

A Critical Analysis of COVID 19 Pandemic's Effect on Education System in India

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ABSTRACT

The *COVID-19* pandemic in our country is a part of the worldwide pandemic of corona virus disease which is caused by "Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2" or SARS-COV-2. The first case of COVID-19 in India, which originated from China, was reported on Thursday, 30th January 2020. India currently has the largest number of confirmed cases in Asia, and has the second-highest number of confirmed cases in the world after the United States of America, with almost more than 3 crores reported cases of COVID-19 infection, more than 4 lakhs deaths and more than 3 crores discharged after treatment.

As the disease crept in our lives the Government of India declared a series of lockdown when several institutions and offices were to shut down, including school, colleges and universities. It was the first time in our history when a disease that turned into pandemic forced to stop and changed our lives to such an extent. One of the major impacts of it has been on the education system of our nation and its vulnerable infrastructure that till now was offline was forced to stop and find an alternative. The forced choice we were only left with is off course resorting to online mode of teaching and learning which hadn't happened in the past. But since as we are accustomed to traditional modes of teaching and learning process, the virgin way of online mode of teaching and learning besides other unconventional systems/methods, has posed certain difficulties and challenges before the education system of India. Thus, this paper attempts to cover up different facets and dimensions regarding challenges of teaching and learning in this pandemic era and its large scale effects on our education system in India.

KEYWORDS: COVID 19, Education, System, India, Pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

Before we discuss the impact of COVID-19 on our education system, it would be amicable to start with a brief discussion about pandemic COVID-19 in India which just a part of the worldwide pandemic of corona virus disease caused by SARS-COV-2 virus. The first case of COVID-19 in our country was reported on 30th January 2020 in the state of Kerala, which rose to 3 cases by 3rd of February 2020, and all the patients were students returning from Wuhan, China. If we go into its timeline, we find that the first known human infection of corona virus was from Wuhan, Capital of Hubei Province in the People's Republic of China. Official reports from the WHO (World Health Organization) reported the earliest onset of COVID-19 symptoms as on 8th December 2019 and human-to-human transmission was confirmed by the WHO officials and Chinese authorities by 20th January 2020. Apart from these, no significant rise in transmissions was observed till the month of February

2020. However, it is important to note here that it took more than a month for WHO to confirm and declare officially that COVID-19 is capable of human-to-human transmission which is in fact be considered as considerable delay. In March 2020, the further transmissions grew after several people with travel history to affected countries, and their contacts, tested positive. On 12 March, a 76-year-old man, with a travel history to Saudi Arabia, became the first COVID-19 fatality of India.

Our India currently has the largest number of confirmed cases in Asia, and has the second-highest number of confirmed cases in the world after the United States of America¹. As of October 2021 in our country **3,37,91,061** have been infected from the coronavirus disease², **4,48,573** people have died and **3,30,68,599** have been discharged/recovered, besides **2,73,889** are active cases of corona virus.³ Thus, statically we can see that India is only behind, United States of America where more than 4 crores people have been infected from corona virus disease and more than 6 lakhs people have been died since its inception.

The common symptoms of corona virus include fever, cough, fatigue, breathing difficulties and loss of smell and taste. The incubation period for COVID-19 or in other words the symptoms starts to appear from 1 to 14 days from the day of infection, most commonly is being around average of 5 days after exposure to the virus to any individual. COVID-19 virus mainly spreads through the air when people are near each other long enough, primarily through small droplets, as an infected person breathes, coughs, sneezes, or speaks. It can spread as early as two days before infected person shows symptoms (presymptomatic). Patients remain infectious for up to ten days in moderate cases, and two weeks in severe cases. The standard diagnosis method is by real time Reverse Transcription- Polymerase Chain Reaction or real time RT-PCR test. Preventive measures include social distancing, quarantining, proper ventilation, covering coughs and sneezes, hand washing, keeping unwashed hands away from the face and use of face masks to minimize the risk of transmission. However, apart from preventive measures the government has also started the mass vaccination program to further curb the pandemic that primarily includes vaccines namely: Covaxin, Covishield and Sputnik V. Due to these flagrant situations the Government of India for the first time, called for the “Janata Curfew” which was a 14-hour long curfew on 22 March 2020 (from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.). Every person was required to obey the curfew, with exceptions for people of “essential services” such as police, medical services, media, home delivery professionals and firefighters. On 25th March 2020, from the first day of Phase 1 lock down (25 March - 14 April 2020) and subsequently more phases of lockdown in 2020, nearly all services were suspended including educational institutions across nation. Also with advent of second wave of corona virus by the end of March 2021, again the government was forced to lock down the country that included educational institutions as well.

Due to repetitive lockdowns and two lives threatening COVID-19 waves, several educational institutions including primary, secondary, higher secondary and higher educational premises across country were shut down for months. These closures and interruptions has led the education system of India nearly crippled and bend on its knees. The need for alternative way of learning and teaching was felt and thus online mode of teaching and learning emerged, but with it many difficulties and challenges

¹ As on 1 October 2021, there have been 42,966,938 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 688,099 deaths, reported to WHO, available at: <https://covid19.who.int/region/amro/country/us> (last visited on September 01, 2023).

² myGOV, available at: <https://www.mygov.in/covid-19> (last visited on September 01, 2023).

³ Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Government of India, available at: <https://www.mohfw.gov.in/> (last visited on September 01, 2023).

also emerged posing real hardships to education system of our country. As in our country for years we are habitual regarding offline/traditional teaching methods, it is not easy to shift overnight from offline to online mode of teaching and there are other difficulties like, poor infrastructure, internet illiteracy and person specific problems as well. So this pandemic has though provided an opportunity to change from conventional mode of teaching to modern way of online teaching, yet we can say keeping in mind the current national scenario that we are not ready to install these changes and cope up with it. Therefore, there exists physical, social, infrastructural, economic, psychological, mental and literacy related hardships that pose severe challenges to our education system. Not only for an individual or institution but also for the Government and beaurocracy, there exist serious challenges. So apart from other things it is the education system of our country that has suffered a lot due to many reasons which have been discussed ahead.

EFFECT ON EDUCATION SYSTEM

As we all know that we have been facing this pandemic now for more than a year since March 2020 in our country, it has highly affected the education sector and other associated things at large. It would also not be out of place to say that COVID-19 has now largely and totally changed the education scenario and the way our education was once used to be. The closures and repeated lockdowns in our country has both badly affected and changed the teaching – learning process that once used to be something different from today.

According to “Unified District Information System for Education Plus” (UDISE+) that works under the Ministry of Education, to collect the school details about factors related to a school and its resources, the School Education system in India is one of the largest in the world comprising more than 15 lakhs schools, 97 lakhs teachers, and over 26.5 crore students from varied socio-economic backgrounds across 28 States and 8 Union Territories. COVID-19 has forced the nationwide lock down forcing 320 millions of learners to stop moving schools/colleges and all educational activities halt in India. Apart from it if we talk globally, due to pandemic while countries are at different points in their COVID-19 infection rates, worldwide there are currently more than 1.2 billion children in 186 countries affected by school closures due to the pandemic and with this with this sudden shift away from the classroom in many parts of the globe, some are wondering whether the adoption of online learning will continue to persist post-pandemic, and how such a shift would impact the worldwide education market.⁴

Thus, we see that how the outbreak of this pandemic has affected not only the education system of India but also of the world when education is something undeniably crucial in contributing to a country’s welfare and an individual’s growth, but it has been jeopardized by the emergence of COVID-19. Therefore, below we have discussed concretely that in what actual terms does COVID-19 has affected the education system of India.

A. Operational Burden – Due to the pandemic the normal course of education system has almost disrupted. In February 2020 China was the first country to mandate school closures with other countries shortly following. India was the one of the countries to shut its education system with the

⁴ World Economic Forum, *available at*: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-education-global-covid19-online-digital-learning/> (last visited on September 05, 2023).

introduction nationwide lockdown that tremendously created operational burden for: (a) - authorities including government, schools and ministry, and (b) – parents.

The authorities were never ready for the radical changes that took place after the lockdown because of infrastructural, habitual and other reasons. After the shutdown the only option left with the authorities was of E-learning, but as the name suggests, it relies on the accessibility of technology and electricity too. However, little or non availability of electricity was a significant challenge in implementation of online mode. According to the 2017-18 National Sample Survey report on education, only 24% of Indian households have an internet facility.⁵

On the other hand, for the guardians/parents the only way to educate their wards was through offline mode. But shift towards online or unconventional mode was new and cumbersome. This was so because, while 66% of India's population lives in villages, Mission Antyodaya, a nationwide survey of villages conducted by the Ministry of Rural Development in 2017-18, showed that only 16% of India's households received one to eight hours of electricity daily, 33% received 9-12 hours, and only 47% received more than 12 hours a day.⁶ Also due lockdown many have lost their source of livelihood due to which majority Indians are unable to make arrangements for their children to access education through electronic mode which requires a decent amount of monetary investment.

B. Digital Divide And Disparity – Digital divide or disparity is something when certain group or class of person doesn't have accessibility or availability of some digital or electronic resources. Due to pandemic there has been shift in way of imparting education, i.e. today most of the things are taking place through online mode. But this has created a digital divide and disparity among masses that don't even have basics required for their life. Only 47% of our population receives electricity more than 12 hours a day which is clearly less than 50% of India's total population and electricity is major factor in online learning.

According to National Sample Survey Reports No. 585 on Household Social Consumption on Education in India⁷, percentage of households with computer facility in rural and urban areas is 4.4 and 23.4 respectively, thus, total households with computer facility in India accounts for just 10.7% which is extremely low. Further, percentage of households with internet facility in rural and urban areas is 14.9 and 42 respectively, thus, total households with internet facility in India again accounts for just 23.8% which is too low. These low figures indicate that there exists a widespread digital divide and disparity due unaffordability of computer and internet resources. Besides, the online self teaching platforms like, BYJU'S, Unacademy, Doubtnut and Vedantu that charges subscription fee and runs on proper network and internet devices has further escalated the digital gap among students.

C. Digital Illiteracy - Stakeholders in the education sector have been forced to use digital platforms to continue teaching – learning process due to changed scenario because of COVID-19. But not all teachers/students are good at it or at least not all of them were ready for this sudden transition from face to face learning to online learning. Most of the teachers and students themselves didn't have any past

⁵ Scroll.in, available at: <https://scroll.in/article/960939/indian-education-cant-go-online-only-8-of-homes-with-school-children-have-computer-with-net-link> (last visited on September 05, 2023).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, available at: <http://mospi.nic.in/download-reports> (last visited on September 06, 2023).

experience of conducting and receiving online lectures on video platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, WebEx, etc. Also as per different reports the digital literacy or awareness is very poor in our country and one of the reasons behind it is lack of proper digital infrastructure and monetary constraints for many that they avail themselves with the resources that are required for online education.

According to National Sample Survey Reports No. 585 on Household Social Consumption on Education in India⁸ by Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, percentage of persons of age group 5-14 years who are able to operate a computer is 9.1 and percentage of persons of age group 15-29 years who are able to operate a computer is 33.6. Besides, percentage of persons of age group 5-14 years who are able to use internet is 8.8 and percentage of persons of age group 15-29 years who are able to use internet is 40.4. So, we can see that both the percentage of computer and internet users in above specified age groups is too low which that in our country the digital literacy rate even below 50% that directly shows that there is considerable amount digital illiteracy among the learners age group.

D. Regional Disparity - There is a significant difference and inequality among States in their ability to access/avail computer and internet facility, operate computer and use internet so as to use online content and operate digital mode of education through various online platforms. This kind of regional disparity has created a hindrance in the implementation of online education programme plus this pandemic has truly exposed the side effects of inequality that exists among States/UT.s due to which some States/U.T. are far ahead that other States/U.T.s. This can be understood as per the National Sample Survey Reports No. 585 on Household Social Consumption on Education in India⁹ by Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, the State/U.T. with highest and lowest percentage of households with computer facility is New Delhi - 34.9 and Odisha – 4.3 respectively. Likewise, according to above report the State/U.T. with highest and lowest percentage of households with internet facility is New Delhi – 55.7 and Odisha – 10 respectively. Besides, as per the above report the State/U.T. with highest and lowest percentage of persons of age 5 years and above with ability to operate computer is New Delhi - 42.8 and Bihar – 8 respectively and the State/U.T. with highest and lowest percentage of persons of age 5 years and above with ability to use internet is New Delhi - 50.5 and Bihar 12.1 respectively.

E. Inequality And Unaccessibility Of Educational Resources – According to Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) under the Ministry of Education, school education system in India is one of the largest in the world comprising more than 1.5 million or 15 lakh schools¹⁰ which is really a huge number of schools and in these schools about over 264 million or 26.5 crore students study at various levels. Prior to COVID-19 era the educational resources that includes, books, notes, schools bags and school dress and other related items were used to directly deliver to the students at their respective place of getting education. But since the outbreak of pandemic the physical delivery of these educational resources has come to a halt because of closure educational institutions. Apart from

⁸ Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, *available at*: <http://mospi.nic.in/download-reports> (last visited on September 05, 2023).

⁹ Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, *available at*: <http://mospi.nic.in/download-reports> (last visited on September 05, 2023).

¹⁰ UDISE+, *available at*: <https://udiseplus.gov.in/#/udiseAbout> (last visited on September 06, 2023).

directly handing over of educational resources there was no other mode at the time of outbreak of COVID-19. So, post COVID-19 there are millions of needy students from poor social and economic background that are suffering as they have no other alternative to seek these essential educational resources, especially notes and texts for learning purpose. In the same way educators also are feeling helpless to distribute these educational resources. One alternative way of getting learning resources is by way of online learning platforms like BYJU'S but knowing that not everyone can afford their expensive subscription has further escalated the problem.

F. Increased Dropouts – In this world everything comes with a price tag and this pandemic has rightly taught this. Due to it there were numerous lockdowns and market and other financial institutions were forced to shut down as a preventive measure, and because of this there emerged a large scale distress and hopelessness among mass for their livelihood. Roughly a third of workers worldwide, around 2 billion people, work in the informal sector. Most of these jobs are in developing countries. The livelihoods of an estimated 1.6 billion, or 80% of the total are threatened by the pandemic.¹¹ We also stand in the queue of developing nation and series of nationwide lockdown forced schools and colleges to close abandoning the usual classroom which resulted in adoption of new techniques on one hand and denying almost 32 crore students of an education on the other. To worsen the situation COVID-19 with lockdown emerged as national crisis, which resulted in increased unemployment as majority here worked in unorganized sector. Lost in income and increased poverty posed serious problem as unemployed families who couldn't afford fees and resources being forced to stop their children's education due to debts and money scarcity. School going boys and girls were forced to work as daily wage employees or assigned to home chores.

The above conditions gave birth to problem of dropout from educational institutions in large numbers. The dropout rate at the secondary school (IX and X) level in India is over 17%, while the dropout rate in upper-primary (VI to VIII) and primary level is 1.8% and 1.5% respectively. There are 19 States/ UTs where the dropout rate at the secondary level is higher than the all India rate - 17.3.¹² UNESCO has also in its one of the projection report covering study of 180 countries, estimated that 24 million children may not return to education in 2021 due to the pandemic and that too from south and west Asia.

G. Budgetary Constraints – As the COVID-19 emerged as pandemic in our country the same forced closure of institutions that generates revenue for the government like, liquor shops, malls, cinema halls, market and others in the like. From the very first time when the nationwide lockdown was imposed in India in March 2020, the revenue and earnings of the government has got a serious. This revenue deficit has affected other social welfare services that are been provided by the government to us and education system of India is one of them. As income of the authorities degraded the budget for the purpose of education was affected. Union minister Nitin Gadkari last year said that India is expected to lose revenue of Rs 10 lakh crore due to the coronavirus crisis. He said that the situation was so grim that some states

¹¹ World Economic Forum, *available at*: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/covid-19-is-increasing-multiple-kinds-of-inequality-here-s-what-we-can-do-about-it/> (last visited on September 07, 2023).

¹² The Times of India, *available at*: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/education/news/udise-report-9-states/-uts-record-over-25-dropout-rate-at-secondary-level/articleshow/84039449.cms> (last visited on September 07, 2023).

do not have money to pay salaries next month.¹³ Also we are a developing country that also creates a revenue issue with the government as already reported by the IMF developing countries need at least 2.5 U.S. trillion dollars to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic led budgetary constraints particularly in education sector. Despite initiatives from the Central and state governments, there has not been enough expenditure on improving the digital infrastructure for remote learning. In fact, in 2020-21, the Ministry of Human Resource Development budget for digital E-Learning was reduced to Rs 469 crore from Rs 604 crore in 2019-20.¹⁴

H. Delay In Academic Session - One year into the COVID-19 pandemic, close to half the world's students are still affected by partial or full school closures.¹⁵ This shutting down of educational institutions, school and colleges in India has very much disrupted the academic session and daily routine of students. The academic session that includes timely semester or annual examinations and fresh admissions at various educational institutions has been delayed much due to closure and non functioning these institutions. The unfortunate stoppage of academic activities led to delay in internal examinations for promotion to higher class as well as students who were supposed to be at university class after their higher secondary or intermediate had to unfortunately suffer the evil effect of pandemic. The CBSE Board intermediate exams which were scheduled to take place in the month of May and June 2021 were cancelled and results were announced passing 100 percent students in the month of July 2021. Country's reputed universities like, University of Lucknow also had their delay in academic session. The session eventually got delayed due second wave of COVID-19 in 2021 and now is scheduled to begin from 04-10-2021¹⁶ instead of usual start of academic session from the month July 2021, i.e. it is now delayed by about three months. Such delays due to COVID-19 may have negative implications upon the mental health of students at large.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Since the beginning of COVID-19, more than a billion students or learners have been deeply affected by one or the other way. Not only the India's education system but the education system of other developed countries has been affected. The evils of corona virus are so deeply rooted in our lives today that it seems as if the global scenario has been divided into two periods viz; pre COVID-19 era and post COVID-19 era. Worldwide school closures due to COVID-19 have brought significant disruptions to education system to almost every single nation of this world. Due academic losses many students have faced several physical, psychological, mental and health issues. School and university going students' life suddenly came to a halt due to total closure of their educational institutions as now they were clueless, without any routine, with no motivation and no future perspective. This also resulted into obesity and downfall in the minimum proficiency level in reading and learning skills as a result of the health crisis, sluggishness and mental passivity. Keeping in mind that almost every learner is

¹³ India Today, *available at*: <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/coronavirus-outbreak-economic-crisis-nationwide-tally-toll-1687705-2020-06-10> (last visited on September 07, 2023).

¹⁴ Scroll.in, *available at*: <https://scroll.in/article/960939/indian-education-cant-go-online-only-8-of-homes-with-school-children-have-computer-with-net-link> (last visited on September 07, 2023).

¹⁵ UNESCO, *available at*: <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse> (last visited on September 08, 2023).

¹⁶ University of Lucknow, *available at*: <https://www.lkouniv.ac.in/en/news?Newslistslug=en-student-news&cd=MQAzADcAMgA4AA%3D%3D> (last visited on September 10, 2023).

dependent on someone for educational resources and COVID-19 has not left any class of person be it teachers or parents has further made the education system of our country more vulnerable than ever.

It will take some time to make educational institutions and their resources better as they were before the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country but nevertheless all the stakeholders will have to take initiative and work hard so that the things could be made as normal as can be. Digital divide and illiteracy associated to it is also needs to be checked. For this end the schools and colleges are needed to be equipped with more friendly and accessible digital resources. In our country more than 83% of total India's population is employed in unorganized sector like; carpenters, drivers, labours, factory workers, electricians, etc. in the like, the earnings at large in this sector is many a times not sure or so less that they can't even afford their daily basic needs. Then, in such a case it is important that the interaction gap between the learners and teachers due to start of online/unconventional teaching methods be reduced as much is possible. Also to avoid any such worse academic catastrophe to happen in future it is suggested that scientific and systematic collection and analysis of data relating to education system and its allied resources in our country be collected and studied so that for future we can ensure evidence-based decisions. The authorities are also required to extend and develop the technological based infrastructure at our educational institutes so that no child feels discriminated for him in the absence of technological modern facilities.

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