

RESPONSES OF DR AMBEDKAR INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY During the COVID-19 National Lockdown

Corona Virus Disease (COVID), having taken birth in China in November 2019 has impacted the entire world and brought catastrophe to most of the countries. The COVID has challenged the advancements in the health systems of the various countries, including the most advanced ones. The pandemic has already killed over 80 thousand people, with several lakhs caught after the infection and are under various stages of treatment. With this pandemic, people are not only put to all forms of stress like never before but compelled to quarantine themselves at homes. That apart people are also maintain strict social distance. This social emergency being first in the recent time. The worst part of the pandemic is lack of diagnosis based medicines, although attempts are on to invent one in many countries after the virus catastrophe. But given its wide range of spread silently, non-medicinal methods are being imposed to minimise the spread and the related sufferings. Especially, these methods are largely practiced by the people in India like home quarantine, social distance and lockdown. Attempts have also been made to develop immunity among the potential patients group like children, aged ones and others suffering from other ailments and diseases. It should not go without mention that like the Indian Army, the Doctors, Paramedics and others in the hospitals have been working day and nights in treating and caring the affected cases and have exhibited their bravery in doing so. Their services are yeoman without caring for their own life. The national lockdown that is in progress has impacted all walks of life of the country and hit the economy badly and severely, as per many estimates. Educational institutions being the centres of conglomeration are the worst hit, in terms of the annual academic calendars that prompted reschedules. The COVID lockdown has posed a number of challenges to the teachers, students, administration and others. The major challenge is not to lose the academic calendar in any manner and to ensure engagement of the students community. It only means to put measures for continuous academic pursuits, without losing academic interest, time and energy. It is obvious especially in the technical autonomous institutions, which are known for tight academic schedules throughout the year.

There are other challenges as well to address to combat the pandemic. First, adjusting the academic calendar as the closure affects in several ways, including completion of the teaching modules, compliance of the students and the semester based examinations and other followings. Second, ensuring facilitating environment like nutritious food

for the students who stay in the residential hostels coming from far distant places and disadvantaged backgrounds, in addition to ensure their quarantine with safety measures. Third, alleviating burden of the parents and guardians in regard to the new learning environment and to ensure the academic compliance of their wards. Last but not the least is the real challenge of maintaining social distance of the students, especially in the class rooms once the lockdown lifted. It must be noted that under prolonged situation, students miss academic interactions, which is essential for learning.

Dr Ambedkar Institute of Technology (AIT) in Bangalore is a multilingual, multi culture and multi religion institution with over five thousand students in all the major engineering branches. Roughly one third of the students stay in the residential hostels in the campus, having come from far distant places. It is known to be a cost effective institution, rich faculty resources, highly secular and for many such reasons, it has become a sought after one by the students of the middle class and lower middle class strata. Having sensitised about the various implications by itself, AIT geared up to meet all the challenges of the national lockdown commenced from 23 March. This is mainly to engage the students and the teachers academically in all measures, keeping the interest and welfare of the students and the parents. Thanks to the autonomous status, which has facilitated one-to-one interactions rather conspicuously between the students and teachers under this unprecedented period. Interesting to note that majority of the students are interacting with faculty members in regards to the syllabus teaching and mentors are conducting online classes with learning materials. Faculty themselves have registered for ATAL FDP to upgrade their knowledge. Students were encouraged to the learning contents of NPTEL Courses. Besides online classes through zoom, google classroom, TCS Ion Digital Classroom, Skype, Cisco Webex, LinkedIn and many other portals. Students were posted recorded video lectures of VTU and previous years question papers were solved. In turn, students have also responded with all enthusiasm and submitted assignments, seminars, mini and final projects through WhatsApp and were allowed to contact the concerned faculty for seeking clarifications on their submissions. In all, it is a matter of pride that over 75 per cent of the undergraduates and cent percent of the postgraduate students were covered during the period of lockdown. From the administration, all faculty members instructed to connect with their students and are



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expected to submit reports to the respective Head of the Department in completing the syllabus and other activities. They have also successfully used online material available in the different portals with the help of the technology.

Boy-students of the distant places, particularly those of the other states and other countries were safeguarded with close monitoring and many of them are room quarantined. They were provided internet connectivity in their residential premises and in their rooms. Foods of the south and north Indian as well as continental style are being provided round the day, after engaging the specialised chefs and cooks. The management and administrators have been visiting the hostel premises regularly to ensure the cleanliness and the arrangements made.

Given the present situation, online learning and academic compliance assumed paramount significance in the technical institution and this shift compels the knowledge of the ICT among the stake holders, more so with students and teachers. The supervisory authorities like AICTE should popularise online teaching along with regular academic activities. They should ensure that students should not miss the classes, especially when the faculty apply various leaves including, assignments on other duties and special leave period. Mixture of both online and offline classes would be more effective. The technical institutions shall be supported to develop additional capacities to meet the similar situations in days to come. Our experience points to the fact that distance education modalities supported with the technology would become an important option under the situation. Similarly, Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) with teacher- student network contact becomes an added importance. But to ensure sustainable online learning, not only the network based infrastructure is mandatory but also training of the stakeholders, especially in rural areas and students and teachers as well respectively. Based on the present pandemic lockdown experience, government shall invite the industry to develop the needed infrastructure as well as the capacities in the technical institutions.