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## AN EMPIRICAL STUDY TO DETERMINE THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ABSENTEEISM OF STUDENTS OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY OF KARIMGANJ DISTRICT OF ASSAM

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### ABSTRACT

This study is focussing on the absenteeism percentage of the students in government schools due to COVID-19 affects. The study compared the attendance and absenteeism rates of government schools before and after COVID-19 and based upon the output of the collected data some suggestions and policy implications are given specifically keeping in view of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data used in the study is a primary data. The timeline for data collection is also mentioned in the study. The suggestions and implications of the policies literally helped various head of the institutions in increasing the student's attendance. The suggested further study covers private schools of same area or urban area based schools.

**Keywords:** *Government schools or GOS, COVID-19 affects/effects, students, face to face classes, online classes, Mid-Day Meal.*

### INTRODUCTION

As we know education is the most vital and the crucial part of sociability and nation and humanity. But due to many adverse situations it is being affected at times. This time education is greatly affected by the pandemic created by Chinese origin CORONA Virus. Basically known as COVID-19 caused lock down all over the globe and people are still really terrified because of it affects and devastation. In this part of our study our major focus is on the later effects of CORONA on education specifically in the case of student's attendance. As a primary school teacher I have seen that the general rate of attendance in my school has been decreased even after opening of school in full swing. Government schools adopted and abide by all the circulars given during the lockdown period but after opening of the schools things have been totally different. Students who were regular in their classes are now becoming absent for longer days and we had to pursue them through mobile or physically we have to visit their homes. All these inspire me

to go for a survey and find whether it is happening to only my school or to every school. This is also important to know the conditions of other schools and the way they are managing their students to come. It has become very important for teachers, students and the system of education to go smoothly and well functioned to run the society, humanity, nation and each and everything that is known to us. But with no student or less student in the classroom it won't be possible. Though state and central government and their various agencies tried their utmost efforts to do well with education but COVID is a new subject in this century and we are not prepared as a nation or humanity and we teachers are also not at all trained to work in such a kind of situation or post situation. Even then to continue the show and to fight against the consequences caused by it at least for such crises in future. Moreover, lagging in education means lagging in readiness in future that today's students are future's leaders and as many as of students are absent in classroom as many as productive persons will be less in future impacting our nations GDP also. During lockdown, it has become a common strategy for containing COVID physical contacts be minimized and for that all social gathering spots were ordered to be closed and for that reason our schools were also declared closed and thus all the problem begun in education.

Since the inception of schooling children attendance has been a crucial aspect of education. As without presence of the student in the classroom the teaching learning process cannot be completed.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

“Assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students” by D. Burns- 2020. The purpose of this paper is to develop the concept of student wellbeing, a general term concerned with positive emotions with reference to COVID-19. This article deals in conceptual data analysis on student's wellbeing in United Kingdom universities with special reference to COVID.

“COVID-19 school closures and cumulative disadvantage: Assessing the learning gap in formal, informal and non-formal education.” This article deals in measuring the gap in case of learning opportunities in non-formal, in formal and formal education system among all socio-economic categories. This article describes the measurements of learning gap between all categories and explained the educational inequalities. This study further reveals totalled gap created among different categories due to educational gap.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2020, when lockdown started due to COVID schools and colleges starting from nursery to college and then university were all declared closed? In this period students who received regular homework or notes for their studies, kept their studies continually at home with parents or tutor teacher guidance, But the students who did not get any such homework or facility started to remain busy doing other staffs such playing, painting, roaming.

“Loss of childcare and classroom teaching during the Covid-19 related lockdown in spring 2020: A longitudinal study on consequences on leisure behaviour and schoolwork at home” by Tanja Poulain, Christof Meigen, Carolin Sobek, Peggy Ober, Ulrike Igel, Antje korner, Wieland Kiess, Mandy Vogel, 2<sup>nd</sup> march 2021. In the spring season of 2020, the first Covid-19 cases were found and lockdown was declared and as a consequence everything that include public gatherings got closed including kindergartens and other educational institutions. Teaching learning at home and almost no social interactions and the care for family and specially children was a tough challenge for most of the families.

“Some notes on school measures in a few countries to limit infections” by Martin Gustafsson 6 June 2020. Here the author wanted to get his own sense of what administrations of different countries instructed on school regulations to contain infection. Here the author focusses specifically on four areas where country policies vary: those are as quoted by author as “(1) physical distancing arrangements for the school as a

whole; (2) physical distancing in the classroom; (3) the use of special equipment such as PPEs and infrared thermometers; and (4) the rights of at-risk teachers to stay away from work.” These areas would have more variations and in other areas, where restrictions were instructed on large gatherings and the infection of any person to be treated as general and similar guidelines for all.

“The impact of COVID-19 on education - Insights from Education at a Glance 2020@OECD 2020”. Public finance of education in OECD countries, International students mobility, the loss of instructional time delivered in school setting, measures to continue student’s learning during lockdown, teacher and government preparedness for next such things.

“The impact of lockdown on the learning gap: family and school divisions in times of crisis, By X Bonal.” Just like any other nation Spain also suffer severe consequences due to COVID-19 specifically in society and in education. Without prior planning or any government planning families and schools had to work ASAP. Children from different socio-economic background had different experience in lockdown. This article is all about studying the learning gap in terms of learning opportunity among students. In the conclusion the author focusses on providing equal learning opportunities for students from low socio-economic background and some other policies were also discussed.

Vigorous, Vital, Vulnerable: Universities an COVID-19, Aotearoa New Zealand Holloway Alisa, (2022). Aotearoa New Zealand’s early responses to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic were appreciated globally. The reduction in both imported COVID-19 cases and transmission of COVID-19 in community reduced due to the governments “Go hard and go early” policy. Its effects are visible in wider range and in almost all sectors including higher education. Just in a few weeks the entire education system transformed to online teaching-learning. While the restrictions were relaxed by that time face to face or in-person teaching was already taken over by teaching learning applying new technologies. Even though the education system got another alternative, yet it has some challenges for the student and staff.

Such a continuous loss in education will create dangerous future for the next generation with lesser information and knowledge.

## **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The main objective of the study is:

To find the average absenteeism percentage of the ongoing government school students in pre and post COVID-19 scenario.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- 1) Is there any significant impact of COVID-19 in the absenteeism percentage of students?
- 2) Is there any problem related to student social background which affects their attendance?
- 3) Is there any psychological effect on student attendance?

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Direct data collection method is applied, where the average of student attendance was taken from the months of November and December 2019 for pre-COVID scenario and for post-COVID scenario February and March months of 2022 are considered.

### Area of Data Sample:

The area of the data collected was chosen as Karimganj district as it shares its international border with Bangladesh and Two states of India, namely Tripura and Mizoram. Even though it's geographical backwardness the district is showing some growth in the field of education. This is why we have chosen the district as Karimganj.

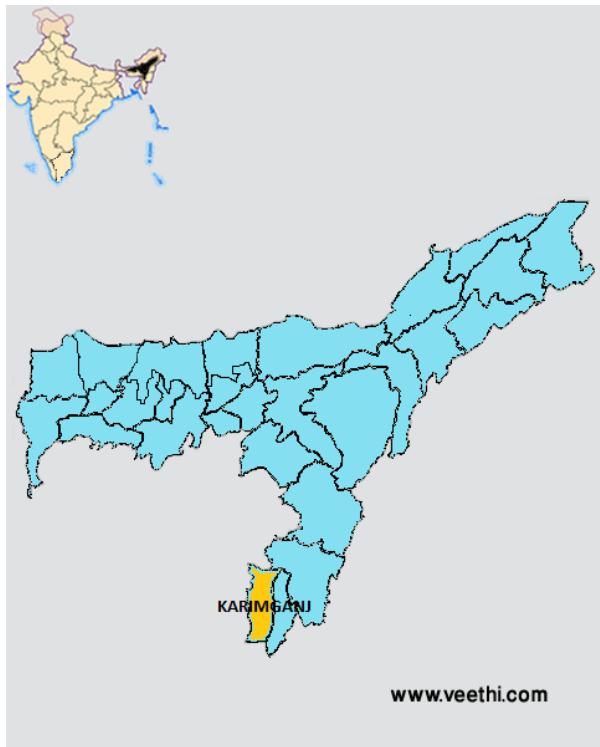


Figure 1: MAP OF ASSAM STATE SHOWING KARIMGANJ DISTRICT.

Source: <https://www.veethi.com/places/assam-karimganj-district-201.htm>

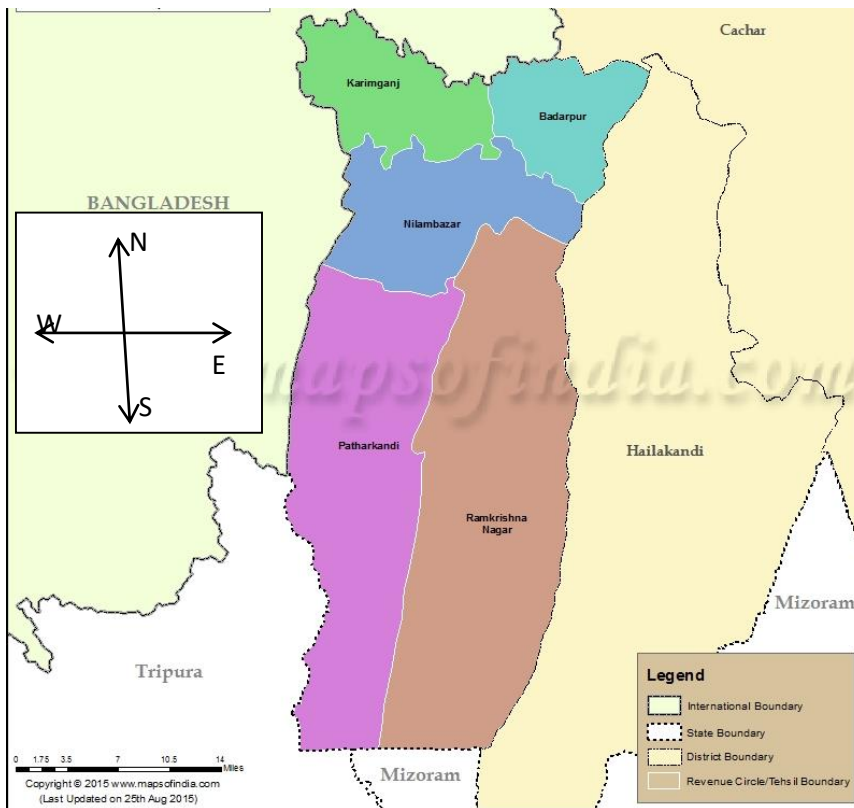


Figure 2: MAP OF THE DISTRICT SHOWING THE STUDY AREAS.

Source: <https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/assam/tehsil/karimganj.html>

In the district Karimganj there are five educational block, namely: North karimganj, South Karimganj, Badarpur, Ram Krishna Nagar and Patharkandi. Out of these five only three educational blocks are selected due to the following reason:-

- (i) Patharkandi educational block is such a block which has two national and one international borders, it has a vivid demography where population is divided into Hindu, Muslim, Christian etc, various linguistic communities such as Bengali (Hindu & Muslim), Bishnupriya Manipuri (a micro community), Meitei Manipuri, Tea tribes , Chorai, Brew tribes etc.
- (ii) North Karimganj is the urban or town block and also the headquarter of Karimganj district is located in this block. Hence, some schools from it should also be taken into consideration. In north Karimganj also the majority population is Bengali (Hindu & Muslim), a small portion of Bishnupriya Manipuri and in some tea garden areas tea tribes are also there.
- (iii) Badarpur educational block is a semi-urban block, the border of Karimganj and Cachar District and also the transport hub of Barak Valley, which is why some schools from it also chosen. It is mainly consisted of Bengali (Hindu & Muslims), Assamese, Meitei Manipuri and Bishnupriya Manipuri population.

Out of these schools of each block, some schools are taken from the rural areas, some from semi-urban and some from urban areas to record the actual educational scenario. The data is collected directly from the Head of the institutions. The research study is done on 27 schools of Karimganj District where 9 L.P.S. and 9 M.E.S and 9 high and high/ higher secondary schools (together) were taken into consideration.

**Timeline of data collection:**

Average absenteeism of students in the months of November and December 2019 for pre-COVID and for post-COVID attendance of February and March 2022.

**Tabulation of the collected data:****Table no 1. FOR L.P. SCHOOL**

Sl. no	Name of school	Location (village / Market area)	Pre-COVID 19 Absenteeism In %	Post-COVID 19 Absenteeism In %
1	964 no Dakkhin Sarjal L.P.S.	Village	13.34	26.67
2	852 no Saipergaon L.P.S.	Village	10	10
3	265 no Bhurunga L.P.S.	Village	7.15	7.15
4	591 No. Kalachand Panirghar LP School	Village	20	35
5	851 No Abhoy Vidyapith LP School	Village	5	20
6	727 No Prasarpur LP School	Village	20.5	30.2
7	608 No Purba Duttapur LP School	Village	10	10
8	431 No Rangerpara LP School	Village	19.36	17.42
9	121 No Goabari LP School	Village	18.45	22.25

Source: Primary Data collected by Authors.

**Table no 2. U.P. SCHOOLS**

Sl. No	Name of school	Location (village / Market area)	Pre-COVID 19 absenteeism	Post-COVID 19 absenteeism
1	Patharkandi Girl's M.E.S.	Market	30.13	39.09
2	Hatikhira M.E.S.	Market	5	30
3	Sri Sri Radharaman Goswami Girl's M.E.S.	Market	50	5
4	Akbarpur ME School	Semi-urban	30	32
5	Borshila ME School	Village	20	38.85
6	NNTC MV School	Town	25	50
7	Barthal Adarkuna Assamese ME School	Village	20	30
8	Rangarpara ME Madrassa	Village	10	25
9	Badarpur Girl's MEM	Market	15	30

Source: Primary Data collected by Authors.

**Table no 3. HIGH & HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL**

Sl. no	Name of school	Location (village / Market area)	Pre-COVID 19 absenteeism	Post-COVID 19 absenteeism
1	Model Higher Secondary School	Outside of Market Area	25	38
2	Jamini Mohan Girls High School	Market	30	50
3	Ahmed Ali High School	Market	25	45
4	Govt Boys Higher Secondary School	Town	20	18
5	Nilmoni Boys Higher Secondary School	Town	30	10
6	Public Higher Secondary	Village	13.05	27.54

	School, Karimganj				
7	Anglar Bazar Public High School	Market	22.15	16.75	
8	Public High School Malua	Market	19.23	24.34	
9	Samabay High School	Market	29.15	18.55	

Source: Primary Data collected by Authors.

## MAJOR FINDINGS:

A) Various pre-COVID factors effecting student attendance or absenteeism as per the head of the institutions and various teachers:

- (i) Some students do not want to come to schools due to socio economic backgrounds of their families. Parents of some students are local vendors, small shop keepers, day labors and during COVID-19 they need help of their children. Some of the students are at 2-3 kilometers distance from the school and due to unaffordability of bus or auto fare also students couldn't attend school.
- (ii) Some students do not want to come to schools just because they want to roam here and there. In pre-COVID days also some of the students by themselves do not want to come to school due to lack of parent awareness and their lack of willingness.
- (iii) Some students are not aware of their wellbeing hence become absent. Some of such students are first learners from their families and there is almost nobody from their family, friends or neighbors to motivate or influence them about the importance of education, hence their absence.
- (iv) Some are slow learners and cannot cope up with the class works and homework hence become absent. It is seen that the home works or class works given to students become overloaded for slow learners even teachers provide average class works or home works. And as those students couldn't complete those works in time and to avoid uneasiness in front of peers they avoid coming to school.
- (v) Truancy of students also makes them absent. In the age of adolescence students want to make more friends, want to explore by themselves, want to visit new places. This nature of adult students makes them truant, hence the reason for absenteeism.
- (vi) Sometimes teachers of some schools could not convince or encourage a student to come to school. Students by nature truant and disobedient must be encouraged and motivated by teachers through various story-telling and telling life stories of great personalities. But some teachers take the teaching job of government schools for granted and do little about fulfillment of their duties. This is also a crucial reason for student absenteeism.
- (vii) Less effective teaching of teachers inside and outside the school also make students absent. Effective teaching is the foremost important thing in the teaching-learning process. When this aspect lags behind then everything about schooling goes in jeopardy and students become less interested in their lessons and school and become absent.



B) Apart from the pre-COVID factors these following factors are responsible for student's absenteeism in classes.

- (i) Some students are already truant are not willing to attend classes.
- (ii) After COVID-19 some guardians do not want to send their kids to schools specifically in lower and upper primary sections.
- (iii) The government notification about student attendance that teachers cannot force students to come to schools bound teachers to limit their influence on students and also on their guardians.
- (iv) Students became habituated of not coming to schools and this habit effects negatively on student school going.
- (v) A minimal part of the students only had access to smart mobile phones for their online classes during lockdown and the rest of them were became deprived section and thus their interest in studies fades during this long period of lockdown.
- (vi) In many cases it is seen that some students got married in their early stages of life in lockdown, hence became absent for good.
- (vii) Some students went to other states for their livelihood.
- (viii) Some students started their own business or started working in the locality itself to afford their family needs.
- (ix) During lockdown the prices of various commodities became so high that single source of family income cannot afford a normal livelihood, hence many students join their parents in earning.
- (x) Many students want to go to schools but due to unavailability of vehicles in various locations make students absent, specifically if the students are located in diverse locations.
- (xi) Schools in which students are coming from diverse locations are badly affected by student's absenteeism.
- (xii) Due to COVID the cook-helpers of some schools are also getting sick frequently, which causes lack of availability of cooked MDM and hence is a valid reason for some students to skip school.

## **SUGGESTIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS:**

It is seen that in some schools the post-COVID affect is minimal, the reasons for those or some suggestions to increase student attendance are stated below:-

- (i) In most of the lower primary schools it was seen in the study that access of those schools are limited to one or two villages. So, schools whose students are from one village and are inside the village area, their student's attendance is same as that of pre-COVID.
- (ii) In those LP schools which have more than two villages students are affected a bit more in terms of attendance because of guardian's natural protective tendency.
- (iii) Schools which has more number of local teachers or stationed teacher had recovered early from the crisis of students absenteeism.
- (iv) Creative and qualitative administrators made the recovery in their student's attendance quicker.
- (v) In the month of February most of the elementary and high school conducted free uniform distribution and this drive also increases the student's attendance to an extent.
- (vi) In the month of March most of the primary schools conducted their final evaluation test and this increases student's attendance.
- (vii) In High and Higher Secondary Schools the season for high school leaving certificate final and higher secondary school leaving final examinations are going to be conducted respectively and

for these various exam related matters like registration, collection of admit card are going on so their attendance is also on the positive side of recovery.

- (viii) Some teachers tried to approach to many students home, which also helped increase their attendance.

## CONCLUSION:

From the above study it is seen that the habit of doing anything is not to be overlooked and as a country we have to have a plan for facing such pandemic or disasters in future and for students attendance teachers should also be trained to teach not only in conventional mode but also some modern techniques and tools be used and the framework of teaching learning should need serious changes not only nationally but also globally. Quality of teachers is also a crucial matter for bringing students to the classroom or teaching room. Teaching should not be limited to classroom it should now come out of its orthodox box and for that teachers should also be taught the ways imparting lessons in the new framework it.

## FURTHER STUDIES:

- (i) The same can be done in case of private schools.
- (ii) The area of the survey can be different and if only urban or only village areas are taken into consideration then some other output may come.

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