

THE EFFECT OF COVID -19 PANDEMIC ON RURAL STUDENTS: A STUDY

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Received: 12 Apr 2021

Accepted: 13 Apr 2021

Published: 15 Apr 2021

ABSTRACT

Covid -19 pandemic has drastically changed the teaching-learning process. Our educational system in rural areas is not that efficient, even in the better times. Adding to this, the pace of the corona's spread has compelled the governments to shut down the educational institutions even after the lockdown resulting in the transition of physical learning to online. The developed countries, however, could cope with this scenario. It has affected the students of our nation, mainly in the rural areas, exceptionally. Even though the students of rural areas faced challenges in their classroom education before this pandemic, they somehow managed to hark to the classes to enhance their skills. However, the pandemic has thrust the students into ambiguity towards learning as most of the rural areas' students are illiterate in using the technology to educate themselves. This paper presents the difficulties of the students of the rural areas in attending their online classes.

KEYWORDS: *Covid-19 Pandemic, Digital Divide, Classroom Ambiance*

INTRODUCTION

On March 11, 2020, WHO declared a novel corona virus outbreak as a global pandemic, India's Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ordered a nationwide lockdown and curfew restricting all the people indoors, compelling them to use all the precautionary measures like wearing a mask, keeping social distance. It affected our nation's economic growth acutely. Keeping aside all these sectors, educational institutions have faced a significant loss because of this pandemic. Simultaneously the aspect of Conducting examinations of higher education students and coping with younger children was kept in ambiguity. When the government decided to go through online education, most teachers got a potential opportunity to polish their skills without squandering their academic year. However, the transition from offline classrooms to online education created many challenges, especially in rural areas. Many rural area families have no access to broadband and android mobiles and laptops because their economic constraints are not obtainable. According to the key indicators of household social consumption on education in India report based on the 2017-2018 national sample survey, less than 15% of rural Indian households have access to the internet (as opposed to 42% urban Indian households). A mere 13% of people surveyed (aged above 5) in rural areas – just 85% of females, could use the internet. Most of the families do not have any laptops or computers.

Even though there is much scope to strengthen the knowledge and creative skills through online education, it still left us with many challenges. Based on UNESCO's report, 90% of the students were affected because of this pandemic globally. However, it has reduced to 67% during June 2020. According to UNESCO's report, almost 14 crores of primary and 13 crores of secondary students are affected by this pandemic. Even the topmost institutions are not well equipped with

digital devices and learning apps. Under these circumstances expecting online education for rural students with modernized devices and learning apps is inconceivable. The following are the practical problems noticed among the rural students in attending the online classes.

Digital Divide

India is a developing country with a many diversified urban and rural population. Because of this pandemic, these differences were multiplied by the introduction of online education. Most urban families, whether they are middle class or upper-middle class, can afford smart phones and laptops for their wards and encourage them towards enhancing their creative skills and knowledge without any hesitation and inhibitions. In contrast, the parents of the rural areas, even though they strongly desire that their wards be successful, cannot purchase these expensive gadgets because of their economic constraints. Broadband connectivity and data speed was another difficulty. Broadband connectivity penetration is very high in urban areas when compared to rural areas. In most rural areas, even voice calls cannot be placed to converse. They search for a designated place when they need to chat with their known persons. So, the learning apps like WEBEX and ZOOM were found out of reach in those remote areas and led to the impractical situation by creating the differences between urban and rural students digitally.

Economic Constraints

Most of the families in the rural areas of India are socio-economically backward. They live hand-to-mouth lives, and they mainly depend on farming and livestock rearing. Attending offline or physical classes is a big question mark where expecting them to attend the online classes using technical apps and costly gadgets are preposterous.

Classroom Ambiance

An ideal classroom requires the active participation of teachers and students. However, because of online education, student participation has drastically decreased. Earlier, students used to ask their queries confidently without any hesitation. However, when exposed to online education, most of the students are not confident about using the technology, e.g., which button to click that allows them to speak and which button allows them to visualize to teachers. Due to these apprehensions and inhibitions, the teacher rarely finds one or two those who ask queries. Secondly, teacher monitoring is effective face-to-face in the physical classes. Even the last bench students were monitored efficiently by the teachers. However, anonymity is ruling the roost in online classes. The teacher cannot see the students, causing a loss of interest for the students and teachers as the teacher cannot see the students. Because of this, sometimes teachers feel that whether the students are listening to the class or not. Even if they do not listen to the class, they may log in to the class and disappear, which a teacher does not recognize, resulting in the lack of interest of the students and the teachers' dissatisfaction.

The language classroom is supposed to be conducted in an interactive atmosphere which is not possible through online teaching. Classroom ambiance plays a vital role in the teaching-learning process, which was very indispensable in improving education quality.

Digital Illiteracy

We have shifted from offline education to online without any prior preparations. Even though the parents and teachers well-qualified, exposure to digital devices is limited. Online teaching is very new to the students as well as the teachers. Because of this, assistance from teachers as well as parents was not expected. The typical difficulties during online classes

are some students cannot mute their audio; they unmute their mike in the middle of the lecture, interrupting the class. Even after repeated requests to mute their mike could not help as they were digitally illiterates and fresher's to use this kind of application. Some students would unintentionally switch on the video; such practical problems are happening because of a lack of guidance. As they are digitally illiterates, they are unable to understand the upgraded technology too.

Passive Learners

Due to online education, the student-teacher interface has decreased, resulting in **the** lack of discipline that made students passive learners. During the face-to-face interaction, teacher monitoring was effective. Students used to participate actively in the classroom, teachers acting as guides used to give some activities to enhance the students' LSRW skills. Even though there is much scope to give educational activities online, as proper monitoring is not possible, students lack interest in their classes and become passive learners.

Dry-Eye Syndrome

Due to binge-watching of screens, many students are reporting dry-eye syndrome. In online learning, exposure to the screens has increased rapidly. Because of this pandemic, students are restricted to houses, and their participation in outdoor games is banned. Staying home, lack of exercise, and exposure to the screens significantly affect the students' health. Due to increased screen time, the students suffer from a lack of sound sleep, which will lead to obesity and other health issues like dry eye syndrome.

Mid-Day Meals

The pandemic leads to another significant loss to rural areas' children is the lack of mid-day meals. Previously, to reduce the school dropout rate, the government has introduced a mid-day meals scheme. This scheme helped a lot in gaining significant students' attendance to schools in rural areas., Implementing mid-day meals through online education is impossible. In light of this again, the dropout rate has increased, significantly affecting the girl students. The girl students are asked to look after the younger sibling at home, or they are compelled to work at their farm or work as daily labor as economic constraints are very high in rural areas because of this global pandemic.

CONCLUSIONS

The global pandemic has drastically affected the education sector, specifically private schools, and colleges. The hands-on experience of the students has greatly suffered. Practical knowledge of students is kept in ambiguity as all the laboratories are closed. Most of the teachers work for self-satisfaction and develop interpersonal relationships. However, because of online teaching, the teachers have lost the flavor of teaching. They feel dissatisfied as they teach to screens instead of the students, resulting in a lack of excitement and enthusiasm. All the students and teachers are still in confusion about when the schools are going to reopen. The situation leads all the people in chaos, not knowing the future. As this global pandemic has changed the complete scenario of the teaching-learning process and exposed all the students and teachers to online education, it has become the responsibility of the governments to provide good broadband services and data accessibility in rural areas. The governments also need to conduct workshops on these learning applications to explore teachers' knowledge to assist the children properly. Even after the pandemic, the Board of secondary education and universities needs to modify the curriculum and syllabus design and the teaching strategies relevant to both online and offline education.

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