

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO RURAL INDIA

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Abstract

We are going through a very tough time because of the disastrous virus, the COVID-19, ravaging into every aspect of our life, making things topsy-turvy to everyone on the earth. The consequences of the pandemic are worrisome. Based on the secondary data the paper aims to highlight the education scenario of the world with special reference to India due to COVID-19 and the costs associated with it. The study finds the widespread closure of formal learning places in almost all the countries of the world including India. The study also highlights that, even when the closures are temporary, it carries high social and economic costs, namely, unequal access to technology, nutrition and food insecurity, unintended strain on health care system, students' learning outcomes and impact on local economies.

Keywords: Impact, COVID-19, education.

Introduction

We are going through a tough time in our life due to the disastrous virus, the COVID-19, ravaging into every aspect of our life, making things topsy-turvy to everyone. The borderless virus has become the equalizer as it doesn't discriminate anyone and anyplace in its war against humanity. Even the wealthy and the mighty countries stand bewildered before the disastrous virus. The consequences of the pandemic are worrisome. The invisible virus seems determined to be written in the world's history.

Under this backdrop the paper aims:

- i) to highlight the education scenario due to COVID-19 at the global level with special reference to India.
- ii) to highlight the challenges or costs associated with the ongoing education scenario.

Review of literature

Oreopoulos, Page and Stevens (2003) examined the influence of parental compulsory schooling on grade retention status for children aged 7 to 15 using the 1960, 1970 and 1980 U.S. censuses. Their results indicated that a one year increase in the education of either parent reduces the probability that a child repeats a grade by between 2 and 7% points.

Simulation studies of Jackson et al (2014) suggested that school closure can be a useful control measure during an influenza pandemic, particularly for reducing peak demand on health services.

Quantitative Analysis made by Wheeler, Erhart and Jehn (2010) showed that school closures may prevent or delay as much as 42% of potential influenza cases among school age children in Arizona.

Methodology

The paper uses secondary data and simple analysis to highlight the education scenario due to COVID-19 at the global level with special reference to India and the challenges or costs associated with the ongoing education scenario.

Findings and Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected educational systems worldwide. The study finds that almost all governments of the countries of the world have temporarily closed educational institutions (schools, colleges and universities) in an attempt to control the spread of COVID-19. Due to the closures, a huge number of learners have been affected. The following table shows the numbers of affected learners, percentage of affected learners out of total enrolled learners and number of countries with country wide closures according to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Table – 1

Numbers of Affected Learners, Percentage of Affected Learners out of Total Enrolled Learners and Number of Countries with Country Wide Closures

Date	Affected learners	% of total enrolled learners	Countrywide closures (no. of countries)
16/02/2020	999,014	0.1	1
01/03/2020	299,145,521	17.1	6
15/03/2020	485,287,687	27.7	53

01/04/2020	1,598,099,008	91.3	194
15/04/2020	1,576,873,546	90.1	190
01/05/2020	1,287,401,633	73.5	181
15/05/2020	1,218,486,850	69.6	159
01/06/2020	1,137,291,883	65	135
15/06/2020	1,083,997,781	61.9	116
01/07/2020	1,067,968,447	61	111
15/07/2020	1,058,897,779	60.5	109

Note: Figures correspond to number of learners enrolled at pre-primary, primary, lower-secondary, and upper secondary levels of education, as well as at tertiary education levels. Enrolment figures based on latest UNESCO Institute for Statistics data.

Source: UNESCO, Education: From Disruption to Recovery- COVID-19 Impact on Education, UNESCO. Retrieved from <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse> on 16th July, 2020.

As on 15th July, 2020, according to UNESCO, the countries, namely, Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Lao PDR, Vietnam, Japan, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Turkmenistan, Botswana, Niger, France, Belarus, Austria, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, Greenland, Svalbard, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Uruguay and Denmark are open. It is also found from the same source that, more number of countries are having localised closures than open countries. The same source also shows that India is having countrywide closure.

The study finds that even when school closures are temporary, it carries high social and economic costs or challenges. The disruptions that the closures cause affect people, which seem to be more for disadvantaged children and their families. The paper highlights the following three costs or challenges associated with the closures of educational institutions.

i) Unequal access to technology:

It is found that, during the educational institutions closures, UNESCO recommends the use of online learning through various platforms to schools and teachers so that they can reach the learners and limit the disruption of education. Most of the countries have also closed down libraries and have made the online access of library resources to slow down the transmission of COVID-19.

Hauck and Stanglin (2020) said that to aid in slowing the transmission of COVID-19, hundreds of libraries have temporarily closed. In the United States, numerous major cities announced public library closures, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle and New York city, affecting 221 libraries.

It is observed that, to follow the recommendation of UNESCO, students or learners need to have technology. For students without internet at home or area, the difficulty of keeping up with online learning

arises. Lack of access to technology (smart phones, laptops, computers, internet etc.) especially by the students of rural areas and from disadvantaged families can prevent the students from learning through the recommended way.

Table 2 shows the internet penetration rate (% population) 2020 year-Q1 estimates. From the table, it can be seen that in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, Middle East, North America and Australia, the internet penetration is not 100 %. Comparatively, Africa and Asia are lagging much behind than the other areas.

Table - 2
Internet penetration rate (% population) 2020 year- Q1 Estimates

World Regions	Penetration Rate (% population)
Africa	39.3
Asia	55.1
Europe	87.2
Latin America/ Caribbean	68.9
Middle East	70.2
North America	94.6
Oceania/Australia	67.7
World total	59.6

Source: <https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>

So far as India is concerned, the internet penetration rate in India went up to nearly around 50% in 2020 from just about 4% in 2007 (Keelery, July 7, 2020). Moreover, the latest report by the Internet and Mobile Association of India and Nielsen showed rural India had 227 million active internet users than urban India's about 205 million as of November 2019. It is also found that rural population (% of total population) in India was reported at 65.97% in 2018, according to the World Bank collection of development indicators, compiled from officially recognised sources. Focussing on the rural-urban Per Capita Income (PCI), it is found that, Rao Inderjit, current Minister of State (independent charge), Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, Government of India, said that the government compiled the estimates of rural-urban PCI in terms of Net Value Added to Rs.98,435 in urban areas and Rs.40,925 in the rural areas (Sharma, December 12, 2019). According to a new report by International Management Consulting Firm Arthur D Little, the worst of COVID-19's impact will be felt by India's most vulnerable in terms of job loss, poverty increase and reduced PCI, which in turn will result in a steep decline in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Moreover, according to the World Bank forecast, GDP will shrink 3.2% in the fiscal year 2020-21, when the impact of

Pandemic will largely hit in India. Thus, it is most likely that the disadvantage Indian learners would face difficulty to learn in the recommended way. The disadvantaged learners of the world are very likely to have the same fate.

ii) Nutrition and food insecurity:

School feeding programmes are targeted social safety nets that provide both educational and health benefits to the most vulnerable children, thereby increasing enrollment rates, reducing absenteeism and improving food security at the household level (World Bank, 2012)). According to the World Food Program (WFP), everyday, millions of children around the world go to school on an empty stomach-hunger affects their concentration and ability to learn. The WFP has 6 decades of experience supporting school feeding and health initiatives and working with more than 100 countries to set up sustainable national school feeding programmes. In 2019, 17.3 million school children received nutritious meals and snacks from WFP in 59 countries.

In India, the National Programme of Midday Meal in Schools which was known as National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education was launched as a centrally sponsored scheme on 15/08/1995 with a view to enhancing enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improving nutritional levels among children. The ongoing scheme generally covers upto class VIII and all areas of the country. The scheme covers all government schools, government aided and local body schools, students studying in Education Guarantee Scheme and Alternative and Innovative Education Centres, recognised as well as unrecognised Madrassas/ Maqtabas supported under SSA. According to Katiyar (2019), Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Puducherry have even extended the scheme to class IX and X and it covers 11 crore students across 11.34 schools.

Thus, the above data clearly suggest that the closure of schools due to COVID-19 pandemic is putting at risk the futures of huge number of children globally, affecting not only their ability to learn, but also their access to nutritious food and health support schemes.

WFP and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) together have taken initiative to track this global cohort of school children and helping national governments to find ways to support them during the pandemic. In place of school meals, governments and WFP are now providing take-home rations, vouchers or cash transfers to children in 68 countries. They are also assisting governments on their strategies to make sure that,

when schools open again, health and nutrition services are provided as incentives for the most vulnerable children to return to school (WFP).

Table 3 shows the initiative of WFP and governments for alternative solutions to school meals. From the table, it can be seen that many countries could not be reached with alternative solutions to school meals by WFP and respective governments. So far as India is concerned, the central government made a political commitment to reach vulnerable school-aged children during COVID-19 induced school closures. Moreover, the concrete actions in terms of the modality for reaching school-aged children were left up to individual sub national states (WFP). According to Scott et al (June 1, 2020), as on May 1, 2020, in India, the measures of distributing food grains only, cash only and, food grains and cash could be seen in only eight (including Assam), one and six states or union territories respectively. Further, they found that in eight states or union territories order was issued but action was not found, in nine states or union territories it was not found functional and from five states or union territories there were no information.

Table - 3
Global monitoring of the impact and alternative solutions to school meals during COVID-19

	Only WFP solutions (number of countries)	Only Government solutions (number of countries)	All (number of countries)
Programe on hold	4	4	4
Schools open	2	-	45
Cash-based transfers to school Children's families	7	5	11
Take home rations to school children	36	15 (including India)	49
Various modalities	4	7	11
No data available	-	-	95

Source: WFP (n.d.), Global Monitoring of school meals during COVID-19 School Closures, WFP. Retrieved from <https://cdn.wfp.org/2020/school-feeding-map/index.html> on 16th, July, 2020.

iii) Impact on local economies:

Educational institutions closures affect also the local economies as they provide labour and bussiness to the local people. The incomes of the people get affected thereby affecting their ability to spend on food, health, education etc.

iv) Student learning outcomes:

According to the UNESCO, students learning outcomes are negatively affected due to school closures. Schools provide essential learning for growth and development. When schools close parents need to facilitate the learning of children at home, so children who have fewer educational opportunities beyond school and children with parents having limited education, face problem. Moreover, schools are also hubs of social activity and human interaction. When schools are closed, many children and youth miss out of on social contact that is essential to learning and development. UNESCO also mentions that it is a challenge to ensure that disadvantaged children return to schools when schools reopens because of the pressure to work and generate income for their distressed families.

Bao et al (2020) finds that Kindergarten children in the United States will loss 67% of their literacy ability during the COVID-19 school closures.

Conclusion

Thus, it can be concluded that due to COVID-19 pandemic, there are closures of educational institutions. The closures of educational institutions have led the disadvantaged people of the countries to face difficulty in learning due to unequal access of technology through the method recommended by UNESCO. Educational institutions closures also have made huge numbers of students to face nutrition and food insecurity which in turn affect students learning. The closures also negatively affect students learning outcomes and earnings of the people of local economies.

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