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Impact Of School Closures On The Learning Level Of Students During COVID-19 Pandemic: An Analysis In The Indian Context

Dr. Raj Kumar, Professor

Department of Education
Chaudhary Devi Lal University
Sirsa, (Haryana) India

Dr. Bhal Singh

Department of Education,
Chaudhary Devi Lal University
Sirsa, (Haryana) India

Abstract

The COVID-19 virus severely affected the educational system in all over the world. During the pandemic, most of the educational institutions were remained closed which degraded the learning level of the students at the school level. The objective of the present research article is to find out the impact of school closures on the learning level of school students in the Indian context. In this research article researchers have explored the secondary sources that demonstrated the pre-pandemic and after-pandemic learning levels of the students. After analyzing the secondary sources, investigators found the impact of school closures on the learning level; a significant decline was observed in the learning level of students at the school level after the pandemic period.

Keywords; learning level, pandemic, COVID-19, school closer, educational institution.

Introduction

The COVID-19 virus has been detected in Wuhan (China) for the first time in December 2019 that spread from person to person rapidly (Andrews et al. 2020). The virus became a pandemic that engulfed most countries of the world which resulted in a worldwide lockdown at the beginning of 2020. The pandemic broke the social, economical, political, educational, and cultural systems all over the world (Bonotti & Zech, 2021). The practice of ‘social distancing' was normally followed in the social system for encouraging the use of

online platforms for communication (Maragakis, 2020). The social order of almost all countries was negatively affected by the COVID-19 virus (Guner, Hasanoglu, & Aktas, 2020). Most governments faced the challenges of how to take over the pandemic and remove the consequences which emerged during the lockdown. The education system of the world could not be untouched by this virus and got collapsed due to COVID-19. In most countries of the world, educational institutions got closed that disrupting the teaching-learning process for a long time (Tarkar, 2020). Educational institutions had to be used online platforms to restart the teaching-learning process. The flipped classroom, blended learning, and remote learning have become part of the teaching-learning process (Rahayu & Wirza, 2020). During and after COVID-19, most of the studies, NGOs, and Organizations reports found that students detached from the teaching-learning process all over the world. The online platform of the teaching-learning process had not been sufficient for the learning of the students as the idea is supported or favored by Bahasoan, Wulan, Mukhram, and Rahmat in their research article titled Effectiveness of Online Learning in Pandemic Covid-19, published in 2020.

According to UNICEF (2020), more than one billion children are at risk of falling behind due to school closers aimed at containing the spread of COVID-19. When children are not able to interact with their teachers and their peer directly, their learning suffers when they are not able to interact with teachers and peers at all. Their learning loss may become permanent. A report by Oxfam India (2020) indicated that children studying in government schools were hit particularly hard with more than 80 % of government school students in Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Uttar Pradesh not receiving any educational materials during the lockdown. This was mostly because families did not have access to digital devices and e-learning tools (as cited in UNICEF, India Case Study 2021).

According to Jena (2020) around 32 crores, of learners stopped moving schools/colleges, and all educational institutions halted in India. 1.6 billion learners are affected in more than 200 countries. This is 94 % world's student population. In India, around 250 million students have been affected due to school closer onset of lockdown induced by COVID-19 (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021).

Objective

- To explore the impact of COVID-19 on the learning level of the students.

Methodology: In the present research article descriptive research methodology was used for analyzing the secondary sources.

Analysis: The Annual Status of Education Report (2020) wave one which was released on February 1, 2021, recalled the learning deficiency of rural children (as reported by ASER, 2018) and probed the impact of the lockdown when schools were closed. After analysis relating to parental education, availability of smart phones, and access to textbooks and learning materials the report concluded that overall, only about 35 percent of children got any type of learning material from their school whereas 72 percent of children got

learning material through WhatsApp. Majority (55 percent) of children did not have a Smartphone and their access of learning was limited. World Bank simulated the learning loss and concluded that school closure of seven months almost affected their learning of one year. School closures resulted into significant learning loss which was created a greater learning gap between the rich and the poor (Chidambaram, 2021).

PEW research survey showed that declined five points in History, eight points in Math and 3 points in Reading of 8th class students in 2022 compared to 2018. NWEA conducted a study through Recovery Scorecard Project on 2.6 crore students of primary and secondary levels of 41 states of U.S.A. In this study observed that school closure was major reseaon behind the learning loss of the students during pandemic period ("Visheshagyon ne kaha", 2023).

National Achievement Survey (2021) was conducted in November 2021 with a sample size of more than 34 lakh students. Students of class 3rd and 5th were evaluated and a significant decline was observed and compared it with the National Achievement Survey (2017).

Table No.1: Comparison of National Average score (2017) with National Average Score (2021)

Class	National Average Score in Percentage 2017	National Average Score in Percentage 2021
3rd	54	47
5th	44	38

*Sources: The Indian Express

The above table demonstrates the learning level of students of classes 3rd and 5th of 2017 respectively as compared to 2021. The findings of the survey indicates a dip in academic achievement across subjects and grades on national level the last achievement survey conducted in 2017, points to the impact of the pandemic induced disruptions in teaching and learning. NAS Report 2021 indicated that the learning level of students decline due to the COVID pandemic comparatively in 2017. According to Banerji (2022), CEO of Pratham Foundation "all data that is coming out is indicating that we need to seriously work on foundational learning and NAS is no exception. It has come at the right time and as the New Year school begins, and school reopens after the summer holidays, the work is out for authorities. What NAS says is what we have all been worried about" (as cited in The Indian Express, June 04, 2022).

Table No. 2: Comparison of National Average Score (2017) with the National Average Score (2021)

(Class and Subject wise National Average Score)

Class	Subject	National Average Score-2021	National Average Score-2017
3rd	Language	323	336
	Math	306	321
	Environmental Studies	307	321
5th	Language	309	319
	Math	284	310
	Environmental Studies	284	310
8th	Language	302	307
	Math	255	269
	Science	250	274
	Social Science	255	278

*Sources: National Achievement Survey Report 2017 and 2021

The National Achievement Survey report of 2017 and 2021 shows different outcomes of the 3rd, 5th, and 8th class students. The learning level of language, mathematics, environmental studies, science, and social science decreased in 2021 as compare to 2017. In language, the national average score of class 3rdstudents was 336 in 2017 which declined to 323 in 2021. The national average score of class 3rd of mathematics was 321 in 2017 which decreased as 306 in 2021. The national average score of environmental studies the class third was 321in 2017 which also declined at the level 307 in 2021.

The learning level of language, math, and environmental studies of class 5th students also went down in 2021 compared to 2017. In language, the national average score was 319 in 2017 and 309 in 2021. The national average score of mathematics of class 5th students was 310 in 2017 which declined to the level of 284 in 2021.

The learning level of class 8th students also went down in 2021 compared to 2017. The national average score of the language of class 8th students was 307 in 2017 and 302 in 2021. The average score in Mathematics was 269 in 2017 which also decreased to 255 in 2021.

The national average score of class 8th of science and social Science also declined in 2021comparatively 2017. The national average score in science was 274 in 2017 which was reduced to 250 in 2021. On the other hand, the national score of the 8th class of social science was 278 in 2017 which was also reduced to 255 in 2021.

Comparison between Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2022 and 2018

Category	Description	2018	2022
Reading	Class third students who can read at the class second level.	27.3%	20.5%
	Class fifth students who can read at the class second level.	50.5%	42.8%
Arithmetic	Class third students who can do subtraction.	28.2%	25.9%
	Class fifth students who can do division.	27.9%	25.6%

*Sources: Annual Status of Education Report, 2022

The above table demonstrates the learning level of the students. According to the survey of ASER (2022) third class students who can read at the class second level in 27.3 percent in 2018 was 20.5 percent in 2022. In 2018, 50.5 percent of fifth-class students were able to read at the class second level and 42.8 percent students of the fifth class can read in 2022. In the arithmetic category, 28.2 percent students of third class could do subtraction in 2018 comparatively 25.9 per cent in 2022. 27.9 percent students of fifth class were able to do division in 2018 comparatively 25.6 percent of 2022.

ASER conducted its annual survey in multiple waves through phone recording. The objective of the survey was to explore the impact of the pandemic on different aspects of children's education. The survey was focused on engagement of access, remote education mechanism, and share learning materials with families and children in the rural part of India. The major findings of the survey are given in the below table:

Sr. No.	Descriptions	Percentage
1.	Children received learning materials of the gross enrolment at the school level	36%
2.	Children of Grade 9 and above received learning materials	37%
3.	Children Grades1 to 2received learning materials	31%
4.	Children of Government schools across all grades received learning materials	67%
5.	Children of private schools across all grades received learning materials	87%
6.	Parents responded that they have not received any type of learning materials.	68%
7.	Parents responded that they do have not their smartphone	24%

*Sources: ASER 2020, (as cited in, India Case Study UNICEF)

The above table demonstrates that during school closure, only 36 percent of children received learning materials of the total enrollment at the school level. Grade 9 and above, only 37 percent of children received the learning materials, on the other hand, in classes 1st to 2nd 31 percent of children received learning materials during the COVID period. 67 percent of government school students received learning materials comparatively 87 percent of private school students. 68 percent of parents responded that they did not get any type of learning materials during school closers. 24 percent of parents responded that they did not have their Smartphone.

Discussion

After the analysis of secondary sources which was collected from various sources, the learning level of students declined during and after the COVID-19 period in India. According to the NAS report (2021), the learning level declined of third and fifth-class students in 2021 compared to 2017. The analyzing NAS Report 2017 and 2021 findings indicated that the learning level of third, fifth, and eighth-class students of various subjects also declined after the pandemic. Annual Status of Education Report, 2020 indicated that only 36 percent students received learning materials through various online platforms from their schools. The report also indicated that 24 percent parents did not have their Smartphone. The learning gap also increased between private school students and government school students. According to ASER (2020), only 67 percent of

government school students received learning material compared to 87 percent of private school students during the COVID-19 period.

On the other hand, the Annual Status of Education Report indicated the learning level of students in the reading and arithmetic categories during and after the pandemic. The above analysis indicated that students were facing serious problems regarding their learning level. The major reasons behind the disruption of the teaching-learning process was the lack of availability of Smartphone, connectivity problems, physical classroom disruption, only limited access to the learning material as the available of one Smartphone in entire family. Due to COVID-19, parents started thinking that their children might be a source of income as COVID badly affected the financial stability. Moreover, they thought that their children remain at home as they did not have any school related task that resulted in child labor.

Primarily, all the stakeholders of the education sector come together and should be acknowledged the learning level of students is a serious issue and should take steps to increase the learning level and fill the learning gap in students.

Suggestions:

- The duration of an academic year should be increased for the recovery of the learning loss of the students.
- The interaction between students and teachers should be healthy, deep, and effective may fulfill the learning gap of students.
- The teaching-learning process should be focused on creativity-based activity.
- The home-based learning environment may be increased the learning level of the students.

Conclusion:

It can't be ignored that the COVID-19 virus affected the social, political, economical, educational and cultural structure in all over the world. Educational institutes are closed in almost all the countries during the pandemic period. In the Indian context, COVID-19 is directly responsible for declining the learning level of students. The above interpretations of the secondary sources indicated that the learning level of the students decreased after the pandemic period.

Children who are admitted in schools should be supported to continue their learning and allow adjusting to the new school environment. They may be provided books from the book banks/libraries maintained by the schools. Peer learning may also be increased learning level of such children. Now we need a collaboration of all the stakeholders of the education sector for fulfilling the learning gap of the students.

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