

COVID-19 Pandemic and School Education: A Study with Special Reference to Secondary Level Students of Rural Areas of Dibrugarh District, Assam.

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Abstract:

Education is a process of development. It enables individuals to acquire new knowledge and skills for making adjustments and solving different problems in life. Education is a tri-polar process where three poles, i.e., the teacher, student, and a sound social environment, are required in a regular classroom situation. At the end of 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic had spread all over the world. The spread of this pandemic was so fast that it affected the entire world, including all aspects of individual and social life. The educational scenario has to also change to meet the demands of a pandemic situation, as the governments of most countries in the world have announced lockdowns. The virus has brought new ways of teaching and learning. Online education has emerged in education in place of the traditional system.

The standards of educational institutions in our country, especially in rural areas, are not so advanced that they can provide sufficient access to internet facilities, computers, and laptops to students in regular mode in the daily classroom. In such cases, the majority of students from low-income families do not take advantage of online education in pandemic. Hence, an attempt has been made in this paper to find out the impact of the pandemic on secondary school students.

Keywords: Pandemic, Online education, Secondary school, Education, Rural area

Introduction: Corona virus disease (COVID-19) is an illness caused by a novel corona virus which leads to severe respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (SARS-COV-2). First identified in Wuhan, China, and was first reported to the WHO on December 31, 2019, this virus has been declared by World Health Organization (WHO) as a global epidemic on January, 11, 2020. With the wide spread of this virus different countries in the globe have been seen taking strict measures including lockdowns to curb the infection. It has been widely seen that this global epidemic not only exacerbated the health sector but also and most importantly no aspect of human life have been remain untouched from the influence of this pandemic. Here, it is worthwhile to mention the very fact that education scenario of the entire globe has been impacted by the Covid -19 pandemic to a great extent Along with the other changes, the education system has also changed. This pandemic has resulted in the emergence of new and innovative teaching and learning methods including emergence and spread of online mode of education system replacing the traditional mode of imparting education involving the teacher and the students in formal education institutes. However, this mode of imparting education is not beyond criticisms and it has triggered widespread controversy and debates across the academic spectrum. Given the scenario, the present article makes a humble attempt to shed some lights on various dynamics of online education in India, a country severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

It would not be an exaggeration in saying that India lives in her villages as a huge portion of Indian population lives in villages and a most of the workforce of India are directly or indirectly associated with the rural areas of the country. However, the Indian rural communities has to face various problems in respect to the social, economic, agricultural, political and educational sectors and this scenario has been exacerbated due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, the pandemic and its associating complexities like imparting education through online mode posed a great challenge to the rural learners. Hence, this paper aims to unfold the dynamics of Covid-19 and the School Education system of the rural areas of Dibrugarh District of Assam, one of the North Eastern States of India paying adequate attention to the online mode of education in the rural areas of the said district

Education is considered a vital element for ensuring all round development of a society. Further, it is an efficient means to make people aware of personal, social, economic, political, and other issues. Besides these, people with adequate education can contribute to the welfare of the entire society as well as the nation.

However, it is a matter of great regret that the standard of educational institutions in our country specially in rural areas are not so up gradated to facilitate the learners with the modern education fortified with technology specially Information technology. Given the scenario, the very education scenario of the rural areas of the country including those of Assam have faced different melodies during the time of Covid-19 epidemic when online mode of imparting education was the need of the hour. Further, lack of sufficient access to internet facility, computers, laptops to students in regular mode in daily classroom also exacerbated the picture to a great extent. Another important dimension regarding school education and pandemic is that the maximum students as found by the researcher belongs to the low poverty groups and does often fail to take use of online education due to lack of access to internet facility.

Significance of the study:

The Covid-19 pandemic has spread crossing all the international boundaries. Spread of this pandemic has influenced in all sectors of human life. Lots of things have changed due to the adverse effect of the pandemic. Along with the other sectors education is also affected. In such a situation maximum countries of the world have imposed lockdowns to reduce the rate of spread of Covid-19. In such circumstances, education has to find new ways. Students have seen various changes all of a sudden. The educational community has made efforts to continue the learning activities via internet facility. Teachers have to adopt new pedagogical approach to teach, likewise, students have to change their learning approach. Students belonging the marginalized segments of the society having no any experiences to use the digital resources. Rural communities face a variety of challenges due to a lack of digital instruments, power outages, illiterate parents, and other issues in lockdown period. So, the present study is conducted to find out the impact of COVID-19 on secondary school education giving special attention to the rural areas of Dibrugarh District of Assam.

Objective: The present study is of following objectives-

- i. To study the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on secondary school students of rural areas.
- ii. To find out the problems arises due to pandemic in secondary school education in rural areas.

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- iii. To provide suggestions for solutions of the problems concerned with pandemic and secondary school students of rural areas.

Limitation and delimitations of the study:

The present study is delimited in certain dimensions for making the study a smooth and lucid one. The study is delimited in the following dimensions:

- a) The present study is delimited to 50 samples only.
- b) The present study is delimited to the secondary school students of Bokpara village.

Methodology of the Study:

The methodology of the present study includes the following-

- Method: In the present study descriptive survey method has been used. The data collected was based on current status of phenomena.
- Population of the Study: In the study, population covered all the secondary school students of Bokpara village of Dibrugarh district, Assam
- Sample of the Study: In the present study incidental sampling is used while selecting sample. The number of sample is 50 in the present research exercise.

Tools used in the present study :

In the present study the investigator used inquiry forms. Questionnaire and observation are used to collect the relevant data. Different sources like books, journals and articles are consulted along with various websites have also been visited for gathering relevant information.

Analysis and interpretation of data:

Technology cannot replace a teacher, but it is technology that can assist a teacher in imparting education and to make the content of the syllabus more comprehensible to the students. The findings of the present study too depicts that technology, under any circumstances, act as a substitute of a teacher but the situation posed by the pandemic has made technology and digital platforms as an inevitable tool for the learning process along with the teacher.

During the catastrophe of the pandemic, when the classes are going on online mode both teachers and students have to depend on technology. The education communities of rural areas with lesser experiences of using the digital devices have faced numerous hurdles to continue their education. The present study shows how education is affected because of the pandemic. After conducting the present study the investigator find the following information associated with pandemic and secondary schools in rural areas-

- Poor economical condition of parents has served as a key obstacle in student's learning behavior. Learners whose family falls under the below poverty line often fails to get the technical facilities equally in comparison to the others to get the education instruction during the time of pandemic. Further, it has been observed by the researcher that parents, such as daily wage earners, private sector workers, labors etc. have often failed to work on regular basis. In such situations, where maximum families are in food scarcity and the question of very survival raises, the online education, digital resources, internet etc. have become mode of luxury for them. In the present study, 76% students belong to poor families have been found facing monetary problems while accessing internet and other facilities required for online education during the lockdown and the epidemic.

- Another fact observed by the investigator that students having minimal access to internet have faced other problems regarding the quality of internet. It has been observed that student belonging to remote areas faces the problem of lack of high speed internet facility to attend lectures and other forms of evaluation procedures conducted by their respective teachers. In the present study, 72% respondents are of the view that because of this problem they have to often being disconnected from the online classes.
- The present study reveals that 45% respondents lacks smart phones. Further, smart phone used by the students while learning actually belongs to their parents and often used by them as well. It resulted, as expressed by the students, in the arise of problems when online classes are going on but students lacking smart phone of their own fails to attend it because of unavailability of the phone.
- In online education system evaluation and assessment are often carried on online mode. So, the chances of proxy evaluation is quite obvious, besides this student attends examination in online mode so, there is the optimum possibility of cheating and using unfair means by the learners.
- As the duration of class time are short and teachers have to impart the lesson on the mode of online so, it is often become quite difficult for the student to comprehend the teaching contents in a short duration of time.
- Teachers need sufficient training facilities for offering online education using different digital platforms. In the present study 78% respondents are of the view that teachers use the digital devices perfectly. However, some students have also opined that there is a need of necessary training for smooth operation of online mode of imparting education.
- Frequent power cuts and load shedding are an important issue that creates hurdles for students trying to attend online classes regularly. 67% of respondents stated that they frequently fail to continue their online classes due to frequent and unexpected power outages. As a result, they have to deprive themselves of getting learning content continuously.
- Another fact about the finding is that most of the parents in rural areas are either unaware or generally disinterested in their children's education. As most parents are illiterate or semi-literate, they don't understand the importance of education. As in India, education is a fundamental right and the 86th constitutional amendment makes free and compulsory education for all from 6-14 years of age, parents send their children to schools, but when it comes to the matter of online education, where children need internet access and electronic devices, parents with low economic strata hesitate to provide such facilities. As a result, a large number of rural students are lagging behind in educational facilities.
- Illegal and inappropriate materials can be found by using an internet facility. Students, intentionally or unintentionally, may access such types of sites which are incorrect both morally as well as legally. It is wellknown that Secondary level students are entering the period of adolescence, it is a period which is indeed a period of turmoil and stress during which adolescents undergo numerical physical and mental changes and may engage in anti-social behavior. During the lockdown period, students get mobile phones regularly for educational purposes. As it is not possible for all parents to keep eyes on their children, in such a context, adolescents may develop certain wrong habits because of the unsolicited use of internet and owing to such problems, students may display abnormal behavioral problems. Further, too much use of the internet raises anxiety and depression among students. Children who spend most of their time in the virtual world often feel socially isolated.

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- 69% respondent of the present study replied that due to laziness, fatigue and some unknown causes students fail to check the recorded audio and video classes prepared by concerned teachers. This fact not only hampers the very learning process of the Students, but also and most importantly, it somehow makes mockery to the very idea of online education.
- It has been widely accepted by the experts that face to face relationships between teachers and students are an essential element of the teaching-learning process. Unfortunately, in online education, both the teacher and the student do not have face-to-face interactions. Hence, no emotional bonding is formed and the teaching-learning process has become just a mechanical progression.
- Online education is not suitable for subjects with practical classes and it serves as a major lacuna of the same . 48% of the respondents of the present study have admitted that they encounter difficulties with subjects like geography, science, and home- science during the course of online education.
- In most educational institutions, evaluation is done by using the open book system, where students can use study materials openly to write answers to questions. In such a context, there is an optimum possibility for students to use readymade study materials from different sources without using their reasoning power, logical capabilities, etc. As a result, the answer scripts of each student resemble the same and students get equivalent marks without having the sense of positive competition among them.

Suggestion: On the basis of the findings unveiled by the investigators, For solving the problems of schools education in pandemic following suggestions can be offered-

- Equity in education is the biggest obstacle for online education in rural areas. As most rural families don't have electronic devices and internet facilities. Their children deprived of getting the online educational facilities in pandemic but the rest of the students having such facilities get education. A large number of students lagging behind in getting educational opportunities.
- The problem of sudden power outages in rural areas should be addressed by respective authority by taking proper initiatives to strike the outages at least during the daytime when online classes are taking place.
- It's a difficult task for the examiner to conduct online examinations. Teachers must exercise extreme caution when performing examination duties and evaluating the answer scripts.
- As most parents of rural students are disinterested in providing educational facilities in a pandemic, they should be encouraged by school authorities as well as by the state mechanism to understand the benefit of online education in a pandemic.
- Each parent has to give a look at their children while using mobile phones with internet facilities. As the adolescent period is a critical period of human life, there may be the chances of misuse of mobile phones in the name of study. So, it is the intense duty of parents to keep an eye on their children.
- Teachers should be trained enough to use the digital devices properly during online classes.
- To deal with the problems associated with the open book system, educational authorities have to be very cautious while setting the question papers for online examinations. As much as possible, indirect questions should be framed so that students can answer them by using their mental abilities. It will help teachers evaluate students' performances according to their level, and accordingly, they will get scores.

Conclusion: COVID-19 has influenced the entire educational scenario of the world. In a developing country like India, where the dream of 100 percent literacy has not yet been achieved, where school dropouts, poverty, illiteracy of parents, etc. are the major problems in school education, in such a country, on-line education cannot be used properly. The present study shows the problems that arise from on-line education. Though a pandemic is a natural occurrence, no one can predict its occurrence, vulnerability, or duration. In such conditions, we have to use the available resources properly. Students and parents have to be motivated to actively participate in the online classes. Though, challenges will appear in front of both teachers and students, we have to accept the challenges and try to continue the progress of education in pandemic situations.

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