



THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 EPIDEMIC ON EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA: PROSPECTS AND INFERENCES FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Sanjok Lohar

Assistant Professor

Department of Economics

Maheshtala College, Kolkata, India

Abstract: The spread of Novel Coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, has drastically altered the structure of socio-cultural, political, and economic aspects of human life, including education. The COVID-19 epidemic has also led to revolutionary changes in education systems worldwide, and the current epidemic has presumably bared the biggest education extremity in mortal history. The Covid-19 epidemic has presented us with a scope to remodel the traditional way of literacy and pave the way for introducing digital literacy. The purpose of this article is to explore the effects of COVID-19 epidemic on the education system of India. In this write up, the researcher will review some of the exploration work done on the impact of Covid-19 on education system in India and try to find out the area which will inspire both research scholars and academicians with regard to future research perspectives on Covid-19 and education system in India. In this frame of references, the counteraction of India's advanced education institutions to the global education catastrophe caused by the current epidemic were examined, and some result proposals were developed for policymakers and advanced education professionals.

Keywords – Novel Coronavirus, COVID-19, Pandemic, traditional way of learning, digital learning, higher education, education crisis

1. INTRODUCTION:

We mark the fourth International Day of Education scuffling with the ruinous impacts of COVID-19 epidemic on our current generation of learners, which at the peak of academy closures disintegrated literacy of further than 1.6 billion children and youth across the world. We're living a extremity within a extremity [3]. The COVID-19 epidemic disintegrated education provision at an unknown scale, with education systems around the world being impacted by extended academy closures and abrupt changes to normal academy operations. The outbreak of COVID-19 was first linked in December 2019 in Wuhan, China and spread each over the world in no time. The first case in India came into light on 30 January 2020 and rapidly started spreading all across the country. As a result, a nationwide lockdown was called upon on 24 March, adding to the panic of millions of people. The lockdown slowed down the social and economic life of the whole population. Education system largely got hit by the closure of educational institutions; the worst affected being the students from the migrant families and daily wage workers. Students were forced to remain within their home bubble (immediate family) and to prepare for online learning [14]. It is estimated by some studies that more than 32 corers students were affected by the nationwide lockdown for Covid-19 in India. The face to face literacy suddenly migrated into remote literacy modalities as an exigency response. India, as majority of the other countries around the world wasn't ready for this unforeseen metamorphosis.

According to the report of All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2019-20, out of the 42,343 colleges that India has, a majority of them- 60.56% are in the rural areas. Another report by Avantika Pandey in GROWTH OF EDUCATION: RURAL INDIA (Blog, 2020) suggests that eighty-seven per cent of the schools in India are in the country's villages. Government statistics and independent surveys have revealed that over 90 per cent of the rural schools at elementary level are run by the government. Availability of basic infrastructure was a serious issue in the interior areas even before the COVID-19 epidemic hit India. Lack of internet connectivity, access of mobile phones, computers/laptops, TVs or even radio are some of the fundamental obstacles faced by the people living in rural areas, further widening the already existed learning inequalities. It has been observed that most of the researchers have done their research on the impact of covid-19 on students learning. But only little research has been conducted during the pandemic to measure the symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression among teachers in India. So throughout the article the researcher explores the different published articles and tries to present an analytical framework to better understand the interconnection between education system in India, livelihoods and Govt. policies and how they correlate within a "socio-ecological" framework, during unprecedented circumstances.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY:

E-learning is a form of distance learning, which has long been a part of the education system globally, replicating the physical "Brick and Mortar" classroom [7]. As we have seen from previous health emergencies, most recently the Ebola outbreaks, the impact on education

are likely to be the most devastating in countries with low learning outcomes, high dropout rates and low resilience for shock [4]. [16] Jena (2020) stated in his research paper “Impact of Pandemic COVID-19 on Education in India” that like every sector in India has suffered a huge loss due to this pandemic and education sector is not the exceptions. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, e-learning has replaced traditional educational techniques and has become an obligatory component of all educational institutions in the world, as it offers students elasticity in where and when they learn [21,29].

It is estimated that the COVID-19 outbreak has confined a large number of students to their homes. Access to the technical requirements of online education is not a significant problem in developed countries because laptops and smart phones with a high-speed internet connection are available for almost all the students and teachers in different parts of these countries [2]; however, online courses might be completely or partially inaccessible to the students in developing countries due to a poor internet connection and also in many cases students may stay logged out [10,33]. In developing countries, a number of students especially those who are living in rural and underprivileged areas do not have access to sufficient and efficient internet connection, which leads to several problems in their education. For example, during city lockdown, about 70% of Indian students attended online classes, the majority of which used android smart phones, but digital platforms used for e-learning are not compatible with smartphones. This also deteriorates the students’ performance [1]. They also mentioned that houses were not a desirable location for studying. More than 30% of the students complained about poor internet connection. All those problems led to self-mentioned depression, stress, and anxiety in 42% of the students [17]. Based on the students’ perspective in India, 77% of the studied students noted that their main problems in participating in online examinations were internet connectivity [5]. Other surveys and reports give a similar picture – e-education, the alternative form of delivery, exposed India’s digital divide. The Remote Learning Reachability report stated that only 24 per cent of households have access to the internet across the country (UNICEF, 2020). The report concluded that: The learning gap is likely to widen across high, middle and low-income families, as children from economically disadvantaged families cannot access remote learning.

In addition to connection-related problems, not all the students could afford to purchase a laptop or a personal computer and preparing technological requirements for remote education is really hard for these students and their families, which leads to educational inequalities [15]. The problem does not end here as most of the teachers/students are not used to the online mode of teaching or at least not all of them were ready for this sudden transition from face to face learning to online learning. No proper communication is another difficulty for the students [9]. Most of the teachers are just conducting lectures on video platforms such as Zoom, Google meet etc. which may not be real online learning without any dedicated online learning platform [20]. Various state-level board exams, recruitment exams, university-level exams and entrance exams have been postponed across India due to the COVID-19 outbreak and national lockdown [28].

The challenges are eternal but India’s education sector has witnessed a surge in solutions to support the continued learning of students during the COVID-19 lockdown. This includes core remote learning solutions (traditional tools such as textbooks and home visits, tech-enabled and mass communication solutions such as WhatsApp, YouTube, TV, and radio, and blended solutions that combine face-to-face with e-learning) and learning-enabling solutions (such as distribution of midday meals, distribution of sanitation kits and monetary support). To support continuous learning while schools are closed, the Ministry of Education shared various free digital e-learning platforms in their press release of 21 March 2020 [37].

3. METHODOLOGY:

This paper is a review article; presenting a brief literature review on the COVID-19 epidemic and education system in India. Different online hunt machines, such as- Google scholar, base.org and semantic scholar has been operated to collect the information on the subject impact of Covid-19 on education system in India. An aggregate of 40 open accessed published papers were chosen from 2020 to 2022 for the current study.

4. OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING:

The pandemic has offered us some critical lessons that we can learn for imparting effective education to the learners in the future.[13,28] in their studies have stated that “COVID-19 outbreak paved the way to initiate digital learning as an emergency alternative education system at all levels of education. Looking from this perspective, more innovative and interactive online learning strategies will help to make education systems more resilient and more prepared against possible future crises and uncertainties”. The methodical collection and analysis of data relating to education during the epidemic is a path breaking model for making data based policy decisions.

The pandemic has brought stress, anxiety and depression among the students, teachers and the whole education system, it has also taught us to face and tackle new challenges within a short timeframe. The whole education gave their best with whatever available resources they had to continue the teaching-learning process reveals the growing awareness and importance of education in fostering human development. The pandemic also gave an opportunity for self realization among the teaching fraternity as to how essential it is to be trained and updated with the latest tools of teaching methods.

The pandemic has widened the existing inequalities in learning opportunities among pupils. The literature on the pandemic and education has showcased the learning loss of millions students and drop-outs on a large scale. It is a suitable time for the policy makers to bring in effective policy interventions for the future of the Indian education system.

The distant learning mode ensured that the learners got used to access volume of materials available through E-Learning platforms provided by the Ministry of Higher Education, Government of India, such as Diksha portal, e-Pathshala, Swayam, Swayam Prabha, e-PG Pathshala, National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER) portal and other digital platforms. Several studies have shown that the frequency of use of these E-Learning platforms has increased since the inception of the pandemic.

5. CONCLUSION:

COVID-19 has revealed how a pandemic can be exacerbated by the prevalence of poverty, weak health systems and a lack of global co-operation. It has also seriously impacted on the delivery of education. Not only in India but most of the developing and underdeveloped countries around the world are faced with the same challenges posed by the COVID-19.

The main problem with India lies in its vast rural population and poor infrastructure. The nationwide lockdown has affected the economic conditions of the poor adversely. The priority for most of them is of survival. In such a situation the acquiring of learning through distant mode is a tough task for the unprivileged students. Thus the pandemic has brought out the disparity in urban and rural education to the fore. These fundamental socio-economic problems were there even before the pandemic happened. The pandemic has just exposed the vulnerability of the poor households to such crisis. A serious introspection and policy level intervention is required to improve this situation.

Much of the current debate and literature also focuses on the quality, affordability, accessibility of education and learning during school closures. Gender based learning accessibility during pandemic remains another area of research. There remains a prejudice between the belief laid upon boys and their sisters in regard of educational outcomes. This has been aggravated by the COVID-19 epidemic. The worst sufferers during the pandemic were the children of the migrant workers who had to leave schools and travel back to their villages. The impact of covid-19 on the learning outcomes of these marginalized students is also a matter of concern and research. The problems faced by the teachers to cope with the sudden change in mode of teaching and their struggles during the course also need to be attended and studied. Education system across the world including India needs to invest on the professional development of teachers, especially on ICT and effective pedagogy, considering the present scenario. Making online teaching creative, innovative and interactive through user-friendly tools is the other area of research and development. This would assist and prepare the education system for such uncertainties in the future.

As the pandemic is still very much a reality, its impact on various sectors of the economy is far from over. Much like the virus itself, our understanding of the impacts of Covid-19 is evolving as we learn more about it and research it in more detail. Therefore, more long-term or longitudinal research studies are needed before we fully understand the full impact of Covid-19 on the education system in India. It is imperative to address the concerns of both the educators and the learners for imparting an effective teaching-learning practice.

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