



AN EVALUATIVE STUDY OF THE COVID-19 IMPACT ON RURAL EDUCATION

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1.1. Abstract

The data has been collected from primary and secondary resources (different journals, research papers, magazines, and internet sources) which have represented the Covid-19 impact on rural education. The findings of the study reflect that, we have limited educational resources, especially in rural areas, and we need more than basic infrastructure to facilitate the online teaching-learning process. It also find out that Covid-19 has created a significant impact on every sector of life. Also some educational policies were not the same as before, like mid-day-meal. Still, our government and Non-govt. organization have taken some initiative to strengthen education in many ways, like; provide different platforms for learning, so maximum students can participate and learn together, it can convert hurdles into opportunities. This study will also create a future path to smoothly deal with the natural and manmade disasters, which can be a cause of the closedown of educational institutions.

Keywords

Covid-19, Impact, Rural Education

1.2. Introduction

The role of education in rural areas can Improve the knowledge of rural people and can increase the living standards, which is very important for whole India, because human resources are more important, which can give us a strength to develop our economy and our society as well. Education provides a platform to understand ourselves and the need of societies, that's why it is necessary to provide at least basic education the societies to keep it remain stable. As the rural population of India, is around 65% and development in these areas is much less as compared to the urban areas. The people living in rural areas are facing a lot of issues such as lack of infrastructures, like schools and hospitals, poverty issues, connectivity issues such as road, transport, mobile communications, and lower literacy rates. Electricity and water supplies are also not enough to fulfill the basic needs. If we look upon the Covid-19 era, we will find out that this pandemic hitted all the spheres of life badly.

1.3. Literature Review

1.3.1. Rawal (2021)¹ pointed out that according to UNESCO, in India we have an extreme largest school system which is comparatively after China, according to the data at over the world, 63 million teachers and 1.3 billion learners affected from lockdown, in this around 320 million learners were from India only. This has changed the traditional Indian education system to technological education. In reality, Indian education has received positive as well as negative impacts of Covid-19 respectively.

1.3.2. According to Dar and Lone (2021)², today the world has evolved and now knowledge is just a click away from us, and the books have converted into E-books. Now internet and computers are an incorporated

¹ Rawal, P. (2021). *Impact of Covid-19 on Indian Education System*. International Journal of Research in Engineering, IT and Social Sciences, 11(3), 49-55.

² Dar, A. M., & Lone, F. A. (2021). *Impact of COVID-19 on Education: Challenges and Opportunities*. Journal of Education and Learning, 10(2), 205-214.

and important part of the education process. The learning experience of students is enhanced due to video conferencing, smart boards' internet, and computer software. Virtual learning has revolutionized education in India. The most important aspect is that the students are not dependent on teachers and this is not limited to four walls of the classroom.

The important point of this study is online platforms are providing space to learn and improve their score without facing the struggle of benches and school's resources. Some students are very comfortable dealing with technology; also some students are not able to use technology for learning, so this is the responsibility of a teacher to identify what sort of issue a student is facing individually? Teacher deals with every individual according to his ability which is not possible for any robot or artificial intelligence device. Thus, we can say it is not possible for any artificial device to replace teachers from the classroom.

- 1.3.3. India needs to develop creative strategies to sustainable access of education for every child, for this we need to maximize the utilization of online platforms, so we can use these platforms after lockdown too. Agrawal (2021)³ stated that due to lockdown number of learners stay at home and they have faced many drastic changes in the education system. Everything has shifted to online mode as such libraries, classrooms, tutorials, etc. It has created a big personal and professional change in the life of students like no meetings with friends and no interaction with the supportive person of students; it has affected the social life as well. Students feel trapped in the four walls of the house where they feel anxiety, depression, and other stress because of low opportunity of learning and families are suffering from economical crisis.
- 1.3.4. According to a UNESCO report, around 1.3 billion learners were not able to attend university across the world; due to this many students have lost their interest in the study. According to studies, students are not able to go outside or they are not able to participate in outside activities, which have been affecting the mental well-being of students.
- 1.3.5. According to Mc. Carthy (2020)⁴, those students who do not have access to technological resources are facing shame and helplessness. Moreover, those who have availability of resources are not able to use them frequently due to a lack of technical skills.

1.4. Significance of the Study

Covid-19 has been giving a significant impact in all spheres of life, which affect not only developing but developed countries as well, and there are very little researches that cover the rural area in comparison to the urban areas of Indian states. Also, the rural areas get more affected from Covid-19 than urban areas because they have not even basic facilities to fulfill their daily requirement and during the Covid-19 lockdown hit badly all the opportunities to fulfill the needs. This study has been conducted on the rural population to evaluate the Covid-19 impact on education.

Director-General of UNESCO, Andrey Azoulayals (2020)⁵, warned that "school closure can create a severe effect for students, teachers, parents and society as a whole. This can mainly affect the performance and interest of the people. The main concern was that, if lockdown is prolonged, it can disrupt the right to education.

1.5. Objectives

- a) To explore available educational resources of rural education.

³ Agrawal, A. (2021). *Impact of COVID-19 on Indian Education System*. International Journal of Research in Engineering, IT and Social Sciences, 11(3), 56-63.

⁴ McCarthy (2020): *Innovations and Challenges in Grammar*. International Journal of Corpus Linguistics
DOI - 10.1075/ijcl.00053.bus

⁵ UNESCO. (2020, March 5). *COVID-19 educational disruption and response*. Retrieved from <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

- b) To study consequences of Covid-19 on rural education.
- c) To identify steps have taken by the Indian government for rural education.
- d) To provide the expected solutions for the post-Covid-19 scenario to improve rural education.

1.6. Research questions:

1. What are the key challenges faced by rural schools in adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic and transitioning to remote learning?
2. How have the COVID-19 related school closures impacted the education of rural students, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds?

1.7. Hypothesis of study

There is no impact of lockdown on rural education because online education is available for all the students of rural areas, as the substitute for face-to-face education.

1.8. Methodologies

In this research, the data has been collected from primary and secondary sources. Researchers have personally collected data from 360 students of 30 different schools of the Uttarakhand district (India), with the help of a closed-ended questionnaire; data has been collected at a different level from pre-primary to senior secondary. Also, researchers find out different aspects of study with the help of different journals, research papers, magazines, and internet sources, etc. To examine the data, we have simply used descriptive and analytic methods, also taking help from the recent government's rules and schemes.

Our motive to collect data from primary and secondary resources was to understand the original situation of rural areas, also we tried to collect data from secondary sources so that we can justify with the different rural areas apart from the specific place where we have conducted our tool.

1.9. Sample of the study

Researchers have taken 360 students as their sample to conduct a closed-ended questionnaire from the districts of Uttarakhand. Researchers have selected a specific district according to their convenience, also they have kept in mind that data must be collected from rural areas.

1.10. Tools of the study

A questionnaire has been used to collect data from 360 students from pre-primary to senior secondary students of the school. Researchers have used closed-ended questionnaires to keep the data more objective, so it would be easy to interpret the data.

1.11. Techniques of data analysis

Data has been analyzed qualitatively because researchers like to interpret all the aspect of this study mainly the impact of Covid-19 in the rural area. Researchers have used descriptive and analytical techniques to analyze and interpret the data.

1.12. Available educational resources of rural education

The right to education is one of the fundamental rights of Indian citizens, whether living in urban or rural areas. It was added by the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002 as a part "A" in Article 21⁶. This article talks about free and compulsory education for the age 6 to 14 years students, and after some time in 2009 it has converted in education act, but only making laws does not make any sense until and unless there is no perfect implementation of it. We all are very well aware of the condition of schools in rural areas. There are very few schools in rural

⁶ The Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002 National Portal of India, n.d

areas and the condition of these schools is still inferior. Youngsters who are interested in quality higher education are bounded to go away from their rural areas, which directly lead to higher costs, accommodation charges, and in fact pain of being separated from their family. At the same time, the Covid-19 pandemic has also wrested this little opportunity from the rural population. As per NSS 71st round, 56.8% of women in rural India are literate. However, that number reduces even further with only 31.9% females completing primary education and only 9.6% of the women completing secondary education.

According to ENTB (2021), it is estimated that more than 45% of the girls drop out between the classes of 1 to 5. On the other hand, many girls get enrolled in schools but unfortunately, they are not able to complete their education because they have responsibility to take care of younger siblings and help in households activities, apart from it as if they face other issues like the pressure of society when she is growing up and the issue eve teasing which affect negatively the education of girl child in rural areas. Also, one more dilemma in rural areas is that we should focus on the education of boy child, because we have less financial resources which we should invest in one child only. According to a report by NCERT, (2021) it stated that there are approximately 13 lakh schools in 6 lakh villages in India, and the 90% of schools is running by Indian government, which covers around 58.7 million teacher, and 22 million students.

According to the Annual Status of Education Report (2021), the number of students studying in rural India keeps increasing. However, there is still a large learning gap where students from Class 4th have the same knowledge which we expect from Class 2nd student. This proves that not only we need to focus on bringing more children to school, but also on improving the quality of education.

1.13. Consequences of Covid-19 on rural education

In India, the government had imposed a "Janta curfew" and all the institutions, including schools had been closed. So, the situation was more crucial, especially in the field of education, as India is already suffering from low quality of education and has very few resources to facilitate education even on normal days. Now, COVID-19 has made the path more critical. On the other hand, this pandemic provides us an experimental environment to deal with the new normal situation of social distancing, which has converted face to face interaction into online mode. Let's look at both the negative and positive sides of Covid-19's impact.

1.13.1. The negative impact of Covid-19

As it is clear that COVID-19 creates a huge negative impact in all the sectors, mainly health and education, we can say that it was the total sum of the degradation of the quality of education that almost closed down the educational institutions.

Un-notified: students and teachers were not notified for online education. This was a sudden decision, and both teachers and students were not able to work smoothly with online education.

This mode of education creates a big difference between urban and rural students, rich and poor, and, most importantly, it creates a big gap between students and teachers because there are some batches who had not even identical interaction with their respective teachers.

Digital Illiteracy: A large population of India's rural areas is still not able to work with technology. Even the rural teachers are not prepared to teach online and use digital resources. Although a lot of the teachers have gone out of the way during the pandemic to provide online classes, still it should be taken into account, especially in rural areas.

Due to reduced and unavailable resources like internet facilities, smart phones, laptops, etc., students more often find themselves in a situation of zero-knowledge. Several parents cannot afford a smart phone for each of their children, or even, in many cases, one for the family. Even if we could fulfill our requirement of smart phones still we have need to access 4G and 5G internet service, and if student can afford digital learning still there are barriers of language.

Physical environment: We all know that physical interaction in the class between teachers and students play a very important role in understanding the concept, which is not at all possible in online classes.

There are many areas where now education is far better, but still there are some areas especially in the rural areas which need a lot of investment as well as improvement, like: Improvement in infrastructure and ICT facilities (Bhalla, 2018). If we will search at the rural level, we can see that technology has not reached at expected level especially in the rural area, where the majority of the population lives with limited access to ICT.

Many jobs in the public and private sectors have been postponed due to the breakdown of social connectivity. Through this, students suffered a lot and faced an era of stress and anxiety.

Increased responsibility of parents: due to lockdown, students were at home only, so it was the responsibility of parents to guide them in all spheres of life. In reality, very few parents can guide their children, especially in rural areas, because a large population is first generation learner in the rural areas.

Closer of schemes: It was difficult to motivate students to be connected with schools because students were no longer receiving mid-day meals, which was directly related to better nutrition.

Technological issues: there are some significant technical issues, like connectivity issues. Also, learning by technology requires some learning space for a peaceful teaching-learning process, which is hardly available in the house of rural areas.

We were suffering from the effects of lockdown, where students were not able to attend classes because they have not proper availability of network and devices. A long way of lockdown can affect the interest of students in their studies. Access to technology is not available to everyone, particularly those who earn living daily. (Crawford *et al.*, 2020).

Online learning as a distraction: while there is an increased chance for students to be easily distracted by social media or other sites, the same has been reported with many students (Bernard *et al.*, 204; Kapadia *et al.*, 2020).

1.13.2. The positive impact of Covid-19

India got the opportunity to transform from a traditional system to new technological system, which Indian government was planning to introduce. Now, COVID-19 has provided the environment to experiment with technologies that have converted difficulty into opportunities, like: Incensement of blended learning: Indian educational institutions shut down during the COVID-19 era, which has positively opened another phase of the teaching-learning process that is blended learning. India was doing experiments for blended learning. Now this COVID-19 pandemic has cleared the way for the same experiment.

Exposure to distance learning: In India, distance learning is a field of experimentation, especially in rural areas where the educational institutions are far from the students' reach. In this difficult situation of COVID-19 pandemic, the students prefer distance learning as it motivates them to self-learn and gives them the opportunity to learn from diverse sources and customize their learning as per their needs. Now, the students are not being spoon-fed by their teachers.

Reduce the digital divide: Education empowers people to realize their full human potential and make the necessary decisions to live a productive and dignified life. The new technology especially communication technology items like TV, mobile phones etc., helps to reduce the gap between urban and rural society.

1.14. Identify steps have been taken by the Indian government for rural education:

Researchers have divided the initiatives into two major level, school and higher education.

School education:

1.14.1. **E-pathshala** is a platform to provide NCERT content in written, audio and visual form for classes 1 to 12 in multiple languages. It provides nearby 1886 audios, 2000 videos, 696 E-books, and 504 flipbooks to facilitate learning in better manner. This platform has created a significant effect mainly for teachers, students, and parents because it provides sufficient material in multiple languages, which was needed during the Covid-19 era. <http://epathshala.gov.in>.

1.14.2. **Diksha portal** is an initiative of the ministry of education, (NCERT) in 2021, that can count as post-Covid-19 period. It provides E-learning content in the form of video lessons, curriculum, textbooks,

worksheets, and assignment that has been created by CBSE and NCERT. This content has been made by more than 250 teachers, in multiple languages for classes. One more interesting part, that is, content can also be viewed through QR codes, and also it provides an option to explore textbooks via the app which is available for offline use. <https://diksha.gov.in>

- 1.14.3. **NROER** (National Repository of Open Educational Resources) is also a platform that provides e-resources in the form of e-books, audio-visual. There are curriculums available for classes 1- 12, which have a total of 14527 files including images, audio, video, documents, and other collections. NROER also works for a 24/7 television channel that is 'Kishore manch' where the student gets a chance to talk with experts on toll-free no. <http://nroer.gov.in/welcome>

Higher education

- 1.14.4. **Swayam** is an individual platform that deals with all the ug and pg programs in all the fields including science, social science, mathematics, law, management, and engineering. All these courses are available at the regional level as well. This is a big advantage of these courses. <https://swayam.gov.in/>
- 1.14.5. **Swayam Prabha** is a D2H television channel that provides educational content 24/7. These programs are accessible for all the viewing all across the country that uses DD set-top box and antenna. the main feature of swayam prabha covers school as well as higher education. <https://swayamprabha.gov.in/>
- 1.14.6. **E-PG Pathshala:** is a platform for Post graduate students only, which provides E-content, especially in this pandemic era. The most important part of this platform is that the students can access these facilities even without having active internet connection. <https://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/>

1.15. Expected solution for the post-Covid-19 scenario to improve rural education:

Prepare for future crises, today we are aware that our life is normal as before, similarly, now we have better perspective to handle that pandemic in future. Now we have another way to teach in schools apart from face-to-face mode of teaching. It will facilitate education not only in pandemic but also to deal with other emergencies, which would be a cause to school closures, such as pollution, natural and manmade disaster etc.

It is important that educational institutions, divide courses into traditional teaching and online teaching. This will provide students with a better understanding of technology. It will also improve digital literacy among students and teachers. It is recommended that educational institutions should ensure that technology is used in all aspects. The rural education curriculum should be upgraded and include education related to farming, gardening, etc. Educational movies should also be shown via projector to attract rural students. They should be provided with free books and laptop distribution should be there for rural students.

We need to strengthen our technology to facilitate teaching through online mode. We need digitalization in the education sector. This initiative will help to strengthen higher education institutions. This Covid-19 creates a more flexible environment for teaching-learning process.

Online classes provide us alternative to regular classes; the online mode of learning is necessity for us. So we should provide basic facilities to educational institutions, like the internet, computers, and smart phones. Rural areas need to provide basic facilities in terms of infrastructure as well. If we are focusing on the expected solutions, we should keep in mind that we are a developing country also we are following a traditional system of teaching, the learning process where we give importance to physical classrooms. Now we need to set up a new structure of classes, where every individual can learn according to their interest.

Online mode of learning is also important to create productivity where students can engage according to their interest, as a part time or full time, also we should provide facilities to distance and blended learning. We must keep in mind if students will not engage productively, so it can lead to youth involvement in crimes and poor academic performance.

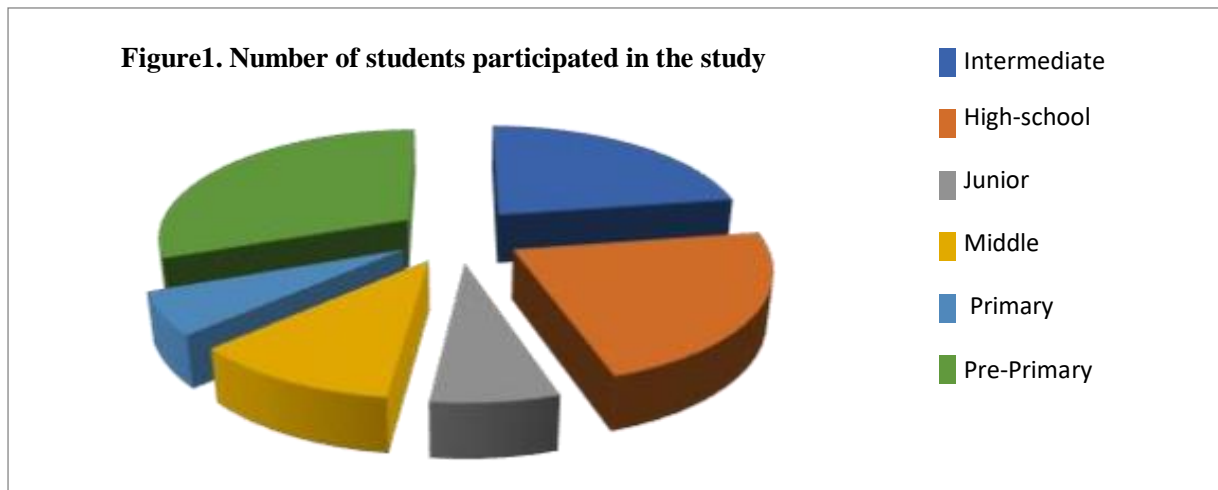
- 1.16. **Delimitation:**

Due to the time constraint the data has collected from the one state of India (Uttarakhand).

1.17. Result and discussion:

- 1.17.1. More than one third of the participants agreed that their study has completely stuck during the whole period of the Covid-19 pandemic. In this, almost all the students in pre-primary responded that their studies were completely stuck during Covid-19, while more than half of the secondary level students responded that their studies were not completely stuck during Covid-19. This finding of the study reflects that students from different levels are affected differently.
- 1.17.2. Almost one-fourth of the students agreed that COVID-19 leads to new experiments in Indian education systems. However, one-fourth of the students did not agree on the same question. The data shows that most students from secondary and senior secondary levels feel that COVID-19 did not lead to experiments in the education system, whereas primary and pre-primary students highly agreed with the point that now the education system has an opportunity to experiment with the education system.
- 1.17.3. The next finding is related to the availability of resources for online learning in rural schools. Almost one-fourth of the students agreed and one-fourth disagreed on the same question. This means that in some schools, resources are available for online learning but some do not have this availability. The data reflects that mainly primary and secondary students have access to online learning resources in their school. At the other level, secondary students do not have access to online resources.
- 1.17.4. Another finding is related to the utilization of available resources by teachers. In this, maximum students (1/3) answered that their teachers were able to utilize available resources, and these students were from the primary level. Another significant portion of the data (1/4) reflects that, teachers are not even able to utilize available resources. This is also a big number, which can't be ignored.
- 1.17.5. The next question gives insight into whether students are able to take online classes or not. In this, almost 27% of the students replied "yes" and the same number of students replied "no." That means some students are able to take class, but there are a large number who are unable to do so.
- 1.17.6. The sixth question of the questionnaire is related to the skills of teachers to deal with technology to teach students. The maximum number of students agreed that their teachers have the skills to teach online. The data also reflects that the students at primary level did not feel that teachers have the skills to deal with technology and teach them; on the secondary and senior secondary level students are quite satisfied with the skills to deal with technology of their respective teachers.
- 1.17.7. With the help of question seven, researchers are able to identify that more than one third of students have resources for learning, but still, there are one fourth of students who do not have resources for learning. Those who have available resources are mainly from the secondary level.
- 1.17.8. Almost one third of the samples have a comfortable environment at home to study, while almost one fourth have not the same environment to study at home.
- 1.17.9. Another question deals whether students feel online teaching is more interesting than offline teaching, so most of the students (28%) replied in favor of online teaching, while one-fourth (25%) replied that offline teaching is more interesting.
- 1.17.10. Regarding facing challenges during online classes, maximum participants agreed that they face challenges during online study, where more than 25% of participants did not face challenges during online class.
- 1.17.11. Almost one-third of participants perceived a lack of network resources, in which the majority of students are from primary and pre-primary grades. One fourth of the participants did not face difficulty due to availability of the network, these students are mainly from secondary and senior secondary levels.
- 1.17.12. The next question is related to suffering due to expensive data. In almost one third of the participants' responses, they suffered due to expensive data.

- 1.17.13. Majority of students responded that rural areas are facing a shortage of online devices, while almost one fourth of the students responded "no", which means they feel rural areas have sufficient online devices.
- 1.17.14. Another question was related to social inclusion getting hurt during online study, so the maximum number of students replied "yes", which means they feel online classes are going to hurt social inclusion.
- 1.17.15. Almost one fourth of the students responded that they feel more comfortable in offline mode of classes or learning, while some of them feel that an online class is more comfortable than an offline one.
- 1.17.16. This question was related to strengthening technology, especially in rural areas, where more than one fourth of the participants said yes, our rural areas need to be strengthened in terms of technology.



1.18. Major findings

Rural education needs to strengthen networks, technology, and infrastructure. They also need to train teachers to take online classes and utilise available resources. Apart from that, students are comfortable using devices for online learning, but at the rural level, students have less availability of devices. It should be kept in mind that an online platform can't replace physical classes, but it can provide a substitute till we are unable to conduct physical classes.

1.19. Conclusion

On the date of 11, March, 2020 WHO after the declaration of lockdown due to Covid-19 there was an effect on education which converted as new opportunity for higher education because at that level students were able to study online and was able to come cross with the teachers to take the classes and their doubt, it will continue after Covid-19 era too. It can be an opportunity for higher education but on the rural areas mainly at primary level lockdown is affecting badly to students and we need to make effort to utilize online platforms.

The COVID-19 pandemic has widely impacted the education sector of India. India's infrastructure is not well developed enough to provide digital technology to all corners of the country. People's acceptance and participation can be used as an indicator for measuring the progress of the various programmes. In this way, we should be able to generate awareness of education among rural people so that they will send their children to schools or colleges. Rural education is imperative not just for the upgrading of the lives of the rural network, but also for the general advancement and improvement of the nation. Further detailed analytical and statistical studies should be undertaken to survey the impacts of COVID-19 on the education system in rural areas.

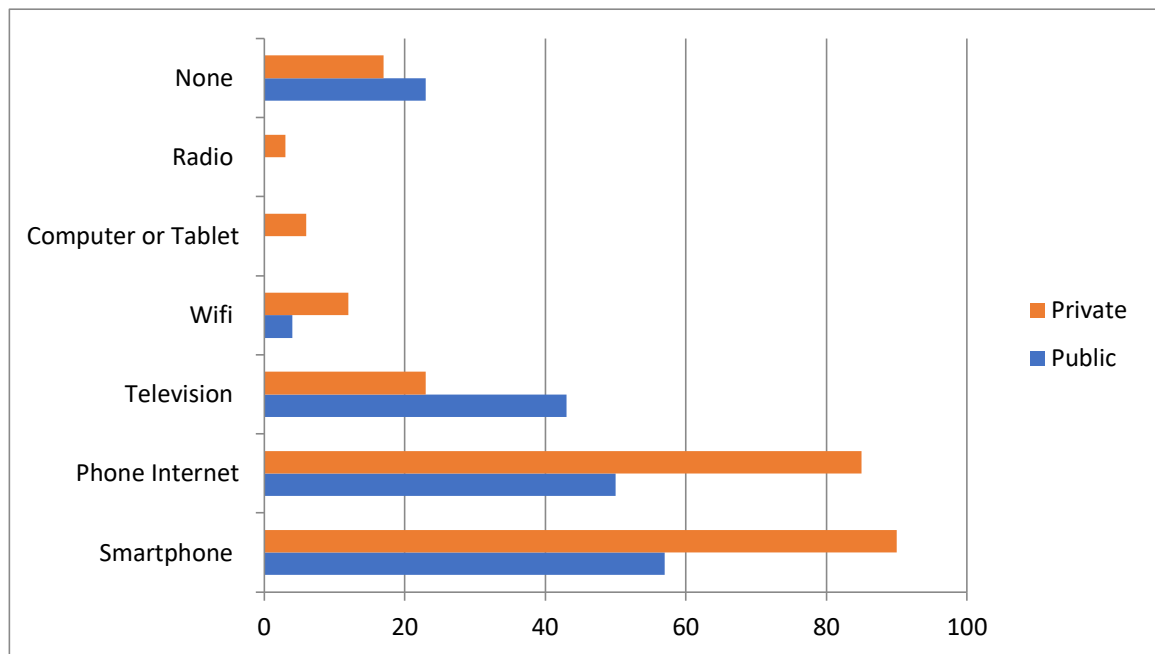


Figure 2: Public-private school students access to educational resources. (Source: Brooking survey, (2021))

The data representation shows that private and public students are able to learn from different technological sources like radio, television, smart-phones, etc. On the other hand, while private students have access to the internet, smart-phones, radios, and computers tablets, on the other hand, government school students are more dependent on television, which data creates a base for us to provide different platforms to learn. Hence, we can follow the idea of "no child left behind." Looking at all these circumstances, the government took some of the initiatives to develop more schools in rural areas with improved facilities, so that rural children could get interested in studying. There are various steps taken by the legislature, which include increasing teachers' salaries, increasing the number of schools so that youngsters do not have to walk long distances to go to school, improving infrastructure, providing mid-day meals, etc. The government is also providing scholarships for the higher education of rural students. Rural education leads to poverty reduction, an increscent of literacy rate, and employment. It also creates awareness in the day-to-day world. These curriculums include English, mathematics, general knowledge, and computer science knowledge. All these teaching methodologies increase students' interest and encourage them to express their views, observations, and experiences. The main objectives of rural education are to provide quality education to the students of rural areas, so that they can compete in the day-to-day world. It provides standard education and a stress-free environment in rural schools.

At the end, we like to conclude our study with suggestive words like India needs to invest more in technology so we can ensure the idea of no "child left behind" and equity in learning resource.

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