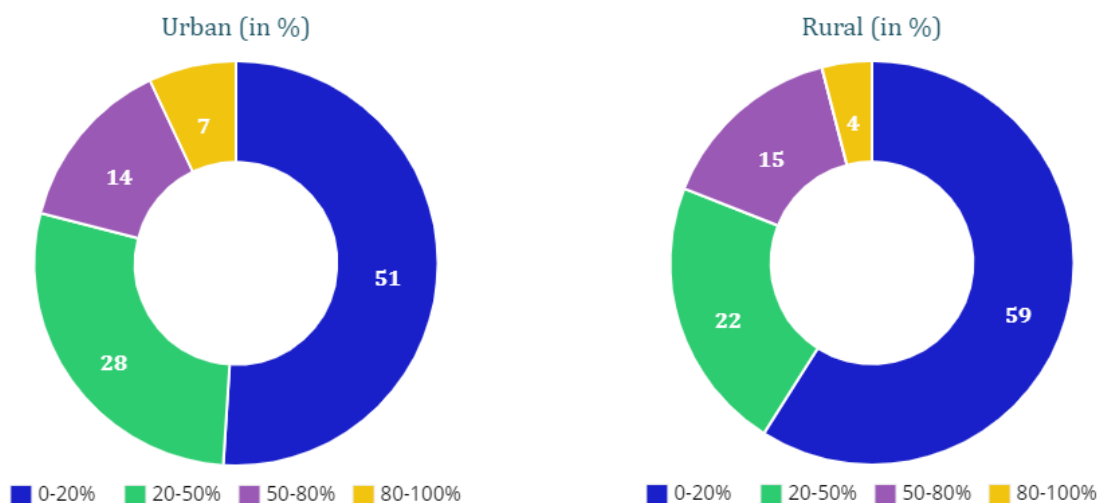


Rural (in %)



(ii) Teachers use of National Digital Library

It is also important to note that Teachers' use of National Digital Library is very limited. Fifty-one per cent institutions in urban and 59% institutions in the rural area reported that 0-20 per cent of teachers use Swayam E Pathshala online resource. Only 7 per cent institutions in urban and 4 per cent institutions in the rural area reported that 0-20 per cent of teachers use National Digital Library.



4.4 What is your estimate on the fall of enrolment in your institution in new academic session?

From the responses received, the overall percentage fall in enrolment in higher education is estimated to be 17 per cent. Hence enrolment is expected to decline by 6.35 million down from 37.4 million. The estimated decline in enrolment in government institutions is expected to be by 1.84 million and in private institutions by 4.50 million.

Calculation of Total Fall in Enrolment

	Percentage fall	Fall in enrolment	Total Enrolment
Government	14.69	1.84	12.54
Aided	17.96	4.51	24.76
Non Aided	21.97		
Grand Total	17.03	6.35	37.4

Note: Aided and Non-aided is clubbed in calculating fall in enrolment.

4.5 What will be the extent of the increase in fees in the next academic session in your institute?

Further, it is expected that there will be an increase in fees due to the cost-push factor. From the information received it is expected that there will be a 4.71 per cent increase in fees – 3.91 per cent in government, 5.09 per cent in aided and 6.26% in non-aided institutions. I assume that annual fees are Rs. 10000 per person per annum in government and Rs. 20000 per person per annum in private aided and non-aided institutions. (very orthodox assumption). Based on this total increase in fees is anticipated to be Rs. 2928 Cr. Rs. It implies that Rs. Approximately Rs. 3000 cr. is the extra minimum burden that student will have to bear for enrolling in Higher Education institutions.

	% increase in Fee	Enrolment (million)	Assumed Fee (Rs.)	Total Fee (million Rs.)	The total increase in Fee (million Rs.)
<i>Government</i>	3.92	12.54	10000	125400	4911.918
<i>Aided</i>	5.09	24.76	20000	495200	24375.127
<i>Non-Aided</i>	6.27				
Grand Total	4.72	37.4		620600	29287.045

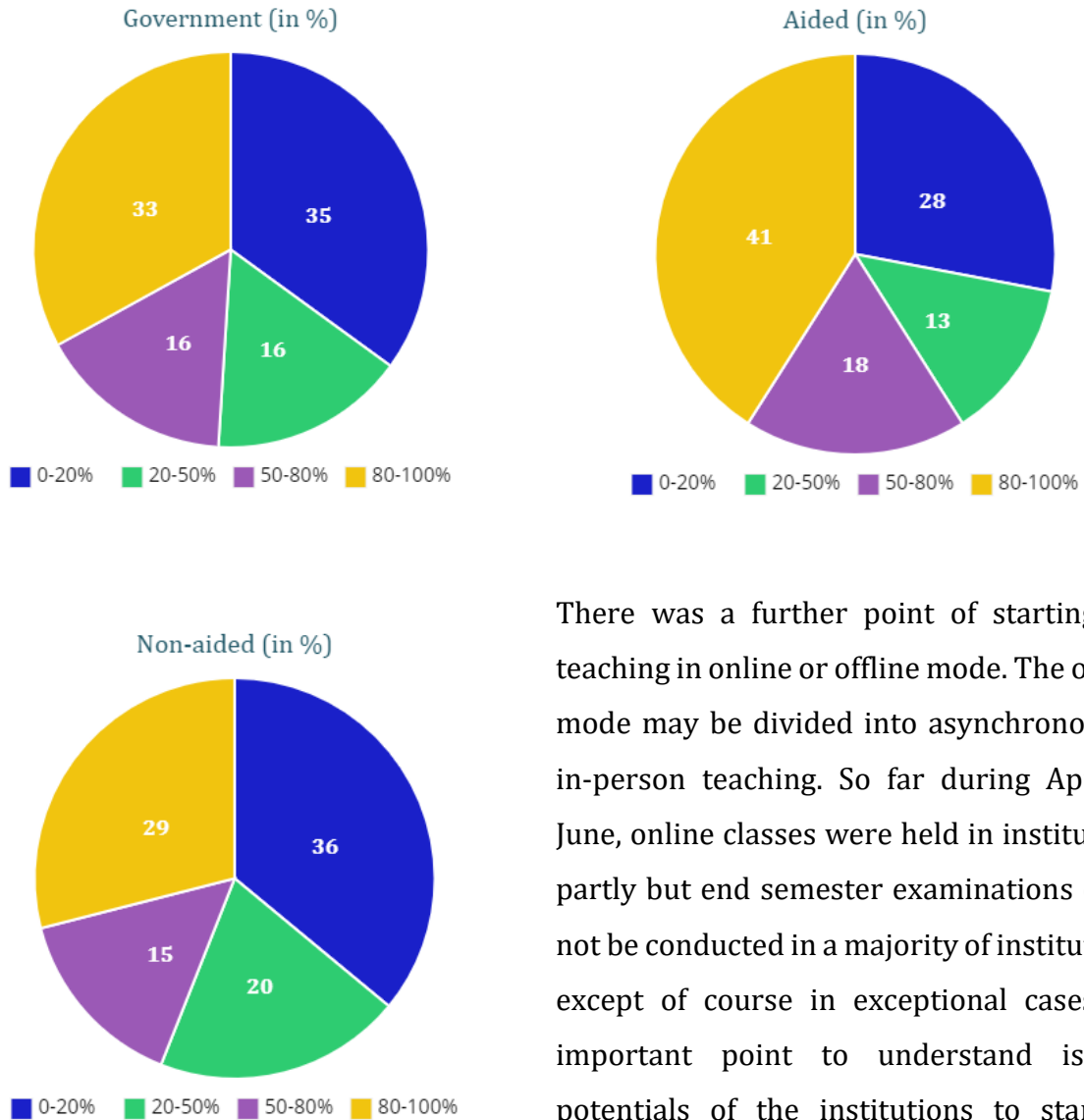
Note: An important assumption is that Government institutions charge Rs. 10,000 per annum per person and Aided and Unaided private institutions charge Rs. 20,000 per annum per person. This is a highly conservative assumption.

From the above calculation, the total increase in fees is Rs. 2928 crore. This is the minimum burden that student will have to bear on account of an increase in fees.

4.5.1 What percentage of temporary/contract teachers will be asked to continue in next semester in 2020? (Government/Private)

During the pandemic, the impact on temporary/contract teachers will be most severe. Thirty-five per cent government institutions, 28 per cent aided category institutions and 36% unaided institutions reported that only 0-20 per cent temporary/contract teachers would be asked to continue in next semester in 2020. Assume that 8000 institutions are under government category. Almost in 2800, government institutions only 0-20 per cent temporary/contract teachers will be asked to continue in next semester in 2020.

To sum up the survey finding following points emerged. There is a complete uncertainty on the opening of institutions of higher education. However, survey results note that from August to October 2020, the opening of institutions of higher education can be initiated.



There was a further point of starting the teaching in online or offline mode. The offline mode may be divided into asynchronous or in-person teaching. So far during April to June, online classes were held in institutions partly but end semester examinations could not be conducted in a majority of institutions, except of course in exceptional cases. An important point to understand is the potentials of the institutions to start an

online course if government decides to start online or offline teaching or a blended model.

Following points emerge from the survey:

Findings of the Survey

(i)	In estimated 2100 government institutions Wi-Fi facility in the entire college needs to be developed and the in rest of the institutions, estimated 6000 government institutions, part support for Wi-Fi facility needs to be provided.
(ii)	An estimated 54 per cent institutions do not feel confident to start online classes in almost all subjects implying that with the strengthening of the capacity to deliver online courses, such institutions will have to be allowed to conduct classes in blended mode – some classes in offline and some classes in online modes.
(iii)	If roughly 70 per cent of teachers have low capacity to offer online courses in government institutions, then nearly estimated 3.4 lakh teachers might need the training to increase competence to offer online courses.
(iv)	Assume estimated 14 million students are in government institutions and further assume that students are equally distributed in all 8000 government institutions implying 1750 students per government institution. From this, it can be estimated that out of 14 million students, 9 million students in government institutions may not be able to access online education. The reasons could be electricity problem or the unavailability of the smartphone or the laptop with the students.
(v)	Enrolment is expected to decline by 6.35 million down from 37.4 million to 31.05 million.
(vi)	It is expected that there will be a 4.71 per cent increase in fees – 3.91 percent in government, 5.09 per cent in aided and 6.26 per cent in non-aided institutions.
(vii)	Approximately Rs. 3000 cr. is the extra minimum burden that student will have to bear on account of an increase in fees.
(viii)	During the pandemic, the impact on temporary/contract teachers will be most severe. Thirty-five per cent government institutions, 28 per cent aided category institutions and 36 per cent unaided institutions reported that only 0-20 per cent temporary/contract teachers would be asked to continue in next semester in 2020.

5. Views and Suggestions

Colleges are the major hubs of Indian higher education. There are severe challenges during pandemic for those colleges which are situated in rural areas and where student strength runs in thousands. It is important to understand the concerns of the Principals of those colleges. From the survey, it turned out that many colleges are sceptical to the conduct of online learning. There concerns were as follows: (i) There is no proper internet connectivity. Hence, they pointed out the need for the government to address connectivity issue by directly engaging with internet service provider. (ii) Majority of students do not possess laptop. It was suggested to provide low cost laptop to the students. (iii) An important concern was that presently the digital divide will lead to learning achievement divide. Hence, online learning could only be a facilitation mechanism for a part of the syllabus, not exceeding 30 per cent of the syllabus. (iv) Principals of the colleges were also concerned about the lack of knowledge on the part of teachers for using IT based facilities. The suggestion was that special training for teachers will be needed to develop the competence of online teaching. (v) Principals noted that students are already admitted in excess of the capacity of the college in terms of teacher and infrastructure. In such situation, the management of conducting classes or examination in a face to face mode is not without risk. Overall, the heads of the colleges expressed concerns for face to face teaching. Yet, many of them put forward many innovative ways to engage students through online or offline modes of teaching. Given their above noted concerns, the financial stimulus to the institutions, the directions from the university to which they are affiliated and some independence in decision making at the college level assume great importance.

The views of Principals, Deans, Heads of Department and Faculty members can be summarised under the following heads.

1. **Opening of colleges and universities:** There was the view that normalcy should prevail before opening colleges and universities. It was also said that let 2020 Year be declared as Zero Academic Year as life is important than education. However, there were also alternative suggestions. Among them, the opinion of faculty was that the next semester may begin from September 2020 to February 2021 and subsequent semester from March 2020 to July 2021. In order to maintain social distancing, a double shift may

be started. Long vacations may be cancelled during this period. During July and August, institutions should prepare on the basis of SOP issued by the University Grants Commission. There was a suggestion to conduct classes on the odd-even basis and online classes on a weekly basis (two days online).

2. **Curricula:** Next semester, syllabus should be curtailed by 10 percent or as considered appropriate and added to the next to next semester. Practical work and activities may be shortened. Curricula should allow for both the modes – online as well as offline, including face to face wherever applicable. It was suggested that syllabus must be pragmatic, practical and decentralised in nature. Much of the problem can then be sorted out at the institutional level. The burden of the syllabus should be reduced.
3. **Admission:** Admission process should be entirely online. Verification of certificates may be at the department level. If any subject change is possible, given vacancy, it could be undertaken subsequently in a decentralised process. Significant reduction of application fee and the admission fee is exceptionally essential.
4. **Offline Teaching:** There were again contrasting views on starting classes in online or offline mode. There was a strong view that offline teaching with online as supplementary may be started, depending on the preparedness of the faculty and the institution concerned. In the offline teaching video classes may be an essential component. It was felt that campus life and interaction with teachers are crucial components of learning. So offline teaching, including face to face, cannot be compromised. An awareness campaign may be launched to build confidence among the parents and students for the starting of class. Complete reliance on online mode of teaching does not provide the experience of learning in terms of various facets of campus life which is one of deliberations and debates. Online teaching is commodifying higher education; in which, the teacher is treated as a producer and a student as a consumer. There was also a view that online classes involve extra cost, the readiness of teachers and inaccessibility of students for several factors.
5. **Online teaching:** There was also a view that online teaching should begin with innovations, as offline, particularly face to face, teaching poses a greater probability of mass spreading of the virus. In the two months during July and August, 2020 preparation may be completed with respect to modified curriculum guide, lecture materials and IT support and infrastructure. UGC should motivate the teachers to start their preparations

for better online interactions in the next session. In online teaching, teachers should be in continuous touch with the students. Students, however, should have a choice of communication with teachers to clarify the doubt and discuss in an online or offline mode. A complete support system to the students' needs to be provided in order to ensure accessibility of students to online teaching. However, teachers reported that their experience of online teaching has not been satisfactory at the field level on a number of counts such as inaccessibility and disinterest of students as also a failure of the operational mechanism.

6. **Examination:** For the next two semesters, it was suggested to have a continuous assessment on the basis of assignments submitted by the students at a regular interval. Conducting a mass examination should not be undertaken. It was, however, feared that an open-ended pedagogy would be not only futile but also counterproductive. It was suggested that assignments should promote self-study. It should not promote unfair means and free-riding. For the current semester students, online MCQ test should be taken as an end semester examination.
7. **University Grants Commission:** It was much expected from UGC to deal with the disruption caused by the closure of institutions due to Covid 19.
 - (i) After detailed deliberation with the government and the University leaders, it should come out with a definite plan of resuming offline teaching or online teaching or a blended approach to learning. The plan should follow with the preparation.
 - (ii) UGC should take the initiative to promote collaboration between faculty at the premier institutes and faculty in the University Departments to produce online courses and prepare teachers for online teaching.
 - (iii) UGC should issue the minimum standards framework for offline teaching or online teaching or a combination of both so that different universities and colleges adopting different methods should follow the minimum standards to prevent any decline in quality.
 - (iv) UGC should issue SOP for resuming classes. It should discuss the entry of students to campus policy, health check-up norms, safe stay in the campus, food hygiene, classroom, library and laboratory hygiene practices, social distancing.

- (v) UGC should issue guidelines to undertake awareness campaign and mental readiness and strength for parents and students.
 - (vi) UGC should allow flexibility and promote the creativity of university administrators and teachers
8. **Government:** The role of government is important to deal with the Covid 19 situation and prepare institutions of higher education for its effective functioning. Generating the E-Learning platform in all higher educational institutions should be made compulsory for which subsidies to the institutions may be provided. It was suggested to have 5 yrs Tie-ups with BSNL for creating and developing student-friendly E-Learning platform for access in the urban and rural area. The procedure of E-Learning content development may be made mandatory for all Higher Education Institutions
- (i) A financial stimulus package for the universities and colleges may be provided for developing IT infrastructure, training to the teachers, providing free/subsidised tablets/laptop/smartphone, increasing digital connectivity and bandwidth. This will be a long-term asset building and effective alternative in future.
 - (ii) Cash transfers to students from lower-income groups were suggested as it was felt that Covid 19 situation would increase the divide in terms of academic achievement.
 - (iii) It was suggested to employ community teachers who could move into the masses and support students from vulnerable groups in terms of motivation, clearing doubts and ensuring offline learning from the study materials.
9. **Student support system:** It was noted by the faculty members that a student support system should be strengthened in every college. Communication with the students should be increased and 24×7 helpline should be developed. Teachers should be in continuous touch with students to ensure focused readings such as one textbook for every paper, good discussion over group chat and assignments. From the perspective of students from the rural area, the complete online alternative is not suitable. Colleges should come out with innovative ways of managing students in smaller groups, alternative days attendance, online and offline combination. However, the university administration must ensure proper plans of innovative ways of students' management in the college. There was a suggestion that the government may provide kindle like

tablets free of cost to meritorious students belonging to BPL so that these students are benefited in future. Most of the students in rural set up are the first generation learners and mostly they come from low-income families. Only 5-10 per cent of students attended online classes. Hence the conditions of such students do not permit to have online class as an alternative to face to face teaching.

10. **Teachers:** Notwithstanding the differences in the opinion of teachers, all teachers were ready to put extra hours of work, whether it is a double shift, work on holidays or work during vacations during the period of the pandemic. Teachers suggested that study materials have to be made available for the students. The strategy was proposed that teachers will work with students in small groups. Teachers should prepare the materials in the form of pdf, docs and video lectures and also acquaint themselves to tools to assess the students learning outcomes. Quick revision classes were suggested for students who were not benefitted by the online classes. Provide proper training for teachers to conduct online classes.

6. Recommendations and Conclusions

Covid 19 pandemic has resulted in uncertainties in all walks of life. Higher education institutions, too, suffer from uncertainties with respect to the opening of institutions and start teaching and examination. Almost all countries suffer from uncertainty and varied opinions. Yet it is important to note that in difficult times like this, a far-sighted leader can mitigate the adverse effects of the pandemic. Based on international surveys on Covid19 and higher education, responses of different stakeholders in India and feedbacks received from teachers, heads and principals of institutions of higher education, following suggestions and recommendations are worth noting.

Government: A financial stimulus package from the Government of India will help to mitigate the loss due to closure and enable institutions of higher education to function. There are the following components of the financial stimulus package.

- (i) Wi-Fi facility in estimated 2100 Government Colleges @ Rs. 10 lakhs per institution and part support to 6000 colleges at rupees five lakhs per institution. This comes to a total of Rs. 510 crores
- (ii) Training to government college teachers to offer online courses may be provided during months of July and August 2020. Five hundred institutions of higher education, including HRDCs, may conduct a 5-day course with 30 participants. Four such courses in two months will substantially benefit teachers to initiate online courses. A sum of Rs. 20 crores may be allocated.
- (iii) Support to purchase smartphone/laptop to students. There are an estimated 9 million students who may not be accessing online education. Various innovative solutions in terms of kiosks, cybercafé and distributing smartphones/laptops may be provided. An estimated Rs. 1000 crores support may be allocated on this account.

UGC: The feedbacks from faculty and from international surveys on Covid 19 and higher education noted the role and importance of leadership. Universities in India look for UGC for guidance and support. At present, there is a lack of guidelines on the opening of institutions as the Central Government has announced the closure of institutions further till July 2020. Stakeholders, including the government is relying on wait and watch policy. During this

waiting period for further 2-3 months, UGC may begin the preparedness of institutions of higher education in offline, online or blended mode. It should directly communicate with universities and take stock of the situation, including online and offline option, teacher's capacity building to offer online course and issues relating to students' access to the online course and promoting research among faculty and research scholars. Specifically, UGC should come out with detailed instructions on the opening of institutions. It may present the case for financial stimulus package before the Central Government, as has been the case in the UK where Universities UK has put forth the demand for financial stimulus package before the UK government. The UGC should also build awareness campaigns and clarify all the doubts and queries of students, teachers and parents.

University: Each university should make a plan for resuming teaching in online and offline mode whichever is applicable. University should have a consultative process with the heads of institutions and the faculty members. The issue of creating enabling conditions for all students to access online and offline teaching should be discussed. Whether the continuous assessment is an alternative to end semester examination should be discussed. A curricular change proposal with appropriate modification of syllabus may be discussed and finalised. The waiting period should be effectively used for preparation to start classes. Universities in a state may come together to develop an action plan to open educational institutions. An action plan has to be context-specific and realistic and approved by the statutory bodies of the university. The following suggestions for an action plan may be worth considering:

- (i) Admission should be made entirely online and paperless
- (ii) Curricula, as per the guideline of UGC, should explore online teaching (synchronous), offline teaching (asynchronous through video, audio lecture, etc.) and face to face. All postgraduate departments and colleges should have further flexibility to decide the mix of methods.
- (iii) There should be continuous assessment and feedback system.
- (iv) Colleges and departments may be provided with a monitoring mechanism in place.

Teachers: The role of teachers is crucial. The teacher should begin to prepare for online courses. Study materials and videos may be put on the website of a college which can be easily accessed by students. Teachers may plan for small group discussion and doubt classes.

Department wise plan can be handed over to the heads of institutions who can get the approval from the university to deliver the course.

Conclusions

The threat of pandemic has created uncertainty in all higher education institutions in India and abroad. The international surveys point out the need for an effective leadership who could come out with innovative solutions to mitigate the threat and open educational institutions mostly through the online mode. International surveys also point out the need to address students' problems through the student support centres during this period. The autonomy in decision making at the institutional level, at the department and at the faculty level has created enabling conditions to start online alternative to the in-person teaching in USA and other European countries.

So far as Indian Higher Education institutions are concerned, there has been announcement of closure of the colleges and universities by the central government. University Grants Commission has also announced the holding of previous semester examination by September, 2020. UGC has advised the holding of online classes and making use of various platforms where resources are available for the benefit of students and teachers. Various state governments and universities are also taking various steps to deal with the pandemic and keep institutions functioning to the extent possible. However, many colleges with a large number of students are still struggling with the threat of pandemic and have remained in a state of inactivity.

A Survey was conducted to understand the ground reality with respect to the online alternative and various other ways to open higher education institutions. The survey results confirm that there is a lack of internet facility. There were difficulties to hold online classes. There is a need to develop capacity of the teachers to use IT facilities. Students accessibility to online classes is a problem that needs to be sorted out. It is feared that there will be a large decline in the enrolment, increase in fees transferring the incidents upon students and fall in the employment of contract teachers and temporary teachers in many private un-aided colleges. Under the circumstances noted above, the government may provide a financial stimulus package. The University Grants Commission may provide a greater autonomy to the university to make decisions suited to the context. This is indeed the testing time for the leadership at the university and college level to initiate measures for making the institutions

functional. Time is running out and the government, regulatory bodies, university administration and teachers should come together and make the plan of action.

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