



EDUCATION BEYOND FACE TO FACE – A NEW CHALLENGE FOR THE NGOS DEALING WITH THE EDUCATION OF UNDERPRIVILEGED CHILDREN – A CASE STUDY OF VADODARA BASED NGOS

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Abstract: With the COVID-19 Pandemic resulting in closure of various activity centers across the world, schools / colleges / universities, institutions, NGOs, teachers & students are quickly shifting from traditional face to face education mode to more towards online education mode using technology and less dependence on classroom education. (Rebecca, 2020; Dutta & Talegaonkar, 2021; TOI, 2020). Use of digital technology in education system has removed all the barriers of face to face or classroom education. Government of India's (GoI) new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 also emphasised on online education through digital literacy, digital pedagogy, online examination, digital repository etc. with special focus towards socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs). (NEP, 2020; Cook, 2014; Dutta & Talegaonkar, 2021). In rural areas and among urban underprivileged children, e-learning has been a major issue due to non-availability of internet, poor connectivity, computer, smart phones etc. (UNICEF, 1999; Dutta & Talegaonkar, 2021; TOI, 2020). The mainstream students might have reaped the benefits of online education system and digital technology in education, but the underprivileged children are deprived of the benefits of online education. (UNICEF, 1999; Rebecca, 2020). NGOs dealing with educational development of underprivileged children are facing enormous challenges to implement education system beyond face to face mode. A study of four (4) Vadodara based NGOs was undertaken to understand the challenges faced during COVID-19 Pandemic, and how they are coping-up / responding to the challenges of education beyond face to face mode. The NGOs and the participants were selected using purposive sampling technique. The sources of data were the functionaries, teachers & students of the NGO and the documents of the NGOs. The nature of the data is qualitative. The total number of participants were one hundred and seventeen ($n=117$). The major findings are 1) Online education system is not effective compared to face to face learning, 2) Teachers facing problem in monitoring and assessing the performance and learning of the children, 3) Poor

internet access at home, non-availability of smart phones, un-healthy environment at home, cramped houses etc. are the few impediments for online education for the underprivileged children, 4) Availability of skilled online teachers, 5) Lack of funds for developing online education infrastructure.

Key words: *Face to face education, National Education Policy (NEP), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Underprivileged children, Digital Technology, On-line Education*

1. Intrinsic

COVID-19 Pandemic has affected children's education worldwide due to closure of major activities since beginning of the year 2021. The children most affected are mainly of pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary schools. It is estimated that 1.5 billion learners have been affected by school closures. (Rebecca, 2020). The speed of the closure of schools/institutions allowed little time to majority of schools/institutions in the world mainly developing and underdeveloped countries to adopt online education mode from traditional face to face / classroom education system. (Rebecca, 2020). The education of millions of children was affected in recent decades too due to natural disastrous, armed conflict and occasional epidemic. In 1918 Spanish flue pandemic, millions of children were out of school. However, the level of disruption is much greater today for 90% of the world young people are enrolled in primary school compared to 40% in 1920. (Rebecca, 2020). UNICEF's report on Education in Emergencies argued that in crisis, education activities need to be designed with long-term development goals and should be accessible to all children affected in emergencies. (UNICEF, 1999).

Rapid changes in technology in last few decades has brought significant development and growth in many parts of the world in-terms of improved productivity, reduction in cost, multiple features, speed of communication, on-line education to mitigate disruptions due to emergencies and so on. Technology is now being used in education system to support both teaching and learning. (NEP, 2020; Dutta; Talegaonkar, 2021). The classrooms are equipped with advanced digital technological learning tools such as smart TV, projectors, computers, tablets, smart mobile devices, and internet. Schools/Universities are offering variety of online courses, experiences, and learning materials. (Cook, 2014). Such digital technology-based learning apps is building 21st century skills, increases student & teachers' engagement and motivation, and accelerates learning. (US Department of Education, 2020; Dutta; Talegaonkar, 2021). Web can increase educational productivity by accelerating the rate of learning, reducing educational costs associated with instructional materials or program delivery, and better utilization of teacher's time. (Ruth Reynard, 2017; Dutta; Talegaonkar, 2021). Online and digital education can be reaped through digital literacy, digital pedagogy, and online examination. This will enrich teaching and learning process. (NEP, 2020; Dutta; Talegaonkar, 2021). However, it is important to ensure that open educational resources meet standards of quality, integrity, and accuracy—as with any other educational resource—and that they are accessible across geographies, languages, levels. (Purdue University, USA, 2020; NEP, 2020; Dutta; Talegaonkar, 2021).

Benefits of Technology in classroom:

In modern times, students are largely relying on technology in their everyday lives. They frequently use smartphones and tablets outside of school hours. They feel comfortable and confident using technology from a young age. Integration of technology in classroom is therefore, become a necessity in the education system. (Rebecca, 2020; Dutta; Talegaonkar, 2021). It helps students stay engaged during class by using a familiar tool for academic learning. By incorporating modern technology like artificial intelligence, for instance, teachers can develop more creative and innovative lesson plans to hold the attention of their classes. (Cook, 2014; University of The People, USA, 2020). e-book technology enables online education, distance learning, and access to up-to-date information. (Cook, 2014). Technology being used widely by professionals across wide range of fields and industries, inclusion of technology in classroom will help students for quick familiarisation and facilitate future careers. (Cook, 2014). Research by the World Economic Forum estimates that 65% of children entering primary school will find themselves in occupations that today do not exist. (Frezzo, 2017).

How Technology is removing the barriers in Education

The cost of education has significantly reduced, with option like online degrees and by eliminating the need to buy physical textbooks. By accessing full digital version of books in libraries, many academic journals offer full digital versions of books, scholarly articles in University database, one need not to travel to other places or country for study. Because of technology, education is becoming more flexible and accessible. (Mathur, 2020; Reynard, 2017). In recent years, there is a growing popularity of online certification /degree courses, mobile learning etc. which has removed the physical boundaries in education. (Cook, 2014). Various online technology like Kahoot, Trello, NearPod, Prezi, ClassDojo etc., are facilitating effective interactions between students and teachers. (University of The People, USA, 2020; Frezzo, 2017). Government of India (GoI) through its New Education Policy emphasises application of online e-learning platforms and tools such as SWAYAM, DIKSHA, SWAYAMPRAKASHA. (NEP, 2020).

Education in emergencies – Challenges and opportunities:

Basic education which means reading, writing and numeracy, is an inalienable right of all children, including those caught in natural and humanmade emergencies, must be able to access. (UNICEF, 1999). This provides the challenge of how to provide education to children experiencing these difficult circumstances. Where education systems have been rendered non-functional, the rebuilding of the system provides an excellent opportunity for transforming education so that it meets the learning needs of diverse groups within a given population. Education in emergency situations has frequently been viewed as a short-term response. This concept need transformation. The role of education should be considered as a social and cultural institution that is used by society to instil attitudes, values, and certain types of knowledge in its newest citizens, its future leaders. (UNICEF, 1999). Many organizations have extensive experience addressing educational needs in times of crisis and emergency, and this work needs to be recognised and reinforced. Such experience

has resulted in very practical supportive materials such as education kits, online education, digital technology in education and some useful analytical ideas. Though, distance education/online education will reinforce teaching and learning approach, but it does not work well across all child population in the world. (Rebecca, 2020; World Bank, 2020). It is difficult for students to watch videos, read documents which are really dull, and students to sit passively and learn. The teachers to acquire new pedagogy skills for online and digital education system. School closure will invite the problem of more dropouts mainly for underprivileged children who do not get education support at home. (World Bank, 2020). Over the last decades or so, progress has been made in the number of students who have access to digital devices and connectivity, making the move to online learning. At the same time, not every child has access to desks, books, laptop, digital devices or internet connectivity at home. The learning gap is widening between children from economically weaker section and better-off section. (Rebecca, 2020; Dutta; Talegaonkar, 2021; World Bank, 2020; Ketchel, 2020). Therefore, access of digital devices, internet connectivity, skilled teachers, appropriate online pedagogy are the few critical factors for online education to meet right to education goal for all section of the children population. (UNESCO, 2020; Rebecca, 2020; Amin, 2020). It has been observed that engagement learning style are more interactive, and that face to face learning is better than one hundred percent online learning. Due to various advantages of online mode such as use of digital resources, quality learning tools, collaboration etc., there is an opportunity for blended learning which will be tried, tested and increasingly used. (Rebecca, 2020; Amin, 2020; IEEE, 2020)

NGOs in Educational Development of underprivileged children – Covid19 pandemic and Online Education

As technology in online education is the current trend across the globe, NGOs are gearing up their educational activities for the underprivileged children, by adopting new technologies in education. Government of India (GoI) is facilitating learning for all students, with special emphasis on Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), by broadening the scope of school education with multiple pathways to learning through digital repository, online assessment & examination, blended model of learning etc., involving both formal and non-formal education modes. (NEP, 2020). NGOs are helping the underprivileged children by giving them access to computer lab with internet connections, providing tablets, smartphones to meet their online educational need. (The CSR Journal, 2020; Dutta & Talegaonkar, 2021). Though arrangement of necessary digital devices required for attaining online classes in Covid19 pandemic, are easily accessible to mainstream children, but not accessible to many children especially underprivileged children. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the emerging opportunities and challenges of NGOs who are engaged in educational development of underprivileged children for migrating fully or partially to the education mode which is beyond face to face education mode. In view of above, a survey of four (4) Vadodara based NGOs was conducted to understand the challenges faced by the NGOs in COVID-19 Pandemic and their future way forward to adopt education system beyond face-to-face mode.

2. Study of Vadodara based NGO

The NGOs operating in Vadodara can be classified on the basis of two major factors, which include their operational level or their co-operational level. (Dutta; Talegaonkar,2020). Their main aim is to up-lift the underprivileged section of the society and support emergency services. Various focus areas are education, community development, healthcare, nutritional food for children, sports & cultural activities, women empowerment, environment, relief activities, advocacy, financial support to bright children for higher studies, child labour protection, child abuse and sexual harassment, family planning etc. (Schwabland, 2016; Jgannathan, 2001; Dutta & Talegaonkar,2020). All such programmes are designed by the NGO authorities and their remaining tasks are carried out or implemented with the help of volunteers. A survey of Vadodara based NGOs dealing with education of the children of migrant labourers was conducted. These NGO's main focus is educational development of the children and provide them nutritional food, medical assistance, engaging them in sports & cultural activities and soft skill training for holistic development.

Objectives of study

1. To study the education system of underprivileged children as organised by the NGOs during COVID-19 Pandemic
2. To study the challenges faced during the COVID-19 Pandemic and how the NGO have responded to the challenges of online education
3. To study the opportunities / challenges of online education as perceived by the resident teachers/children of the NGOs

Design of the study

The design of the study is a case study

Procedure for selection of the case

In the above perspective, four (4) Vadodara based NGOs who are registered under Indian Society Act, and are active in the field of education were selected using purposive sampling technique for survey. The name, year of establishment and number of beneficiaries (children) of the NGOs surveyed are given in Table 1. The NGO surveyed satisfy the stringent conditions of transparency, governance and demonstrate impact on beneficiaries and represent most mature Vadodara based NGO in the sector in-terms of size and scale. The survey was conducted at NGO's office and/or at their education centers.

Table 1

Name, year of establishment and number of beneficiaries(children) of the NGOs

Sr No.	Name of the NGO	Year of establishment	Number of beneficiaries	Remark
1	Muniseva Ashram	1980	650	Both boarding and school facilities are available in the campus

2	United Way of Baroda (UWB)	1986	6089*	Day coaching at activity centers / school premises / awarding scholarships / advocacy etc.
3	Mahavir International (MI)	2000	4756*	Day coaching at government schools/ technical training centers/ distribution of school kits/ scholarships/ education loans etc.
4	Srotoshwini Trust (STTR)	2010	123	Boarding facility, activity center and coaching beyond school hours. Beneficiaries are attached with Private / Govt. schools

*This includes beneficiaries who receives annual scholarships and/or school & tuitions fees etc.

Sources of data

The sources of data were the functionaries, teachers & students of the NGOs and the documents of the NGOs

Nature of data

The nature of data - qualitative

Sample

The participants of the NGOs are selected using purposive sampling technique were functionaries, teachers & student. Total participants were one hundred seventeen ($n = 117$). The sample size is given in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Sample size

Sl.no,	Description	Sample size
1	Functionaries (Trustee members / managing committee members / education coordinators)	12
2	Teachers / volunteers	48
3	Students (6 th to 11 th standards)	36
4	Total:	117

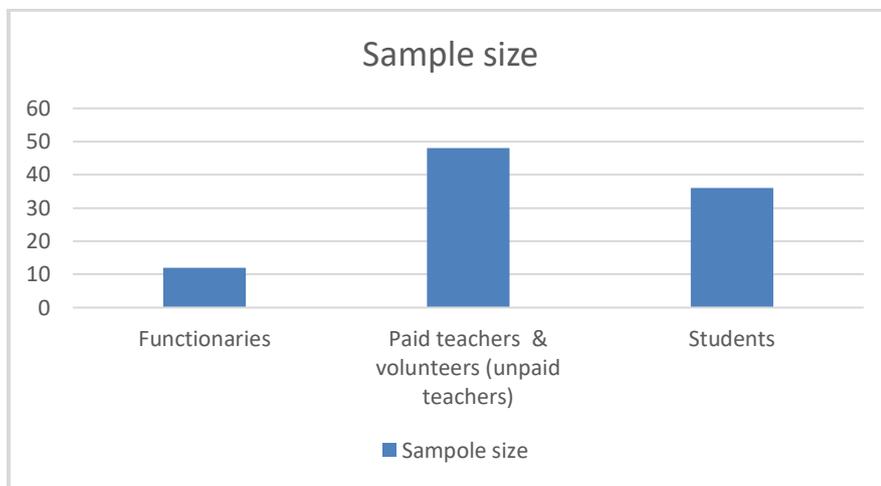


Figure 1

Sample size

Tools

The tools for the study were un-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The aspects covered were NGO's education system, facilities and technology used for online education, challenges faced due to closure of schools in COVID-19 Pandemic, functionaries / teachers / children's opinion about opportunities and challenges of online learning, and NGOs sources of fund.

Data collection

Two-way data collection was made: a) Primary data collection by un-structured interview and FGD, b) Secondary data collection from annual reports, brochures, web site.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using the technique of content analysis.

Findings of the study

The major findings of the study are presented below.

Type of support system for educational development

The NGOs organized the education of the underprivileged registered with them by developing their own curriculum and follow the syllabus of the Gujarat State Board. They have appointed paid teachers who visits NGOs hostel premises or their activity centers or government schools and impart teaching to the children according to the curriculum. NGOs have set up activity centers at various locations of Vadodara district mainly in and around slum areas, under the bridge, established their own campus where students stay along with resident teachers, functionaries, staff etc. The NGOs also provide tiffin, meals (meals where boarding facilities are available), medical support, stationaries, school uniforms, scholarships, career counseling, mentoring, sports & cultural activities, skill-based training, project based learning etc. to the underprivileged

children. Children are either attached with government / private schools or studying in the NGOs own campus where schooling facilities are developed by the NGOs.

Boarding and Day care facilities

Motivating the children and their parents to attend formal or informal schooling needs huge effort. The NGO volunteers go to the grass root level and try to understand the difficulties or inertia of the underprivileged section towards education. With tenacity and perseverance of the NGO volunteers, the children slowly find interest in learning and attaining formal or nonformal schools. The teaching environment created by the NGOs makes these children comfortable and make learning interesting. Figure 2-Graph given below depicts the type of facilities provided by the NGOs.

- 2 out of 4 (50 percent) of NGOs have day care education arrangement. Teachers / volunteers go to their activity center in slum area / under the bridge / Anganwadi centers (AWC) / Govt. schools to provide teaching, extracurricular activity, tiffin etc.
- 2 out of 4 (50 percent) of NGOs have developed hostel campus wherein the children stay at free of cost. The teachers/ volunteers teach them in the morning or in the evening depending upon the school timing, which includes coaching as per state syllabus, extracurricular activities such as arts and crafts, physical activities, meditation, music etc. One NGO have established school inside the campus where children attend schools as per the time table.

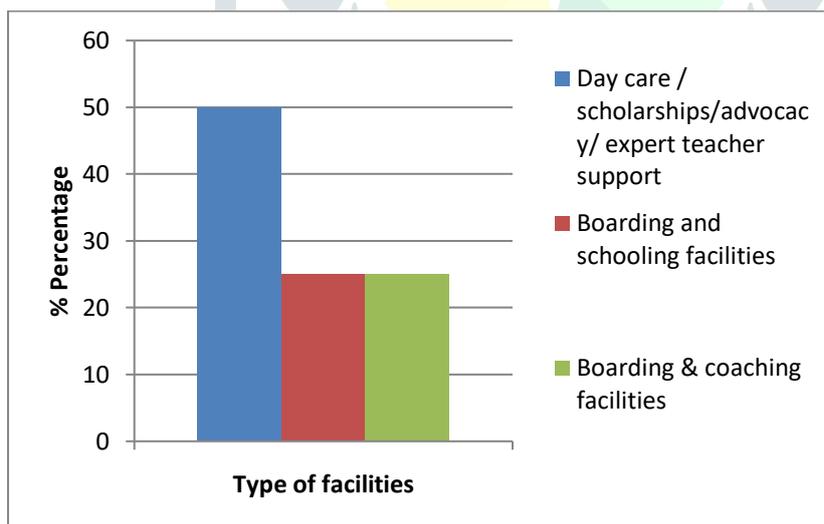


Figure 2

Type of facilities provided by the NGOs

Challenges faced during COVID-19 Pandemic:

- Activity centers where NGOs teachers use to take classes either in the morning or in the afternoon or in the evening, depending upon the children's school timing were all shut down due to COVID-19 Pandemic

- The underprivileged children (mainly from the nearby slums) stop studying as there is no encouragement or favourable environment at home for self-studies i.e without the support and guidance by the NGO teachers / school teachers. Parents involved them in household works or engage them with their professions
- Few underprivileged children who are given laptops, smartphone etc. by the NGO are attending online coaching on subjects as per the school syllabus imparted by the NGO teachers or school teachers (only for 9th and 10th standard students).
- The children of one NGO where boarding and schooling facilities exists, left the campus for their respective villages since declaration of the lockdown. These children are from nearby villages and belong to economically weaker section (EWS). The mobile phone being mainly used by their father, are not easily accessible to the children for attending online teaching
- The principal and other teachers of the NGO shared that online attendance is hardly 40% and they are not sure whether they are understanding the subjects being taught
- According to the teachers, the other possible reasons for poor attendance could be attributed to poor network connectivity and lack of availability of computers/laptops/ digital devices etc.
- NGOs infrastructure development are mainly funded by the Corporates through their CSR funds. COVID-19 Pandemic was never envisaged by the NGOs while making budget in the beginning of 2020 for the financial year FY2020-21 nor they had accrued fund for augmenting their existing IT infrastructure to cater online education. Due to sudden closure of schools, NGOs hardly got time to plan and augment funds, resources such as computers, furniture, head phones, internet connections with highspeed bandwidth, smart phones, classroom space, teaches with online pedagogy skills etc. to adopt online education
- Though online interaction/communication platforms such as Zoom Conference, Google Meet etc. are available, the NGO teachers facing difficulties in preparing online teaching materials using digital technology
- Due to lack of fund for procuring online infrastructure facilities, NGOs could facilitate supplying laptop/computers, smart phone etc. for few children only which is less than 1% of the beneficiaries covered by the NGO before COVID-19 Pandemic. The NGOs had to rely on the facilities available with their parents for catering the online education to these underprivileged children
- Teachers facing difficulties in monitoring and assessing the children's learning performance through online education system

Voice of the NGO functionaries / volunteers / teachers about online education:

- Though there are substantial benefits of online education, but for underprivileged children, face to face teaching is also necessary to address their emotional need. A blended model of teaching may be a better option

- Drop out will increase post COVID-19 lockdown. NGOs have to reach out again to the areas where activity centres are established, to convince the parents, children and encourage/motivate them to re-join the centres for study once COVID-19 lockdown is over
- Online education is suitable for mainstream children where there is a support system at home
- Online education system cannot create school atmosphere. Children can come to school but school cannot go to home
- Technology can be used in education but in school environment
- Emotional bonding between the teachers and students is decreasing in COVID-19 Pandemic except for one NGO where the children stayed back with the NGO resident functionaries and teachers
- Online education system is not effective for underprivileged children

Voice of the students about online education:

- The children of activity centres are not aware of online education system for their studies were stopped since closure of their schools and activity centres due to COVID-19 lockdown
- The students of NGOs who are attending schools and / or coaching through online mode, felt that online learning is not interesting to them. They prefer face-to-face learning over online learning.
- Repetition request of students are ignored by the teachers in online education
- Interference in their home due to noise, household works, internal conflicts, disruption of network connectivity etc. making online learning impossible
- They can give more attention in face-to-face learning over online learning
- Keeping the online set active, the children go out for play or for household works. Continuous attention and sitting in-front of computer/laptop / digital devices at one place make them uncomfortable
- In online teaching, teachers only speak. No interactive session. No story telling/acting.
- In face to face learning, students understand better what the teacher is teaching
- Face to face teaching create more bonding between teachers and students
- Their eyes are getting affected due to online classes
- As the online devices such as laptop, smart phones are new to them (many of them are using them for the first time), they are more curious in learning the various applications (Facebook, WhatsApp etc.) in the devices rather than concentrating in online study

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