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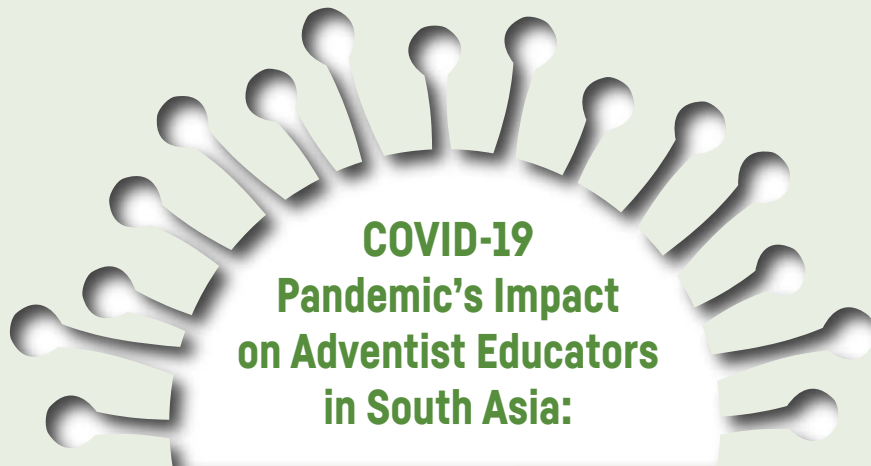# COVID-19 Pandemic's Impact on Adventist Educators in South Asia:

Teaching Amid Crisis

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly influenced educational systems, prompting significant modifications in teaching and learning methodologies. The pandemic affected students, educators, and institutions at all levels and caused one of the most severe educational catastrophes in human history.[1] Many schools and institutions closed during this period. Educators were required to use remote teaching techniques, and for many, this posed significant challenges.[2] However, the worldwide interruption provided opportunities to reform higher education and create efficient teaching-learning approaches.[3]

This article aims to examine the COVID-19 pandemic's repercussions on higher education in the Asian context, taking into account Adventist educational institutions. Additionally, it will discuss difficulties for teachers and other educators during the pandemic and examine their perspectives on remote learning and teaching.[4] To assist educators in adjusting to the new teaching style and enhancing student engagement and outcomes, the article concludes by highlighting the necessity of teacher training and professional development during difficult times in the future.[5]

Review of the Literature

A fundamental shift in pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning occurred because of COVID-19. Educators quickly had to adjust to virtual learning modalities, which posed considerable challenges.[6] Numerous studies have examined the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on education.[7]

Many children and young adults experienced challenges during the transition to online learning, particularly in cases where remote learning alternatives were either unavailable or difficult to access. For example, at Spicer Adventist University in Pune, India, I was appointed as an online teaching-learning coordinator as we transitioned from physical to virtual classrooms. During this time, one of the most difficult and challenging issues we faced was students' difficulty in connecting virtually to online classes. For instance, one student from Northeast India shared that he had to climb a nearby hill every day to obtain a mobile signal to log into classes. Other students told us that learning online was very expensive, as their limited data plan would be exhausted within the first few lectures, and they struggled to afford extra data for daily classes. An additional investigation revealed that the pandemic affected both students and professors, as many faculty members were required to provide innovative support to educate students in their care.[8]

The transition to virtual learning imposed significant demands on higher education establishments to deliver high-quality instruction while maintaining sustained student engagement. The challenges continue, as the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the need for teacher-training and professional-development programs to assist educators in adjusting to new teaching approaches (unrestricted by traditional government-controlled schooling methods), enhance student engagement, and improve academic achievement.[9]

Additionally, agricultural education, health-care education, and other professional programs that relied heavily on hands-on practice and in-class experiences faced significant disruptions since the practical teaching methods in these programs made it particularly difficult to adapt them to online learning environments. Challenges included communication, instructional quality, program facilities and activities, student motivation, technology and Internet access, and maintaining work-life balance. Better comprehending these challenges can equip the education system with the ability to enhance its resilience to wider social forces in the years to come.[10]

Despite its notable challenges, the situation in 2020 provided opportunities to reconfigure tertiary education and implement effective pedagogical approaches.[11] Therefore, training and professional-development opportunities to support educators in adapting new teaching methodologies and improving student engagement and academic achievement are evident.

Amidst the pandemic, several modifications were introduced to the education sector: the adoption of virtual instruction,[12] the implementation of hybrid and HyFlex[13] teaching models, the alternation between offline and online studying, the use of blended-learning techniques, bridging the gaps between face-to-face and online learning through innovative pedagogical approaches, the integration of novel technologies into the education system, the creation of virtual-instruction alternatives for specific student groups, the provision of professional development and support for teachers implementing changes, and consideration of the workloads imposed on teachers.[14] Nonetheless, certain obstacles still exist, such as discerning superior content and addressing the issue of "webinar fatigue."[15] To create educational environments that are accessible, engaging, interactive, and sustainable, pre-existing teaching strategies must be combined with the integration of new approaches.

Adventist Philosophy of Education in Context

Education has long been regarded as a fundamental element in human development and societal progress.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church values the acquisition of knowledge not only for intellectual growth but also for spiritual development. The Adventist philosophy of education embodies distinctive approaches to education that are intricately connected to the church's principles and convictions; it serves as a guiding foundation for Adventist educational institutions everywhere.[16]

The Adventist Church operates schools and colleges around the globe, including 6,897 elementary and 2,793 secondary schools and 107 colleges and universities.[17] The educational philosophy that forms the foundation of Adventist schools is rooted in the conviction that education should be comprehensive, Christ-centered, and oriented toward students' needs. Adventist education aims to foster individuals' wholistic growth, encompassing spiritual, cognitive, corporeal, and communal dimensions.[18] Principles such as character development, service to others, and preparation for life in this world and the world to come are interwoven throughout the curriculum.[19] The prioritization of service and community engagement cultivates a feeling of social accountability among students, motivating them to actively contribute to their local communities and the global society.

Adventist educational institutions actively promote epistemological values, maintain commitment to academic rigor, and simultaneously emphasize character development. Although the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a shift from traditional in-person to virtual education across all age groups, educators still sought to foster wholistic development through their assignments and interactions with students. Students' critical thinking and emotional intelligence were developed through the use of technology, in addition to the dissemination of information.[20]

However, amid concerns regarding students, infrastructure, facilities, and future opportunities, little attention was given to educators' well-being. Numerous global studies have found that the COVID-19 profoundly impacted educators' mental, physical, and social well-being. For example, educators experienced widespread psychological distress[21] during the pandemic. Prolonged screen exposure and disrupted rou-

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tines caused adverse effects on educators' physical well-being.[22] Additionally, studies such as those conducted by Filho et al.[23] have underscored the detrimental effects of social isolation on educators' well-being, emphasizing the importance of fostering supportive social networks.[24]

Challenges Faced by Adventist Educators: A Qualitative Study

The qualitative study reported here focuses solely on Seventh-day Adventist educators. Its scope was restricted to Indian educators. Despite the initial intent to include 36 respondents in the survey, several factors, such as the influence of shame and honor, peer pressure, and fear of voicing opinions that could potentially jeopardize employment, resulted in fewer participants. Therefore, 12 respondents who served as educators affiliated with Adventist educational institutions in India were involved in the research.

Several respondents expressed their apprehension and characterized the pandemic encounter as a jarring, unforeseen, regrettable, and transformative event. The impact of this phenomenon extended beyond the disruption of daily routines and encompassed the entire realm of education. Due to respondents' reluctance to comment and the small number that did, the generalizability of the results may be limited; however, the responses still offer helpful insights into the experiences and viewpoints of this cohort of educators. The participants' comments highlight the severity of the pandemic's impact on educators' lives and careers.

The data provided were analyzed using thematic analysis,[25] a qualitative research method commonly used to identify patterns or themes within a dataset. Initially, the researcher became familiar with the content and context of the data by reading and rereading the narratives provided by the respondents. Subsequently, these narratives were systematically coded to label meaningful segments of data, with each code representing a concept, idea, or theme present in the text. These codes encompassed various aspects related to Adventist philosophy, education, teaching and learning difficulties, mental issues, educators' health problems, etc.[26]

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This study emphasizes that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic extended beyond disruptions that affected daily routines and societal norms. The education sector also experienced a substantial impact. Owing to the closure of physical campuses, educational institutions were compelled to swiftly adjust their instructional approaches to remote teaching and learning methods. The transition to online learning brought about several challenges. The participants described challenges related to effectively engaging students, guaranteeing equal access to technology and Internet connectivity, and upholding the same educational standards as in traditional in-person settings.

The results of this study emphasize the importance of providing educators with sufficient assistance and tools to manage challenges effectively, and of empowering them to share their ideas freely. It is imperative to acknowledge and address apprehensions relating to shame, honor, and the potential consequences associated with expressing opinions. This is essential for cultivating an inclusive and cooperative educational setting that empowers educators to share their insights and make meaningful contributions to the advancement of educational reforms.

The limitations of the sample size resulting from cultural considerations highlight the difficulty of conducting research during difficult times. The results underscore the significance of acknowledging and addressing the variety of difficulties encountered by educators and of providing their perspectives to policymakers in educational establishments to bolster and improve educators' resilience during crises. The interviews yielded four distinct themes, which served as a framework for further discussion by the researcher.

Theme 1: Pedagogical challenges of managing technology and time effectively

The digital age has ushered in transformative teaching methods, but this has not come without hurdles. Educators grapple with technological limitations, communication issues, and overwhelming workloads.

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Effective time management is vital in this new paradigm. Despite these challenges, educators seek innovative solutions to bridge gaps and deliver quality education, showcasing their resilience and commitment to their profession. Several respondents expressed similar ideas regarding the difficulties associated with the technical aspects of this new reality and with time management. Respondents frequently identified as significant a variety of keywords such as *technological limitations, communication issues, time management, extra workload, adaptation, dissatisfaction, disconnection,* and *lack of effectiveness.*

The rapid transition to online teaching methods necessitated by pandemic isolation presented a novel challenge for educators. Many struggled to adapt to new technologies and platforms, as they likely had limited experience or training in using tools such as Zoom, Google Meet, Google Classroom, and Google Slides for instructional purposes. This made it difficult for educators to effectively integrate these technologies into their teaching practices.

Moreover, growing reliance on technological advancements has imposed additional constraints on educators' productivity. The necessity of familiarizing oneself with these platforms and using their features to foster optimal teaching and learning experiences mandates significant investment in time and resources. Unfortunately, many educators did not have the luxury of acquiring these resources amid the unrelenting demands of the pandemic. Consequently, they experienced difficulties fully maximizing the potential of these tools, which may have led to inefficiencies in lesson planning, delivery, and student engagement.

Additionally, constraints on bandwidth due to inadequate investment by institutions in securing high-quality technology-support services exacerbate these challenges. Limited Internet connectivity or insufficient bandwidth can interrupt online sessions, resulting in delays, interruptions, and frustrations for educators and students. A variety of technical obstacles

can impede the uninterrupted delivery of instruction and hamper educators' ability to effectively maintain student engagement and participation (MBM, SPF, HBM, EVF, CMM, and RSM).[27]

Theme 2: Psychological challenges of isolation and struggles

The wide implementation of online education has created significant mental and emotional challenges that require educators' attention. The absence of face-to-face interactions and affectionate environments results in social isolation, which negatively affects educators' (and students') well-being. Consequently, the expression of emotions becomes arduous, leading to anxiety and disengagement. One respondent (EVF) observed: "Student enrollment went down, many of the students could not pay even the regular fees [due to financial strain during the pandemic], and hence teachers also did not get their salaries on time. Besides financial things, the beautiful campus looked deserted because there were no students on campus. It was mentally unpleasant."

Some of the challenges impacting mental and emotional well-being were irregular salaries, fear of the virus, lack of medical assistance, and fear of losing a job. A few respondents expressed dismay about the lack of supportive virtual environments to help foster emotional well-being and engagement. One respondent (KDM1) wrote: "The institution's church pastors never visited or even called unless there was someone dead in the family. I felt a lack of spiritual security causing extreme anxiety." Another respondent (DBM) wrote: "A cohesive community is of utmost importance in alleviating the mental and emotional burdens that students face during the transition to online education." SPF's response was quite intense: "The challenges we faced during this period were overwhelming. The combination of mental, physical, and financial strain, coupled with the insecurity of life itself, sometimes made me doubt my faith and ultimately my life. It was a constant struggle to find hope and meaning amidst the chaos and uncertainty."

The responses underscored the profound impact of psychological challenges associated with isolation and struggles in the realm of education. From financial strains and irregular salaries to fears of the virus and the absence of supportive virtual environments, educators and students alike faced significant hurdles that affected their mental and emotional well-being. Addressing these challenges requires a wholistic approach that prioritizes creating supportive communities, fostering emotional resilience, and providing resources for mental-health support.

Theme 3: Educators' physical and mental well-being

The cumulative effects on educators' physical health of extended periods of sitting, combined with severe stress and anxiety, emerged as a salient theme. The reported prevalence of spinal and back pain underscores the need for a proactive approach to promoting health and well-being among professionals.[28] Two of the respondents, RSM6 and AKLM, indicated that they had experienced back pain because of sitting for extended periods of time while preparing lessons, creating PowerPoint presentations, and grading during the lockdown. Educators need to recognize that the demanding nature of their profession necessitates that they periodically take breaks, engage in physical activity, and employ effective stress-management techniques. Educational administrators play a critical role in prioritizing the well-being of their educators, helping them foster a healthy work-life balance, and providing mental-health support to maintain a thriving teaching community. Respondents indicated that, owing to being homebound, they experienced a lack of regular eating schedules and irregular exercise routines. This can cause several health complications, such as hypertension and diabetes, and increase the incidence of cardiovascular disease.[29]

Theme 4: Institutional challenges regarding resource and financial constraints

Administrators within the Seventh-day Adventist education system grapple with a range of challenges, notably a shortage of resources and financial constraints. As one respondent (DBM) aptly noted, "Despite our best efforts, it is evident that these constraints impact the quality of education we can provide and ultimately affect student outcomes." This sentiment reveals the significant impact of inadequate resources and financial pressures on educational institutions, which can lead to reduced student satisfaction and declining enrollments.

Addressing these challenges necessitates a comprehensive approach that includes strategic planning, efficient resource management, and a student- and teacher-centric focus. Respondent EVF echoed these sentiments, emphasizing, "It is crucial for institutions to make strategic investments and provide support systems for educators to prevent burnout and maintain morale during challenging times, such as the pandemic. Work pressure and financial instability have only increased during this period, with no medical reimbursement, on-time salary, or credit balance paid to date. These factors have created a sense of

chaos, rather than stabilizing our mental well-being, and have resulted in mental breakdowns."

Investing in both material resources and human capital is essential in cultivating an environment conducive to learning and development, thereby fostering long-term sustainability. Despite the resilience demonstrated by Adventist educators during the pandemic, burnout remains a tangible concern that cannot be overlooked. Therefore, prioritizing the needs and overall well-being of educators within institutional frameworks is crucial to ensure preparedness for navigating future challenges.

Transforming Challenges Into Triumphs

The challenges faced by Adventist education in India, including technological limitations, communication barriers, and the intricacies of online teaching and learning, have not deterred educators from demonstrating steadfast commitment to their work. Despite these obstacles, Adventist educators in higher education institutions have displayed creativity and adaptability, transforming difficulties into growth opportunities. The successful integration of traditional and innovative approaches has been a hallmark of this journey.

Educators have learned to seamlessly blend the richness of face-to-face interactions with cutting-edge technology to bridge generational gaps and pave the way for a progressive future.

The survey respondents demonstrated a high level of dedication. In response to questions about their readiness for future situations, almost all respondents indicated that they believed they had gained the necessary knowledge and skills to serve effectively during chaotic times such as those experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Future Readiness in Education

The future of education lies in the integration of technology resources. Educators and institutions should embrace educational technology, online and blended learning models, and continuous professional development. To prepare students for the challenges of an ever-changing world, educators must nurture

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open-mindedness and encourage a culture of continuous learning and improvement. By honing the digital skills of teachers and students through access to training, reducing obstacles, and strengthening teacher-student relationships, the Adventist education system can evolve to meet future needs.

By reducing obstacles to technology adoption and strengthening teacher-student relationships the Adventist education system can evolve to meet the future needs of students and teachers. This can be done by improving the following areas:

1. *Invest in educational technology infrastructure*: Adventist educational institutions should allocate resources to build a robust technology infrastructure, including high-speed Internet, digital devices, and online learning platforms, to support the seamless delivery of online and blended learning experiences. Essential to the success of this is investment in skilled technical support staff and training. According to Magasu et al., allocating significant resources to information and communication technology (ICT) and to infrastructure is crucial for the effective implementation of blended learning in higher education institutions.[30]

2. *Provide comprehensive training and support*: Educators need training and ongoing support to effectively integrate technology into their teaching practices. Professional-development programs should cover topics such as digital literacy, online pedagogy, and effective use of educational software and tools.[31]

3. *Prioritize continuous professional development*: Ensuring educators remain abreast of emerging trends and best practices is crucial. Providing workshops, webinars, and mentorship opportunities can help educators stay current in their field and refine their teaching skills. Continuous professional development is essential for educators to stay updated on emerging trends and best practices in their fields.[32]

4. *Foster a culture of innovation*: Encouraging experimentation and fostering creativity among both educators and students is essential for cultivating a culture of innovation within Adventist educational institutions. Establishing environments that facilitate collaboration, brainstorming, and idea-sharing can ef-

fectively nurture this culture of innovation and drive positive change.[33] Such practices positively impact educators, boost morale, and foster a sense of accountability and belonging, enabling them to participate freely and contribute to the institution's growth and development.

5. *Establish partnerships*: Establishing partnerships with industry leaders, other educational institutions, and community organizations can greatly benefit educators in several ways. First, such collaborations can provide educators with access to industry insights, trends, and best practices, enriching their understanding of the real-world applications of academic concepts. Second, partnerships offer opportunities for professional development through workshops, seminars, and networking events, allowing educators to stay updated on industry development and enhance their teaching practices accordingly.[34] Additionally, partnerships can facilitate the development of experiential learning opportunities for students, such as internships, mentor-

ship programs, and project-based initiatives, which educators can integrate into their curricula to enhance students' engagement and learning outcomes.

Conclusion

This article revealed the profound effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Adventist educators in the South Asian context. Through an in-depth exploration of educators' responses to the crisis, including their challenges, innovative strategies, and future readiness initiatives, this research has provided valuable insights into the resilience and adaptability of Adventist education in the face of unprecedented challenges (see Sidebar 1).

As evidenced by the findings from this small study in India, Adventist educators have demonstrated remarkable resilience and resourcefulness in adapting to the pandemic, implementing innovative teaching methodologies, and leveraging technology to ensure continuity of learning for their students. Despite the

Sidebar 1. Adaptability for the Future

Investing in the technology infrastructure, providing continuous training and support, fostering a culture of innovation, and building partnerships are factors that will improve an institution's ability to face future challenges. However, the key to successfully navigating these challenges lies in increased adaptability, which can be fostered by adopting approaches to curriculum and instruction development that can be sustained regardless of the circumstances. Some of these include the following:

1. *Embrace flexible learning models*: Flexible learning models allow adaptation to various learning environments, including traditional classroom settings, online learning, and blended learning (combining both in-person and online instruction). Education can continue uninterrupted, even in the face of external disruptions, if schools are flexible about methods for instruction delivery.[1]

2. *Develop adaptable curriculum frameworks*: Curriculum frameworks show how standards can be implemented. By designing curricula that are responsive to changing educational needs and priorities and allowing for the incorporation of new content, methods, and technology, educators can remain engaged and innovative in their teaching practices, which enhances their professional satisfaction and fulfillment.[2]

3. *Foster a growth mindset*: Encouraging resilience and adaptability among educators promotes a positive learning environment in which challenges are viewed as opportunities for growth and improvement. Embracing a growth mindset entails

believing that abilities and intelligence can be developed through dedication and effort rather than being fixed traits. A growth mindset encourages educators to approach challenges with optimism and perseverance, leading to greater resilience in the face of adversity.[3]

4. *Use data analytics*: The use of data analytics is a powerful tool to gather valuable insights. Educational administrators can use data to gain deeper insight into student performance, engagement levels, and learning preferences. This data-driven approach allows educators to make informed decisions about curriculum development, instructional design, and student support services, ultimately leading to more effective teaching practices and improved student outcomes.

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numerous challenges posed by the pandemic, educators have remained committed to their students' well-being and academic success, embodying the spirit of service and dedication inherent in Adventist education.

This research highlights the significance of future preparedness in Adventist education, stressing the necessity of continuous professional development, strategic planning, and a culture of innovation (see Sidebar 2). However, moving forward, teachers cannot do this on their own. They will need committed support from administrators at the school, conference, union, and division levels, as well as funding for professional development, technology upgrades, and innovative approaches. Adventist educators can continue to navigate future crises with resilience and effectiveness if they embrace adaptable strategies, leverage emerging technologies, and foster collaboration between industry leaders, other educational institutions, and community organizations. ✎

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Sidebar 2. Innovative Ideas for the Future

Integrating innovative ideas into the curriculum offers solutions for educators facing crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Here are a few suggestions:

1. *Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) technology:* AR and VR can provide students with immersive learning experiences that simulate real-world environments and scenarios during remote learning or restricted physical access to educational resources. Educators can leverage AR and VR to create virtual field trips, laboratory simulations, or historical re-enactments, allowing students to explore and interact with content in ways previously limited by physical constraints.[1]

2. *Project-based learning initiatives:* Project-based learning offers a flexible and adaptable approach to education, making it particularly well suited for responding to crises. During remote learning or disruptions to traditional classroom instruction, project-based learning allows students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world problems, fostering critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills.[2]

3. *Incubator programs or innovation labs:* Establishing spaces for students to develop and prototype their own solutions to societal issues can provide a valuable outlet for creativity and innovation during times of crisis. Incubator programs and innovation labs offer students opportunities to collaborate on real-world problems and develop innovative solutions. Educators can facilitate virtual or remote innovation labs where students can brainstorm ideas, conduct research, and prototype solutions using digital tools and resources.

4. *Micro-credentialing programs:* Micro-credentialing allows students to showcase their mastery of specific skills or knowledge areas through short-term focused learning experiences. Educators can design micro-credentialing programs that align with industry needs or emerging trends, thereby providing students with valuable credentials that enhance their employability and career readiness.[3]

5. *Flipped classroom models:* Flipping the classroom shifts the focus from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered learning. In a flipped classroom model, students engage with instructional materials independently outside of class, such as through pre-recorded lectures or online readings, and then come together to apply and discuss what they have learned. This approach allows educators to maximize their limited face-to-face instructional time, focusing on activities that promote active engagement, peer collaboration, and self-directed learning.[4]

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