



Long Term Impact of the covid-19 on the School Children with Special Reference to Peren District

Igong N. Ipuing

Assistant Professor

Peren Government College

Introduction

Globally, the COVID-19 epidemic has caused previously unheard-of disruptions that have a significant impact on many industries, including education. Millions of children's educations around the world have been profoundly influenced by school closures, social distancing policies, and the shift to online learning. It was estimated that more than 1.5 billions of students were affected by the lockdown across the world and 320 millions in India. The effects of the epidemic on schooling have been most noticeable in Nagaland, a state in northeastern India, with Peren District being one of the most severely impacted places. The favourable outcome of online teaching-learning depends on the internet accessibility in the region. Peren district, being technologically backward and limited access to multiple telecommunication networks, was affected most, especially in far flung areas and villages. This not only have affected the students during the temporary closure of the schools and colleges but also left a long term impact on the students' community. With an emphasis on Peren District, this study aims to investigate the long-term effects of COVID-19 on schoolchildren in Nagaland.

Due to the disruption of traditional learning methods brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic-related school closures, there has been a rise in dropout rates, learning loss, and an aggravation of already-existing educational disparities (UNESCO, 2020). Long-term negative consequences on children's educational outcomes and general well-being have been demonstrated by studies on the subject (Viner et al., 2020).

Methodology

To examine the long-term impact of COVID-19 on school children in Peren District, a mixed-methods approach was adopted. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with educators, parents, and community leaders. Secondary data were drawn from journals, published articles, news bulletins, blogs, web pages, etc.

IMPACT

School dropout is a general phenomenon across the world but it has increased due to the COVID-19 lockdown. Student decision-making to continue their studies after the covid-19 lockdown are largely influenced by the pandemic. School dropout can be understood as the abandonment of the schooling before completion of the course by students. It is caused by a combination of factors that stems from both at school and in social, family, and individual level. A significant factor that led to school drop-out was found to be economic in nature, which compel the students to abandoned their studies and start working to support their parents in the family. This is inevitable especially in rural areas when there are no sufficient facilities for the students to continue their studies like internet facilities, mobile phones or power supply in the villages.

Children's mental health has also been negatively impacted by the epidemic, with reports of higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among students (Loades et al., 2020). Children's mental health has been worse due to social isolation, concern about the future, and difficulties adjusting to distant learning (Guessoum et al., 2020). Students being one of the most exposed group of people are more vulnerable are more likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression and distress due to social isolation, which ultimately affects their mental health and academic performance. It was also observed that emotional and

behavioural changes were noticed in the students' community like trauma like feeling of loneliness, boredom, irritability, lack of concentration, restlessness, uneasiness, nervousness and worries during the lockdown period. Such behavioural changes could leave a negative impression in the young minds which could affect their mentality in the long run.

The Covid-19 lockdown adversely affected the normal education process. Face-to-face classroom education system was replaced with virtual classroom teaching-learning system and was imposed on the students and teachers. In this virtual classroom, students and teachers both stay in their own home and carried out teaching-learning process through the screen. This new system of teaching-learning process was completely new things especially for those senior teachers who were not well verse with modern technology. Due to sudden introduction of online teaching-learning, many students and teachers faced difficulties in adapting with the new system. As a result, the quality of education has been compromised. Lack of information and communication technology, financial constraints, poor network connectivity, poor content development and inadequate technical support are the main challenges faced by the students especially in far flung areas. This has also left a bad impression in the minds of the young students which in turn reduce their interest to continue schoolings after the lockdown was lifted. Studies also show that both students and parents experience post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms due to the pandemic. Students who attended online classes were also reported to have higher chance of experiencing mental health disorder as compared to those students who attend regular offline classes. Parents of students receiving virtual or hybrid instructions were entrusted with additional responsibility to supervise and facilitate their children's education. Students receiving virtual education were found to have higher anxiety, stress, depression and chronic health conditions when compare with those students receiving in-person education (Stone and Witzig, 2023).

The pandemic's economic effects have made schoolchildren's struggles much more severe, particularly for those from disadvantaged socioeconomic groups. Marginalized groups are particularly affected by the widening educational inequities caused by lack of access to technology, internet connectivity, and suitable learning resources (United Nations, 2020). A study on the drop-out rate during 2020-21 and 2021-22 in India shows that the drop-out rate among the students in Nagaland State is much higher than the national average. The average annual drop-out rate in Nagaland for primary level was 5 percent, upper primary at 3.0 and secondary level was 17.5 percent as against the national average of 1.5 percent, 3 percent and 12.6 percent respectively. It is estimated that the drop-out rate is likely to increased post covid-19 period if the government does not paid attention to the education sector. Increased in drop-out rate in a country like India can be attributed mainly to poverty, lack of infrastructure, inadequate teaching staff, lack of interest in education, and the prevalence of child labor (Bansal, 2023). Nagaland State being an agrarian state is not an exception in this regard, particularly Peren district.

The pandemic, in a nutshell, affected the district in almost all sectors- educational sector, business community, households, farming sector, parents, teachers, students and left a mark everywhere whose footprint will remain there for a long period of time.

FINDINGS

Interruptions to Education

For schoolchildren in the Peren District, the closing of schools and the switch to online instruction have presented serious difficulties. Students' capacity to engage in remote learning activities has been hampered by limited access to digital devices and internet connectivity. Students from far flung areas and remote locations suffer the most. Till date, after the resumption of normal classes, students both young and old were not able to adapt fully as was before the lockdown period. During the lockdown period, it was observed that lack of willingness among students to accept online learning are found to be major hurdles in the path of shifting from face-to-face learning to online learning during this crisis. Willingness to learn from online classes was also compromised due to lack of proper internet connectivity, power supply and financial constrains. Given that the level of proactive and disciplined learning is lower in online learning when compared with traditional learning in the district.

Issues with Mental Health

The epidemic has caused interruptions that have led to increased levels of stress, anxiety, and social isolation among schoolchildren in the Peren District. The uncertainty surrounding their education and future possibilities has proven to be difficult for many students to deal with. The impact of online classes and virtual examinations has left a deep mark in the minds of the young students which now affects their learning capacity. Majority of the parents has reported that after the normal classes were resumed, their children face issues mentally to adapt quickly and it also weakened their retention power and performance in their academic performance. It was also found that the number of students drop-out increased dramatically after resuming normal classes as compared to pre-lockdown period. This increased drop-out rate could also be attributed to the impact of online classes in the district.

Socio-Economic Consequences

The pandemic's economic effects have made socioeconomic gaps already present worse, making it harder for kids from low-income families to get a good education. Vulnerable populations in Peren District are now even more marginalized due to a lack of funding and support systems. Students from economically weaker section of the district were hit hardest by the covid-19 lockdown. They faced the problem not only of financial constraint but also of inadequate power supply and internet connectivity in their villages. Digital gap act as a hindrance on online education and adversely affected the students from villages.

STRATEGIES FOR MITIGATION

There has been a paradigm shift in the teaching-learning process post covid-19 lockdown period. Online learning platforms occupied a major place in the education system across the globe. With this changes, there arise a need to re-focus and develop require infrastructure that meets the needs of the present generation students. Following are some measures that can be used to counteract the long-term effects of COVID-19 on schoolchildren in Nagaland.

- With the state's support, educational institutions need to focus on an asynchronous learning program, a student-oriented program that allows them to complete the course credits with more flexibility in time and place of learning.
- Keeping in mind the lack of internet connectivity as the major reason behind the failure of online teaching in the country, educational institutions should adopt a policy to provide free internet and free digital devices to students and educators. Service providers for internet should provide facilities to all rural remote areas. This will also encourage the already drop-out students to enrol in different courses and complete their studies from home.
- The government should explore ways to put in place mental health support programs to attend to pupils' psychological needs. This can be useful to reduce drop-out rate and enhance retention ratio of the students in schools.
- Reducing socioeconomic gaps by giving resources and financial support to low-income households. This scheme will not only facilitate the rural households but also encourage the students to enroll in schools.
- Bolstering neighborhood-based programs to assist schoolchildren's resiliency and educational continuity.

Conclusion

For school children in Nagaland's Peren District, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact, interfering with their schoolwork, escalating mental health issues, and deepening socioeconomic divides. In order to lessen these effects, inclusive and equitable policies that cater to the needs of all the communities, families, and students must be given top priority. Policymakers, educators, and stakeholders may assist reduce the pandemic's long-term effects and promote resilience among Nagaland's schoolchildren by making investments in education, mental health services, and socioeconomic development.

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