STATUS OF ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A STUDY OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS SITUATED IN KALAKHOWA VILLAGE OF LAKHIMPUR DISTRICT

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Abstract: Due to the sudden outbreak of covid-19 pandemic, the school remained shut for a longer period of time. Though the Govt. implemented online learning for both the upper classes and primary education also, but the children of primary schools are very young for joining online classes through various electronic gadgets. The present study aims to find out the status of online teaching and learning during covid-19 pandemic of primary schools situated in Kalakhowa village of Lakhimpur district. The study is qualitative in nature and a case study method was adopted ad data was collected from a sample of 108 individuals including parents, students and teachers using semi-structured interview schedule. Results of the study reveal that most of the schools and the household of students don't have basic infrastructures to provide online class. Results also reveal that the teachers are untrained and don't have competencies over the technological tools used for online teaching and learning. Teachers and students face various challenges regarding connectivity, electronic gadgets, study materials etc, and the parents are not satisfied with the quality of online teaching during covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords- **covid-19, Primary education, Online teaching and learning**

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the foundation of academic institutions, like any other social institutions, they had to face wounding epidemics that had interrupted their smooth functioning. But still, they have survived and continued their mission even with their doors closed. In 1665, Cambridge University had to close due to an epidemic named the 'black plague' which struck England. Isaac Newton was a student of that university during the tenure. So, he had to return to his home i.e. Woolsthrope Manor. One day, he was sitting in the garden; he saw an apple fall from the tree which inspired him to invent his theory of 'universal gravitation, which he told to William Stukeley who included this anecdote in Newton's biography which was published after his death (Stukeley, 1936). The story defines that, as much as the doors of educational institutions have to be closed, academic activities will continue if there is a desire. Where there is a will there is a way. Incidentally, the doors of educational institutions are closed again.

This pandemic (COVID-19) has forced to shut all the educational institutions down and the government to think about other methods of providing education like online learning and television learning.

On February 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) gave the official name of the virus as **COVID-19** as it was first spotted in 2019. It was for the first time identified in the Wuhan city of China on December 31, 2019. A 61 years old man of Wuhan was the first to be died by COVID-19 on January 11, 2020. Afterward, it was started to spread all over the world and as a result, on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it as a 'Pandemic.' A person of Kerala was the first Indian to be affected by the virus, reported on 30 January 2020, who had a travel history from Wuhan, China. The first death was reported on March 12, 2020, in India due to COVID-19. More than 4.5 million people are affected by it worldwide (WHO). More than 90% of the world's student population has been affected by it during mid-April 2020, according to the report of UNESCO.

1.1. EDUCATION DURING PANDEMIC

Covid-19 was declared as pandemic on March 11, 2020 by World Health Organization. Most of the governments of the world have temporarily closed educational institutions to curb the spread of covid-19. This worldwide closure of educational institutions has impacted the world's student population. The pandemic has forced the governments to think about the continuity of education by other means. Thereby the pandemic has changed pedagogical approaches and led to the introduction of virtual education in all levels of education. Online education has now become the demand of the current crisis. Many virtual platforms have been introduced by UGC and MHRD with online depositories, e-books and other online teaching learning materials.

Online education was started through some interactive platforms to reduce the spread of corona virus among the students of the country. The conventional education system of India follows face to face and physical teaching. By the closure of schools, teaching and assessment, structure of schooling and learning was the first to be affected. Though the use of audio-visual aids in the classroom was introduced a decade ago, only a few private schools could adopt the online teaching methods. On the other hand their counterpart of government schools; they completely got closed for not having access to e-learning facilities.

Even if we talk about the higher education institutions, only some renowned universities in India such as University of Delhi are providing online education to its students. But, many of the higher educational institutions are not well equipped with such facilities to provide online education. The act of providing online education is very much expensive itself because the institution should have access to new software to ensure that all students can learn online.

Many colleges and universities are providing and conducting online classes but, some students from disadvantaged families, lack of access to technology or connectivity to a good network are some obstacles to online learning especially for the people living in rural areas. So, the task of providing education through a virtual platform is very much difficult, especially in the primary level. For using online platforms to impart education has affected many but, the people who live in rural areas and have socio-economic constrains have affected the most. Moreover, the online education may also lead to mental health problems, especially among those, who deprived from it (Sahu, 2020).

1.2. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

ICT i.e. Information and Communication Technology has now that much evolved that it has transformed the world into a global village, and the interest of the people over it is growing day by day. So, the growing interest of people in ICT tools has started changing the dynamics of classroom and also the role of the teacher in the teaching learning process such as, flipped classroom and smart classroom are some examples of this transformed pedagogy. But, most of the changes are limited to private schools, urban areas and higher education only. In many of the public funded schools, there is no basic facility of infrastructure to use smart classes or use multimedia or digital TLMs in the teaching learning process. Moreover, in most of the cases teachers of the schools are not properly trained to use projectors, tablets, smart boards, applications (apps like Google meet, zoom meeting, Google classroom) of teaching and computers etc. Most of the students and the teachers are dealing only with the conventional classroom and 'chalk and talk' methods are being followed. Because of this pandemic, this gap has become more visible as the students and teachers needed to adopt online teaching-learning method. Therefore, it has become very much important to know how the teachers and the students are adjusting themselves with the sudden change of teaching learning process from offline to online. In doing so, they might have faced some challenges and difficulties, what those challenges and difficulties are especially in the rural areas?

Generally food, shelter and clothing are considered as the fundamental needs of human beings. But, nowadays education is also considered as fundamental need of human, because, one cannot survive in this competitive world if he is not having education. Education is important for everyone whether he is child or adult. Primary education is considered as the foundational stage of human life. So, getting education in the primary stage is very important because it is the base of life and when the base is strong then the rest of the life will be good. Hence, the kids should go to school, because in school they will meet new people and that will help them to be social. For the all-round development of human being it is important to make new friends and play games. Children learn to communicate, read, listen and many more things in the school. So it is very important for the children's to go school.

But, due to the sudden outbreak of covid-19 pandemic, the school remained shut for a longer period of time. Though the Govt. implemented online learning for both the upper classes and primary education also, but the children of primary schools are very young for joining online classes through various electronic gadgets. Moreover, the schools remained closed for more than one year. So, it has become very much important to know the actual state of primary school during the covid-19 lockdown. Were the teachers able to conduct online class with those little children? If they could, then what challenges they might face?

In the present study, the status of primary education of Kalakhowa village during the covid-19 pandemic is being studied. Findings of the current study will not only enrich the literature related to online education but, will also give useful insight about developing online teaching learning process and the hindrances of online learning in the context of rural Assam.

1.3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

a) To find out the availability of infrastructure at schools and household of students of primary schools of Kalakhowa village required for online class.

b) To study the competence of the teachers over the tools used for online teaching and learning during covid-19 pandemic.

c) To find out the challenges faced by the teachers and the students during the online teaching and learning during covid-19 pandemic.

d) To examine the perception of parents regarding the quality of online education during covid-19 pandemic.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Population

The locale of the present study is Kalakhowa village of Lakhimpur district which occupies an area of 235.17 hectares. The Lakhimpur district is located in the North of Assam state and lies in 27°14' N latitude and 94° 5' E longtitude.

Due to limited time and resources a total of 50 households and 8 teachers were purposefully selected for the study based on consent and feasibility of data collection. There are total 344 households in Kalakhowa village, but every household is not having students of lower primary level. Only 100 of the households are having children of lower primary. So, 50 households have been chosen purposefully. Also there are 4 lower primary schools in Kalakhowa village. So, all the parents, children of lower primary and teachers of lower primary were considered as the population of the study. The population of the study comprised of 350 people including both male and female from 100 households of Kalakhowa village.

2.2. Sample

In order to achieve the objectives of the present study, purposive sampling technique was used to collect information from the selected population. Firstly, the village was selected purposively for the study and then a sample of 50 households and 8 teachers from 4 schools have been selected from that village based on their consent and which are purposeful for the study.

2.3. Tool Used

The researcher used semi-structured interview schedule for the purpose of collection of data. The interview method will collect primary data, which is first hand information tips and responses collected be the researcher from their original sources. Therefore, in this study primary data was collected from the participants as fresh information obtained from the interviews. The tools used for this study are-

 a) Interview Schedule for Students

 b) Interview Schedule for Teachers

 c) Interview Schedule for Parents

2.4. STATISTICAL TECHNIQUE USED

The researcher simply used tables and percentages for quantitative analysis and the statistical interpretation of the data.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Objective-1

The result of the study shows that some of the schools are not having electricity. Most of the schools don't have the facility of computer. None of the schools have Wi-Fi or broadband. None of the schools have subscribed any application software which is needed to conduct online class. All the schools used whatsapp to send learning materials only.

The results indicate that the students don't have the proper infrastructures to receive online classes. Some of the students don't have electricity at home. None of the students have computer or laptop at home. Some of the students don't have smart phone and some have only 1 Smart phone at home.

From the above results it can be concluded that both the schools and homes of students are lacking in providing the proper infrastructures. These results were supported by various studies conducted by **Narayanan, A., Zalat et al., Srivastava, R.,** and **Amin, R.** which found that the schools and homes of students don't have the needed facilities to conduct online classes.

Objective-2

The results indicate that the teachers are not competent over the tools used for online teaching and learning. Results of the study showed that teachers are untrained. They don't have the basic hardware knowledge, software application skills, internet skills, and online communication skills which are the most important components to be competent in online class. Some of the teachers are not confident to teach in online class, they could not engage their students in online class actively. So it confirms that they are not competent.

So, from the above results it can be concluded that the teachers are not competent over the tools used for online teaching and learning during covid-19 pandemic.

Objective-3

Based on the results it is seen that teacher faced various challenges during online classes. They faced challenges in covering all the students. They faced challenges in providing learning materials to every class. They felt challenges while interacting with students. Slow internet connectivity was the most important challenge faced by the teachers. And mostly lack of electronic gadgets or technical tools to conduct online class was the biggest challenge faced by the teacher.

It is also seen that the students faced various challenges in online class. They found online education as not easy. They faced challenges to stay motivated in online class. They faced challenges to be attentive in online class. They found it challenging to grasp all the concepts taught to them by the teachers. And they found it challenging to be comfortable with online class. They found it stressful and anxious. And most important challenge was the interrupting electricity.

So, from the above analysis it can be concluded that both the students and teachers faced various challenges during online class. The results of the study is supported by **Das et al.,** and **Gurung, (2021)** which found that students faced challenges in having required technologies and teachers faced in covering all the students and providing learning materials to all the classes.

Objective-4

From the results it is seen that the parents were not satisfied with the quality of online classes during covid-19 pandemic. All the parents worried about the education of their child during lockdown. Some of them are not satisfied with the learning materials. They think that their child's motivation and cognitive level is not increased via online class. Based on their perception they rated online class poor and some of them rated as good.

So, from the above analysis it can be concluded that the parents were not satisfied with the quality of online class.

IV. Conclusion

Covid-19 had impacted the world vicariously including the educational sector. Due to the sudden outbreak of covid-19 pandemic, various governments have recommended its educational institutions to adopt virtual learning platforms. But, online education could not cover all the students equally. The students who have economic constrains could not receive online education, especially in the rural India. And this has supplemented the digital divide which is prevalent between the poor and the rich in Indian society. Even if the government has taken various programs and schemes to bridge the gap between the poor and the rich, yet the gap is still dominant in the rural areas. During the covid-19 pandemic this gap has become more visible. Therefore, the covid-19 has impacted the whole student community, but especially the students with economic barriers. Also the students of primary level of Kalakhowa village have been impacted by covid-19 severely, because they are mostly from poor economic background.

Therefore, the present study concludes that online education could not get success in Kalakhowa village due to proper facilities and infrastructures in schools and at the households of students. All of the teachers are untrained about online education, and they are not competent over the tools used for online teaching and learning. And the education provided by the schools was not satisfactory for the parents. During the process of online teaching and learning both the teachers and students faced various challenges regarding technical tools, internet connectivity etc. At last the study concludes that the education system of Kalakhowa village was hampered severely due to the covid-19 pandemic as there was no live interaction session carried out between the teachers and the students. And the students were almost away from education for a longer period of time.

V. Educational Implications

- From this study schools administration, governing bodies can know about the problems faced by the teachers and students during covid-19 pandemic.
- From the results of this study, the schools can get to know about the requirements of online education and can fulfill the required infrastructures in the school.
- The government and educational institutions can prepare themselves to be ready with proper requirement for smoothly running online education if another pandemic arises.
- Educational institutions and governments can solve the problems and challenges of online education and plan to implement blended learning in the educational institutions.
- Educational planners and policy makers can help in improving online education by knowing the problems and challenges of online education.

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