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## **Healing from COVID-19 through digital platforms: exploring the influences of this pandemic on students and jobseekers in India**

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**Kuldeep Jayaswal\* and D.K. Palwalia**

Department of Electrical Engineering,  
Rajasthan Technical University,  
Rawatbhata Road, Akelgarh, Kota, 324010, India  
Email: Kuldeep12555@gmail.com  
Email: dheerajpalwalia@gmail.com

\*Corresponding author

**Abstract:** Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infection caused by a recently discovered coronavirus. The origin of this virus and subsequent epidemic, which broke out in China in December 2019, has been unexplained. COVID-19 is also a regional pandemic that has infected several countries since the outbreak began in Wuhan. Social-distancing is playing an important role in reducing the community transmission of this virus. To ensure the maximum effectiveness of social-distancing, lock-downs have been declared across India. These have affected the lifecycle of citizens across the world in terms of jobs, education, industrial production, etc. Digital platforms are currently playing a very important role in people's healing from these critical situations caused by COVID-19 pandemic. In this research article, the influences of this pandemic on Indian citizens, especially students and job seekers, have been reported. This article clearly describes the power of self-learning as a tool for preparing the youth to face future challenges successfully through digital platforms.

**Keywords:** COVID-19; lock-down; work and human resources; school education; jobseekers; career development; digital platforms; self-learning; E-learning; WHO.

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**Biographical notes:** Kuldeep Jayaswal received his Bachelor of Technology (BTech) degree in Electrical Engineering and Master of Technology (MTech) degree in Power Systems from Rajasthan Technical University, Kota, India, in 2011 and 2014, respectively. His research interest includes designing lightning & surge protection schemes, design of control panels; APFC, MCC, DBP, industrial & medical robotics, design of power electronics converter, solar PV systems, semiconductor physics, digital platforms, integration of technology in curriculum development and social stratification.

D.K. Palwalia received his Bachelor of Engineering (BE) and Master of Technology (MTech) degrees from Malviya National Institute of Technology (MNIT), Jaipur in 1996, and 1998, respectively. He received the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree from the Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee in 2010. Currently, he is working as a Professor in the Department of Electrical Engineering at Rajasthan Technical University, Kota, India. His research

interest includes power electronic & drive, renewable energy, induction generator, digital control design, integration of technology in curriculum development, digital learning and social stratification.

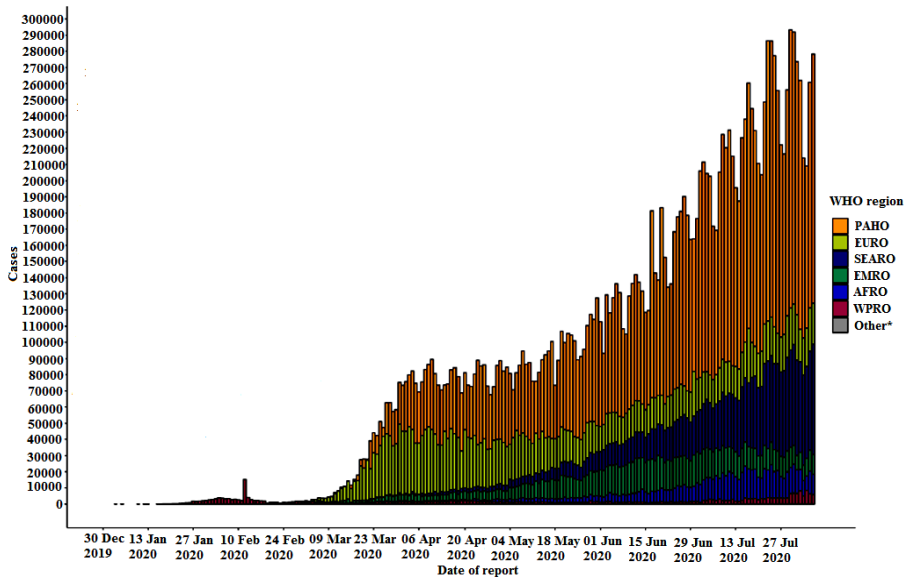
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## 1 Introduction

According to the 'Situation report-200' from the 'World Health Organisation (WHO)', a total of 18,902,735 confirmed cases and 709,511 deaths have been reported globally till 7 August 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020). Figure 1, clearly depicts the COVID-19 confirmed cases by WHO regions. The regions are 'PAHO: Region of the Americas', 'EURO: European Region', 'SEARO: South-East Asia Region', 'EMRO: Eastern Mediterranean Region', 'AFRO: African Region' and 'WPRO: Western Pacific Region'. It is more than five months of lock-down in INDIA. This lock-down profoundly influenced people's everyday lives from children to senior citizens (Akkermans et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2020). In India, primarily, people work in various small and large scale industries. These lock-downs have highly affected industrial production works. Various small as well as large-scale industries have been closed (Fisher et al., 2020). Owing the poor financial conditions of employers, they are unable to provide salaries to employees. Ultimately, people are moving towards their homes (Chakraborty et al., 2020). Lower-middle-class people are highly affected due to these job crises. The people working in other cities are facing economical difficulties. Many of them have no money for tickets and food. They are returning home in other ways like by trucks, bicycles, and some of them by walking from hundreds of kilometres distance. Owing to the sudden lock-down, a large gathering of people has been seen on the bus and railway stations that are also becoming one of the reasons for increased corona cases. Not only industries but also schools, malls, vegetable markets, city markets, hostels, hotels, travel services, etc., have been closed till further orders of government (Ioannides and Gyimóthy, 2020). Yes, the COVID-19 pandemic indeed creates problems in every person's life whether they are students, employees, industrialists, senior citizens, etc. (Oldekop et al., 2020).

This pandemic has also affected the education sector. Many students, who were preparing for various exams in different cities of India, are bound to leave their courses due to lock-downs. Parents also do not want to let them stay in other cities as they are worried about their children's health.

In this critical situation, students from junior to senior levels are passing through a depression due to an outage in their education. In this situation, both parents and their children are worried about their future (Dwivedi et al., 2020). In these financial crises due to lock-downs, People are facing difficulties in paying school fees of children and unable to fulfil other house expenditures. Industries are facing economical crises due to low product demand. Many small-scale industries have been closed permanently due to economic crises and created the biggest job crises in India (Dev and Sengupta, 2020). But on another side, the COVID-19 pandemic has opened up new opportunities with new challenges in front of people (Shenoy et al., 2020). It seems like the world is changing and ready to enter a new technological era where unlimited opportunities are waiting for us.

**Figure 1** COVID-19 confirmed cases by WHO regions

Source: World Health Organization (2020)

Digital platforms are playing a very important role in healing from such critical situations due to the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of providing a platform for online business, various job-oriented training modules, live video lectures, and course material, free access to thousands of book, work from home, banking, etc. Sreekumar and Sreejaya (2005) focused on digital libraries for students and job seekers with different issues involved in designing and improving them. Sreekumar and Sreejaya (2005) reported that owing to their multifaceted features, digital libraries have drawn almost all developed and emerging nations. Some of the features such as collection development, infrastructure, acceptance, access constraints, readability, standardisation, authentication, security, copyright, policy and strategic problems, user interface, funding, etc., have been included. The influence of digital libraries has been recognised by India and several efforts to build state-of-the-art digital libraries are on the transition. Mohan and Punathambekar (2019) reported the role of digital platforms in navigating the new markets via YouTube. Gill et al., (2017) focused on the role of the digital platform as a cloud and big data service in agriculture. Authors suggested a cloud-based autonomous information system with the use of cloud and Big Data technology to provide 'Agriculture-as-a-Service' (AaaS). The proposed framework, through pre-configured devices and IoT sensors, collects information from different users and processes it in the cloud using big data analytics and automatically provides users with the necessary information. Vasset et al. (2019) focused on digital tools for professional learning. Three topics have been reported: inter-professional collaborative learning, the use of a digital platform, and virtual meeting communication. Numerous studies have been reported on the importance of digital media before the pandemic, but the usage of accessible tools through online learning has seen a tremendous increase during the pandemic. In this

lock-down, individuals especially students and job seekers, need to be aware of various channels that are available to them free of cost. It will be helpful to them for continuing their education without any outage.

A digital platform is an online networking system that encompasses phone, smartphone, network, and email applications and incorporates social media, like Twitter, Amazon, Google, Facebook, Youtube, Wattpad, etc. (Ayodeji et al., 2020). Today these platforms are providing help in the future development of students by providing various services like online books, notes, e-content, video lectures, live experiments, etc. Thanks to the Indian government for providing all the content through digital platforms. Jobseekers are taking advantage of these platforms for their business via work from home. Thousands of people are taking advantage of online resources in healing their situations caused due to COVID-19 outbreak.

In this article, the main focus has been given to the influences of the COVID-19 pandemic on people especially students, and job seekers in India. As people have no jobs anymore and schools are closed due to lock-downs, they (both students and jobseekers) are worried about their future. Currently, the prime challenge in front of people is their survival with these problems. Here, it has been discussed in depth that how the digital platform can assist the students and jobseekers in healing from such situations. This lock-down is teaching people how to live with limited resources.

## **2 Influence of COVID-19 pandemic on students and available digital platforms**

‘University Grant Commission (UGC)’ addressed the students and teachers in a letter, stating that *as we work together to counter COVID-19 by taking preventive and precautionary steps, preserving social distance, and remaining within the boundaries of our homes/hostels, we can use this period productively through participating in online education.*

In India, schools and colleges have been closed as per the advisory of the Government of India (GOI) for the successful implementation of lock-downs and to reduce the community transmission of coronavirus. In this situation, thousands of student are moving towards their homes so it is important to provide the learning resources to them for further education (Hodges et al., 2020). According to UNESCO, since the COVID-19 outbreak began, school and university closures have affected around 1.37 billion students in 138 countries worldwide (UNESCO, 2020; MeitY, 2020). In the classroom, nearly 60.2 million school teachers and university lecturers are no longer present. In village primary school to senior secondary school comes into this case where students are unable to cope up with these situations (Akkermans et al., 2020). But today the government is creating various facilities via online medium through the internet for their studies. The government is also establishing help centres for students from where they can share their doubts related to the selection of subjects for higher education. The government is also establishing health centres for students where they can share any problem that may cause depression or any adverse effects on their mental health (Roy et al., 2020). The various digital platforms are as follows:

## 2.1 'e-PG' Pathshala

'e-PG' Pathshala is an ICT (NME-ICT) initiative of the MHRD (now termed Ministry of Education) rolled out by the 'University Grants Commission (UGC)' within the scope of its National Education Mission. This digital platform offers high-quality, curriculum-based e-content in broad areas of social science, arts, fine art and humanities, natural & mathematical sciences (Jana and Maiti, 2020). This portal has been subdivided into various sections like 'e-Adhyayan' for e-books, UGC MOOCs for online courses, and e-Pathya for office processes. The major objectives of the 'e-PG' Pathshala platform are:

- To organise the training to various topic specialists and experts in e-content development.
- To make the e-contents freely available and accessible in the digital form maintained at the INFLIBNET Centre by the SCORM-Compliant repository.
- To speed up the utilisation of e-content between students and the academic environment.
- To create the e-content in all postgraduate courses, drawing on the expertise of subject experts from schools, universities and R&D laboratories.
- To ensure the availability of e-content through the use of various delivery modes to include informal and formal education and to supplement and supplement the higher education learning and teaching process.

## 2.2 DIKSHA

This portal is an initiative from the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), MHRD (now termed Ministry of Education), Government of INDIA. The DIKSHA platform provides entertaining learning content related to the specified school curriculum to teachers, students and parents. To create enjoyable classroom experiences, teachers have access to help like lesson plans, worksheets and activities. Students grasp ideas, study lessons and perform exercises. Outside school hours, parents can follow the activities in the classroom and clear questions. It provides more than 70,000 pieces of compiled content in various languages. The broad variety of instructional content such as various exercises, educational games, assignments, video lectures, training modules, etc. The characteristics of this platform 'DIKSHA' are listed below as:

- To provide in-class resources
- To provide teacher training content
- Providing assessment aids
- Assessment of teacher profile
- To announce various news

### 2.3 *Shiksha Vani*

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) released a ‘Shiksha Vani’ mobile app that is available for Android phone users on the Play Store. This app has been launched for providing correct information to students and parents. Parents will be able to see the exam sheets and their results on this app. This mobile app has various characteristics as:

- It helps to offer all of its affiliated schools uniform guidelines.
- It helps to disseminate information during related activities, such as exam response sheet assessment, declaration of the outcome, etc.
- It helps to broadcast official evaluation information, as the podcast is said to promote a zero-error evaluation policy.
- In contrast to written knowledge or circulars, podcasts are less time-consuming and incredibly entertaining.

### 2.4 *NDLI*

The National Mission on Education via Information and Communication Technology (NMEICT) has funded the National Digital Library of India (NDLI) project and arranged funding through MHRD (now termed Ministry of Education) to make accessible the learner’s group learning tools through a single window. National Digital Library of India (NDLI) is a forum for the integration of teachers, classrooms, colleges, lecturers, universities and scholars. This portal has various characteristics like:

- The main purpose of this platform is to acquire and annotate information from many national and international digital libraries, as well as other related sources, and to include a full-text index.
- It is a multimedia archive of textbooks, papers, images, audio books, seminars, simulations, fiction, and all other forms of media for learning.
- The NDLI offers free access to several books in the Indian and English languages.
- It can help the processes of e-learning and distance learning across the world. This opens up countless doors in India today, and for the future, to tackle literacy and educational access.
- NDLI aims to establish an engrossing e-learning environment for children of all kinds with the vision of creating a knowledge economy.

### 2.5 *IIT-PAL*

Professor Assisted Learning (PAL) lectures are available for those students who are preparing for engineering and medical entrance exams, from this platform various classes of science domain subjects have been prepared by IITs professor and are being telecast on Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry’s Swayam Prabha Channels. These are accessible through the National Testing Agency’s website. In short, the various characteristics of IIT-PAL are:

- Under IIT-PAL, there are four channels-one each for Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology.
- Biology, a vital component of the IIT foundation courses, can be accessed and learned easily by watching these lectures, even if you are sitting in a remote village.
- The videos were captured primarily by IIT Delhi professors under these platforms, but now also contain other staff such as some teachers from Kendriya Vidyalaya.
- Aspirants who cannot possibly manage coaching classes can mitigate the challenge, as this facility only requires internet connectivity or a DTH (direct-to-home) television set up to access it.
- The initiative is primarily led by IIT-Delhi but is supported by Kanpur, Kharagpur, Mumbai and Guwahati IITs.
- Consultation and questions can be given and answered by e-mails and even phone calls, apart from only online experiences.
- Each topic has a channel that delivers new material for four hours a day, two for class 11 and two for class 12, as per the set course schedule.

## 2.6 *Vidwan*

It is a professional platform that provides expert information to peers, prospective collaborators, fund institutions, policy-makers and the academic scholar of the world. This portal provides all of the knowledge about the well-known scholar, scientists. This portal's key purpose is to explore prospective partners for current research ventures. This portal has the following characteristics:

- An expert with a postgraduate degree can enter VIDWAN with a doctorate in their respective field with 10 years of professional experience.
- This portal may be joined by Postdoctoral Fellow / Research Scholar / Assistant Professor / Associate Professor / Professor / Senior Scientist or similar teaching and research roles.
- This portal gives scholars the advantages of demonstrating their knowledge to the entire academic community worldwide.
- It provides expert knowledge to colleagues, potential partners, politicians from funding agencies, and academic scholars in the country easily and conveniently.
- It offers the ability to recognise peer reviewers for papers and study proposal proposals.
- It also offers the ability for scientists to create knowledge exchanges and networking opportunities.

## 2.7 *e-ShodhSindhu*

The Ministry of HRD (now termed Ministry of Education) has established 'e-ShodhSindhu' on the advice of an Expert Committee, which is a joint venture of

UGC-INFONET Digital Library Consortium, NLIST and INDEST-AICTE. This platform provides access to more than 10,000 core journals and repositories from different publishers to those universities who are covered under 12(B) and 2(f) section of the UGC Act. 'e-ShodhSindhu' has the following characteristics:

- On a perpetual access basis, it offers a rich collection of e-journals, archives and e-books.
- It tracks and encourages the use of electronic tools through knowledge and training programs at member universities, schools and technical institutions in India.
- It provides all educational institutions with access to subscription-based scholarly information (e-books and e-journals).
- It also facilitates exposure to open-access scholarly content through subject repositories and subject nodes.
- It is useful for addressing complex issues and also a bonus for libraries that are involved.

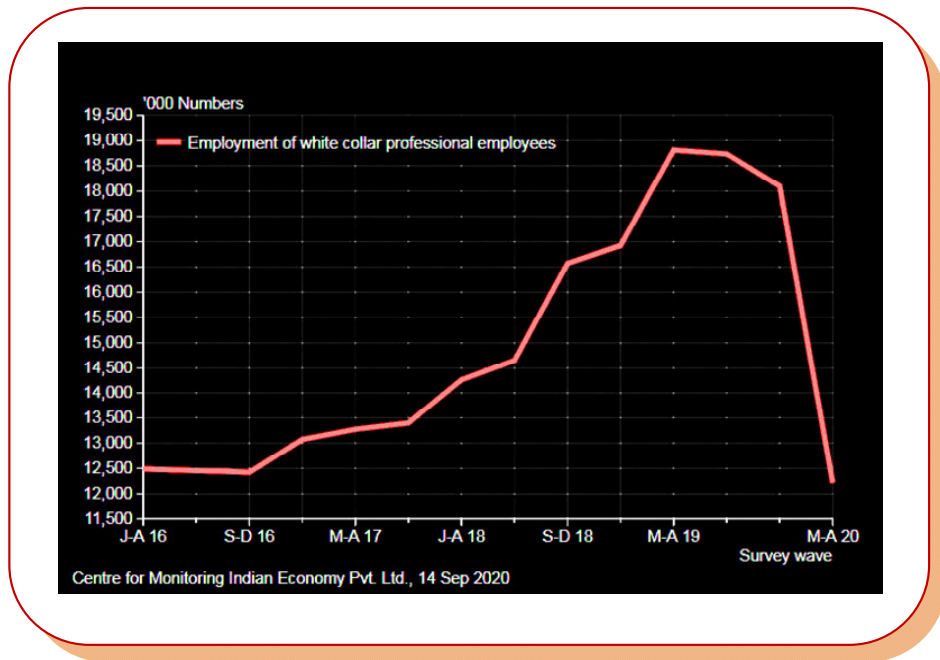
As the entire country is under lock-down, the best option left is e-education across digital platforms. University faculties are developing accounts on online video conferencing sites like Google Classroom, Skype, Zoom, to communicate with the students (MeitY, 2020). Today those students who don't know how to operate mobile phones are learning to operate such gadgets. Students are learning how to access the internet. One can say this situation teaching those things that were necessary for students but not included in the school syllabus. Those students who are living in villages, unable to purchase mobile or tablet, getting such gadgets via various policies of central and state governments. Students are learning about the science projects design process through several short term training programs. Today, digital platforms are providing support to students in this COVID-19 outbreak and creating the image of a new digital India.

### **3 Influence of COVID-19 pandemic on jobseekers and available digital platforms**

This pandemic has highly affected the economic condition of people due to job crises. Not only the small scale industries but also large scale industries are suffering from a lack of funds for salaries due to low demand and production rate (Dev and Sengupta, 2020; Gopalan and Misra, 2020).

According to the 'Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy (CMIE)', in a pandemic-battered economy since April 2020, 1.89 crore wage earners have lost their jobs. CMIE data showed that during the time 68 lakh daily wagers in India lost their jobs and 1.49 crore went to farming. Today India is facing immense pressure due to the coronavirus pandemic and resultant lock-down. The economy has experienced an irreparable loss because of the lack of strategy. Figure 2, clearly shows the effect of lock-down on employment.



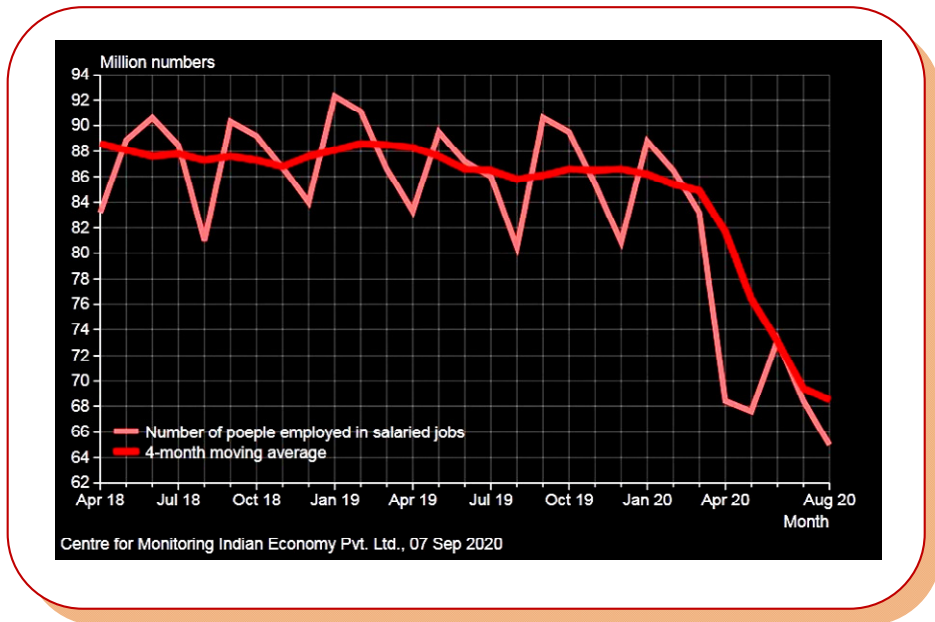
**Figure 2** Impact of lock-down in India on jobs till August 2020

The unemployment rate dropped from 27.1 to 24% for the week ended May 10, while the labour participation rate increased from 36.2 to 37.6%.

The rate of employment also increased from 28.6 to 26.4%. Further, according to the 'CMIE' Market Pyramids Household Survey, young people in the age group of 20–24 accounted for 11% who lost employment, while in 2019–2020, they accounted for 8.5% of the country's total working people. In 2019–2020, 34.2 million of these young men and women were working. Their numbers dropped to 20.9 million in April 2020.

In the Indian market, salaried jobs are highly affected during this post-pandemic lock-down. Their initial losses are recovered by other forms of employment and some have even acquired employment. However, wage earners continue to experience rising job losses. According to CMIE, around 14 million workers have lost jobs in the 25–29 age groups. The effect of the lock-down (due to COVID-19) on salaried workers can be seen in Figure 3. But, we cannot ignore the fact that this pandemic has been creating lots of new opportunities for every jobseeker who is suffering due to job crises. People have the opportunity for adopting new policies and methods for creating new jobs. Thousands of new courses are available through which one can have the chance to explore more opportunities for being an employer.

As the digital platforms are emerging as a blessing for new learners in this COVID-19 outbreak, people can adopt new job-oriented short term courses from various government portals (Fletcher and Griffiths, 2020). People have the chance to create their own business through online platforms such as Flipkart, Amazon, Snapdeal, eBay, etc.

**Figure 3** Impact of lockdown in India on salaried employees till August 2020

If talking about the villages in India, small shops are the main source of people's earnings that have been closed till further order of respective state governments. It has highly affected the daily life cycle of small shopkeepers in villages (Roy et al., 2020). But this outbreak is also providing the chances to learn about new business models for jobseekers (Habes et al., 2020). This learning will make them advance and will prepare for future challenges. If talking about various newly graduated students who are searching for jobs can adopt new technologies with the help of a digital platform. Before this pandemic, people were purely dependent on others for jobs. In this COVID-19 pandemic, people have the chance to be an employer rather than an employee (Akkermans et al., 2020). This possibility is making whole India self-learner and proving as a backbone of new India. In this situation, the Indian government is playing a key role by conducting various online job-oriented training programs. The skill development department is providing different types of online job-oriented short term courses.

These courses are helping people in learning new technologies and offering various ideas about a variety of small businesses. Further, these courses are helping the people in developing their product as per the need of market demand and providing them the opportunities to be an employer. Various institutions and industry leaders are helping jobseekers by providing various job-oriented courses that have been mentioned below.

### 3.1 NASSCOM offers free online courses

NASSCOM's 'SkillUp' online portal, which was launched with funding from the 'Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)' (MeitY, 2020), provides the courses such as AI Foundation Course, AI for all, and other related subjects for free.

In this digital era, 'SkillUp' is the ideal learning portal that enables people to upgrade technical skills, such as Data Science, Big Data, Artificial Intelligence, Cloud, Front-End Development and many more.

A major skill gap has been created by the ongoing digitisation of new-age technologies in the IT industry. According to an estimate, about 1.5 to 2 million professionals out of the 4.5 million professionals working in the IT sector today would need re-skilling in the next four to five years. This is beyond the rising demand due to digitisation for professionals in the horizontal market. NASSCOM expects to meet this increasingly rising demand to help and accelerate India's global digital-domain growth.

### *3.2 TCS offers digital certification program*

TCS is providing a 15-days interactive learning curriculum called Career Edge-Knockdown the Lock-down free of charge through TCS iON. This course aims to fine-tune the student's communication, presentation and interpersonal skills to make an impact in interviews and workplaces. TCS also offering the diploma certificate to those who are completing this curriculum. Undergraduates, students, postgraduates, fresher and professionals may enroll on the official website for the course by registering for the same.

### *3.3 Harvard university offers over 60 free online courses*

Harvard University, one of the world's most prestigious universities, offers as many as 64 free online classes during the lock-down duration. The courses cover a variety of topics including finance, computer technology, data science, mathematics, computing, physics, education and teaching, art and design, health and medicine, humanities and social sciences.

### *3.4 AICTE ELIS portal launched*

The All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) has introduced an online training program named Enhancement of Learning with Development of Skills (ELIS), to deliver free online courses from a single site. The portal's e-learning material has been purchased from various major Ed-tech firms for different courses.

AICTE, for the benefit of all students, has launched a free e-learning portal. The ELIS portal has been built to offer content for all students that not only improves learning for standard subjects but also aims to create valuable skill sets as needed in the real working world. These are available at prices ranging from Rs. 5000 to Rs. 20,000, under normal circumstances. Both participating businesses, however, have offered to enroll students at no cost until 15 May 2020 in the current lock-down phase. Also, both organisations have gracefully decided to continue the course free. In essence, there will be no payments at all to be paid for students who are already enrolled before the course is finished.

### 3.5 *Google offers various courses*

Google has also agreed to offer free online classes on data and technologies, digital marketing, job growth, and education. The course lengths vary from 1 hour to more than 25 hours. Based on the course there are both free and premium certifications available. Many involved in the course should visit the Google Digital Open (GDO) site to enroll.

## **4 Things that can be considered during this lock-down period through digital platforms**

Some training classes can aid with having a substantial pay rise and add additional skills to our ability to leverage the lock-down duration. We can also boost our odds of being chosen in the next interview by choosing these courses. Communication means to connect one to other individuals, cultures and worldwide conventions. If we want to learn foreign languages, it is one of the important choices. When the world is more globalised, there will be a growing demand for language speakers from enterprises. It is an asset that we find when working for big business organisations. There is no denying the fact that online advertising or internet ads are in high demand. Modern ads have grown from an obscure dubious phenomenon to a substantial effect in such a small period.

If we are interested in studying data science, then an online course will help us to become a master in data science. E.g., Python or SQL to Basic Data Analysis and Machine Learning, We'll get acquainted with the basics of data science. Any of the specialisations commonly accessible within the course are computer science, data processing, deep learning, enterprise analytics, business intelligence, etc. We are in a time where it is important to route monetary crises to keep away from through earlier rather than later. Numerous companies are seeking to pass, and their strategies address dubious behaviour. When completing a course on financial accounting, we will make a few tactics to leave the numerical tables unblemished for the organisation. With the advent of digital media, companies establish an exceptional external footprint by online sites, posts, tweets, ads and so on, at various times (Habes et al., 2020).

Writing computer programs is important for updating and boosting the computers and web strength in our everyday lives. Writing programs is important to correctly gather, track, measure and analyse information and data planning. Designing is one of today's called areas in the industry. We may gain the credit of a famous logo or a poster by completing this course. We can also render fun sketches of blog passages and Google ads. This kind of work position provides a range of career openings and we can select according to our needs.

## **5 Conclusions**

In March 2020, the World Health Organisation declared 'COVID-19' as an outbreak. It is a condition caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). For saving the lives of people, various researches on corona vaccines are under process and few of them cleared the initial phases of the trial. Different methods are being used for reducing COVID-19 community transmission. Social-distancing is playing an important role in reducing the community transmission of this virus. To ensure the

maximum effectiveness of social-distancing, lock-downs have been declared across India. These have affected the lifecycle of citizens across the world in terms of jobs, education, industrial production, etc. Many students, who were preparing for various exams in different cities of India, are highly affected due to lock-downs. Similarly, many of the employees have lost their jobs. This pandemic also affected the industrial sector badly. Industries are getting closed, among them many small scale industries have been closed permanently due to economic crises in front of them. This created job crises in every sector.

On one side, the Covid-19 pandemic gave a high shock to the whole community in terms of economical crises, Job crises, and Industrial crises but on another side, it is teaching the community to live with limited resources by learning new things through digital platforms. It is making the people self-dependent who were relying on others for their earnings. It is teaching all over the country about new technologies for providing support in healing from these critical conditions. This pandemic has sped up the process of self-learning between the people with the help of a digital platform. The students who were unable to bear the financial load of school, today able to access all the facilities from the digital platform free of cost via Indian government policies. People who are living in villages and depend upon agriculture for their earning and not so educated, having the chance to learn about various technologies according to their needs in this lock-down. As thousands of jobseeker are searching for jobs, moving towards learning new job-oriented courses for preparing themselves for a new challenge. Digital platforms are playing a very important role in healing from the COVID-19 pandemic with all available resources free of cost. The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted many small as well as large scale industries to experience major restructuring, to reinvent core aspects of their corporate practices, and to use technologies to manage activities while adhering to an evolving regulatory environment and new procedures.

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