



Covid-19 impact on education in India: A study

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Abstract

The pandemic Covid-19 has impacted all the sectors worldwide the nation-building sector i.e. education are most affected particularly in developing countries like India. In India, more than 32 crore students have been affected. The education sector is facing a major crisis to survive. Those institutions which are shifting to the new technologies are growing while others that have no such facilities are facing closure, the students of such institutions are worst affected. This article highlights some positive aspects and difficulties faced by the teachers, students and other stakeholders associated with the education sector during the pandemic period.

Keywords: Covid-19, pandemic, online classes, internet, electronic gadgets

Introduction

India the largest democratic country in the world has approximately 1.3 billion residents out of which 250 million are school students (up to class 12) and 7 million are college students (Sharma, 2020) [7]. The numbers of educational institutions in India are 1.5 million schools (up to class 12); 1.4 million Anganwadis (Government run childhood nutrition and early child education centre) (which are three times than the schools in China); 1028 universities and 51649 higher educational institutions. About 75% of these schools/colleges/ higher educational institutions are in rural areas. The teaching manpower in these institutions is about 14.2 lakhs

Table 1: The literacy % in India is as (Chandra, 2019) [3].

Sl	Age in year		Rural India	Urban India	Average
1.	5-15 years		71	86	76
2.	Above 15 years	Primary level	23	17	20
		Upper primary level	17	17	17
		Secondary Level	20	30	24
		Graduate level and above	4	18	10
3.	No Literacy	35	16	27	

Before the pandemic In India there was a major crisis of learning in basic education particularly in rural areas. ASER² survey from 2005 to 2018 has reported that students from class 2-6 of government schools in rural areas cannot read the books of their previous class and students of class 6 cannot solve the maths problems of class 4. The pandemic caused by Covid-19 has significantly affected education worldwide especially in India. In India, since 23 March 2020 the Schools, colleges, universities are almost closed and since then the students are disengaged from formal education. As India is a vast country with diversity students differ in both quality and quantity and can be distinguished based on region, caste, religion, gender and area of birth across the country. Classroom study is the major way of teaching in our country but the lockdown and higher number of Covid cases/deaths left no option to the educational institutions but to cancel classroom teaching, examinations,

research work and other training programmes and to opt for online modes focussing on virtual education.

In India, the teachers and learners are habitual of classroom teaching and are not trained for online teaching environments most of the teachers do not cater for the virtual model of the teaching. Though some of the faculty members are digitally skilled most of them do not know how to prepare materials appropriate for online education.

As per UNESCO report (2021) [8] around the world, the schools in India remain closed for the longest period. As low-income government and private institutions are not efficient to adopt this mode have been since closed, very few schools/ colleges and universities in India have shifted to this model of teaching. 13 crore students of very crucial classes i.e. 9 to 12 are most affected (Sharma, 2020) [7]. Though the Indian Government has provided platforms like Swayam, Pratham, e-PG Pathshala, besides educational TV channels for the online classes there is a great divide in the rural areas due to:

1. Physical Infrastructure: uncertainty of electricity supply, study space and environment of the house.
2. Electronic devices: Access to smartphones, computers and TV.
3. Internet connections.
4. Scarcity of need-based study material in the mother tongue

Due to these scarcities the Government's aims to continue student teaching by virtual model has not been fulfilled. A study has reported that more than 80% of students of the government schools of the states Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and Punjab were without any educational material during this period (Das, 2020) [4]. A survey conducted by Azim Premji Foundation (2021) [5] has found that due to the Covid pandemic 92% of 2-6 grades students lost ability of at least one language than the previous year while this data for maths ability loss was 82%.

The Annual State of Education Report [2] (ASER) 2020 has found that during pandemic period in the rural India approximately:

- a. Only 11% of students joined online classes; 8.1% of government schools and 17.7 % of private schools.
- b. One-third students who have access to smartphones have not received any educational material.
- c. Out of three students two students have no communication from the school.
- d. At home, text-books were available to 79% of children only
- e. For 28% of the students, no education assistance from the family at home was available.

Positive impacts of Covid-19 on education

- The pandemic has compelled educational institutions to switch from class room teaching to blended learning.
- The educators and learners are using soft copies for reference more frequently inducing the teachers and students to learn and use digital technology.
- The number of Webinars, virtual meetings, e-conferencing has vastly increased.
- The educators and learners are getting more opportunities to interact with experts around the world enhancing opportunities for the collaborative work.
- The time and place for teaching remain no hindrance.
- More time was available to academicians for improving the theoretical research work and to get familiar with the latest technology to improve the research quality. The researchers get more opportunities to publish their research articles and to write books.
- As per studies of Google and KPMG (2021) ^[6] the Indian online education market grows 8 times in the last five years. It became 1.96 billion US dollars with 9.6 million users in 2021 from 0.247 billion dollars (1.6 million users) in 2016.
- E-learning is a boon to those students who are unable to attend schools i.e. differently-abled children and few girls' students.
- In the classroom teaching, there were two types of students' frontbenchers and backbenchers while during online classes there are no backbenchers.

Negative impacts of Covid-19 on education /difficulties faced during online classes

- Teachers can not verify from the students whether the teaching material provided to them is up to mark or not or the students have understood the topic or not, as in the classroom teaching is verified by asking questions randomly from some students. The teacher generally fails in getting feedback regarding the teaching content.
- In the classrooms most of the students remain disciplined due to the fear of the teacher which lacks during the online classes as the students are in the home environment and the teacher cannot punish the naughty students.
- Due to the closure of the schools, the children are missing friendship, social bonding, play and due to homestay screen time has been increased these factors significantly negatively impacts the mental health of school-going children. A survey has shown that since May 2020 the mental and socio-emotional health of 50% of secondary school students and 33% of elementary school students became poor or very poor (Agoramoorthy, 2021) ^[1].
- The students are more comfortable in the classroom as

they are in the company of their friends like a tree in the forest but during online, they were isolated like the tree in desert creating a stressful environment.

- During the online classes as the students are at home the workload given by the teachers' increases largely.
- Due to e-learning eye problems and headaches have been reported by a fair fraction of the students.
- Due to online classes the writing habits of the students of the class 1 to 6 grades has been declined.
- Due to the pandemic, the income of the citizenry has been declined to cause cut in the budget. In the rural areas the cut in budget results in stopping the education to the girls.
- There are all the possibilities of the cheating during online examination.
- As the students are getting certificates late they failed for applying to other countries for higher studies.
- As the entrance test/interviews for jobs have been suspended; job withdrawals by many Indian and overseas companies have created an atmosphere of uncertainty for final year students.
- Research which is one of the very important aspects of higher education depends on the infrastructure provided by the institution. For research students' lab set up, the centres, access to the library, repositories, data collection, and interviews are the parts of the research process. Due to lockdown and pandemic, it became very difficult to carry out these research processes.
- Cancellation of internal and external examinations/ assessments has a very significant negative effect on the learning and retention power of the students, which directly affects the educational and occupational future of the students

Suggestions

Governments of India and other state governments

1. Must organise online teaching training programmes for the teachers of Primary to higher education.
2. Must provide free internet and digital gadgets to teachers.
3. The technology and internet must be available to all even in remote areas at nominal rates.
4. The electronic gadgets to the students must be provided by the state Governments/ Government of India at a subsidized rate.
5. Internship programmes and research activities must be allowed with Covid-19 protocol behaviour.
6. For online programmes, there must be a quality control mechanism for the teaching content.
7. To check the cheating during the examination the questions must be asked in such a way where student answers by original thinking.

Conclusions

The pandemic has provided an opportunity for all educational institutions change in educational methods. All the stake holders i.e. parents, Institution management, teachers, state and central government must develop a way to improve the infrastructure, internet facility, availability of electronic gadgets at a subsidized rate to the needy students. Workshops must be organised for the online teaching training programme to the teachers of Primary to higher education by the state governments and/or the Governments

of India, free internet and digital gadgets to teachers must be provided. There must be a panel for quality control of the online teaching material. The paper setting pattern must be changed in such a way that the student answers the questions by the original thinking not by cheating.

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