



IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

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Abstract :

Education is the process of facilitating learning or acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and beliefs. Inclusive and equitable quality education is the basic human right of every individual and is a crucial goal of sustainable development. However, disparities exist within the educational system in India which has now further increased because of the new pandemic. Children are deprived of regular learning opportunities because of school closure. In this article, a modest attempt has been made to review the literature on the impact of COVID-19 on the learning processes of children. The aim of this literature review is to identify empirical studies focusing on the impact of Covid-19 on Education of Children and to propose solutions, which should be introduced to mitigate the immediate impact of school closures on the education of children. Secondary sources have been used to describe and summarize the content. The findings suggest that there is a need for an exhaustive change in the education sector at the national level. The study concludes that a detailed comprehensive guideline and a contingency plan is required before the schools reopen. Further, a training programme is required to prepare teachers and students for online classes.

Keywords : Children, Education, COVID-19, Endemic, Learning, Student, Teacher

INTRODUCTION:

Education is the process of facilitating learning or acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and beliefs. Inclusive and equitable quality education is the basic human right of every individual and is a crucial goal of sustainable development. International conventions, treaties, programs and policies have been introduced globally to ensure that every individual gets an equal chance to avail equal educational opportunities. However, a large number of children remain unschooled and are facing the problem of low learning outcome. This is due to lack of infrastructure, lack of teaching staff, poverty, marginalization and persisting inequality.

Apart from that, natural and man-made disasters, wars, displacement and endemic create a barrier in smooth learning process of children. In a country like India, school education already had interruptions in the recent years because of pollution, extreme weather conditions and violence. Now the Government has mandated nationwide closure of the educational institutions in the wake of growing pandemic which has been designated as COVID-19 [1]. Though unpleasant, such a harsh step was unavoidable to contain or limit the transmission of the dreaded disease at community level.

However, in this process, flow of education has received major disruptions. 188 countries have imposed countrywide or local closures affecting more than 1.5 billion children and youth [2]. Before the outbreak of this global disaster, India was already facing the crisis in educational sector and now a large number of students will not be able to attend school, which would leave a permanent impact on their growth and development. UNESCO's report revealed that in the 80% of the world, disparities already existed within the educational system. The impact of pandemic Covid-19 would be more severe on the vulnerable and marginalised children, who had fewer educational opportunities and had hardly known a life beyond school. They would be deprived of not only regular learning opportunities and access to childcare, but also of free meals, which was fulfilling their nutritional and social needs.

Though a national distance learning platform has been introduced by more than two thirds of the countries, yet among developing countries the share is only 30 percent [3]. In addition to that, the digital divide (access to internet and mobile) would exclude a large number of children and youth from the learning process. There is also a high possibility of children dropping out from school because of a possible financial crisis, which the families would face. School is not just a learning centre but it is also the hub for the children, where they enjoyed free midday meals and reveled in social activities with their schoolmates. Such an upbringing is an important requirement of their growth and development.

Due to sudden shutdown of the educational institutions the academic activities such as examination, admission, counselling, internship, placement, pursuing higher studies in foreign universities have received a setback. It is likely to sap the morale of the teachers and their families also. They are fearing salary cuts and slashing of the perks. On the other hand, it will affect the food security, access to childcare and education loan hitherto enjoyed by the students. Closing the doors of the schools and colleges for unknown duration has taken the stake holders by surprise.

The teachers and the staff did not get time to acclimatize themselves to a novel system of imparting education through on-line platform and standardized testing and admission process. The transition from frontal classes to digital classes has created many challenges for them as they have no training on how to keep communicating with the students to support learning process. Parents with limited education and resources are put to difficulty in reconciling with on-line learning tools for education of their wards. The students themselves face the onerous task of switching over their lessons to digital mode.

This may or may not be a temporary phase. Even if the schools and colleges are restored, the original glory may not return in the same form as the disease is not showing signs of abatement. It is thus open to question whether we are geared up to run these institutions with the same gusto once the lockdown is over. It may take a year before a vaccine is developed as an antidote to this disease. Till such time there will be instructions and guidance from the Ministry of Home Affairs as well as from the Ministry of Health & Family welfare on social distancing and hygiene apart from advisory by the World Health Organisation. They will have to be faithfully complied by the students while attending the classes as well as the staff. In the meantime, there would be many arrangements which may have to be planned viz:

1. A Nodal Official for the institution to disseminate updated information provided by the Government and resisting alarms & rumours.
2. Plan to use the infrastructure in an optimum way.
3. Keep classes on alternate days.
4. Introduce classes in shifts.
5. Have different batches for different days.
6. Open schools only for classes above primary level and manage rest with the help of online classes.
7. Integrate online classes with the regular classes, where ever feasible.
8. Cancel all the events like sports day, teachers day, alumni meet, annual function etc.
9. Postpone or indefinitely cancel all parents meet, academic meetings and conferences. At best they can be held on-line.
10. Rearranging hostel facilities. Dispense with indoor games like chess & playing cards etc to avoid face-to-face situation.
11. Rearrange seating arrangements with the help of glass partition after sacrificing some seats.
12. For new admissions, reduce the number of intake of students for each class.
13. Mess arrangements to ensure complete hygienic conditions.
14. Sanitization of the premises on fixed days.

There is a need of a very exhaustive change in the educational sector at the national level. A contingency plan is required before the schools reopen. Policy makers will have to introduce a detailed comprehensive guideline which has all the component related to school education [4]. A training programme is required to prepare teachers and students for online classes.

To facilitate students with limited wherewithal to continue their education, it may be necessary to connect them to one of the multiple applications of Open Educational Platform. Further, the students and the staff will have to be oriented about the safety practices they have to adhere to, after they join the school. Digital learning is the need of the hour and it should be introduced compulsorily in all schools. Though studies [5] have proved that there are huge disparities in learning levels of students who are attending online classes, it also reveals the inability of schools to support online learning during school closures. The situation would be worst in those areas where the internet penetration rates are low and a significant number of students do not have the required aid for digital learning.

In rural areas, there is a great digital divide as the internet facilities, regular electricity, computers and smart phones are not available to a large number of families. Lack of proper infrastructure in rural sector would also act as a barrier in ensuring social distancing norms within school. Research has proved that television and radio increases access to remote learning. China, Ethiopia, Brazil, India and Ghana have relied on such educational television programming. Telesecundaria, is an example of such a programming which was used to provide education through television broadcasts in rural and hard-to-reach areas of Mexico. The evaluation reports revealed that it had a positive impact on out-of-school children. The enrolment of such children into formal education and learning programmes increased dramatically, especially in those areas which were remotely located. Since the resources are constrained at present, similar mode of learning program should be introduced and implemented so that every child is provided with uninterrupted access to education.

Distance learning requires a self-directed learning on the part of the learner and a new study skills, which must be supported through new teaching, learning and guidance strategies. This would be new challenge for policy makers. Furthermore, the readiness of the curriculum content for all grades, technological capacities, home based learning support and monitoring and evaluation of outcome would be a task in itself. Supporting the delivery of lessons, hosting and managing learning materials and supporting teacher- learner communication are additional requirements which need attention. Teachers and other stakeholders should be engaged in designing the distance learning programmes. Additionally, they need training in pedagogical shifts and use of distance learning tools. The current pandemic has necessitated a novel educational model.

The sway of this deadly virus on poor and vulnerable children would be very severe and would require special attention. Children on street, children staying in rehabilitation centres, slum children and children with disabilities will face unprecedented risks to their educational rights, growth and development. The whole world will have to work together to defeat this pandemic and erase its ominous footprint on the educational rights of the children. This is a clarion call for the future of world's children. The Sustainable Development

Goal indicator must always guide us and ensure inter alia that all girls and boys complete free primary and secondary education by 2030 [6].

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