

COVID-2019 DISRUPTION IN EDUCATION AND LESSONS FOR FUTURE

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Abstract

The COVID-19 Pandemic created a huge disruption in education resulting in the closures of Schools all over the world. The Educational institutes in our country shifted to online measures of teaching. These measures however didn't prove adequate thereby resulting in the loss of learning. In the Second wave of Pandemic, It is estimated that roughly 286 million school-children could not continue their education in schools, and were taught through remote learning from their home. The governments and International Organizations have come forward to address the learning loss.

Keywords: Disruption, online education, digital divide, digital access, reluctance, impact

Introduction

The COVID-19, Pandemic primarily a health scare, that saw its emergence in the month of January 2020 in India, has touched all the facets of human life, education included. In absence of any medication then, the only way to stay safe was social and physical distancing (Saha, et.al, 2020), or sort of complete restriction in the movement of Individuals. What is called in common parlance —Total Lockdown. Most of the countries initially had a dilemma of choosing between locking down everything thereby maintaining social distance, and saving lives or keeping everything open for retaining the health of their economies. All Countries world over took a conscious call to close schools, colleges and universities, though the call was sudden and abrupt. Within a month of WHO declaring the COVID 19 pandemic, 91% of the student population found themselves locked down in their homes, staying away from go to schools, colleges and universities. Approximately 1.5 billion students across the world were deprived of basic education (Lee 2020) Indian situation was no different; the Educational Institutions within a span of 24 hours followed the Govt. Orders of complete lockdown.

India seemed to be doing very well in controlling the first wave of pandemic in the months of January and February 2021, a year into the COVID-19 pandemic. However, since March there has been a significant rise in the number of cases. From April 2021, the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has hit India hard. (UNICEF, April 2021). This has resulted in huge Disruptions to education in India. It is estimated that approximately 286 million school-children were unable to continue their education in schools, with remote learning from home becoming the only option. With a greater number of children and young people affected during this second wave, (UNICEF April, 2021), It is anticipated that schools may remain closed until August 2021.

Disruption in Education

The pandemic induced lockdown and shutting down of schools led to the loss of basic ability in children in mathematics and language, a study by Azim Premji University 2020 found that 92% of children on average have lost at least one specific language ability and 82% of children on average have lost at least one specific mathematical ability from the previous year across all classes. The loss in learning is steeper for mathematics than reading, and it is especially acute for upper-grade students (Kuhfeld et. al. 2020, Kuhfeld and Tarasawa 2020)

As the world comes to terms with the scale and severity of the COVID-19 pandemic, the health of the global population is rightly taking priority over education for the time being. For today's students, the second outbreak of corona virus means a huge loss of learning time, with potential repercussions for their schooling and careers in the years to come. Stressing upon the severity of the pandemic and efforts to salvage the humanity from the negative impact of the virus, UNESCO Director General on March 24, 2020 assured that "UNESCO is fully committed to supporting Govts. For distance learning, open science, knowledge and cultural sharing, as fundamental means to stand together and tighten the bonds of shared humanity'

Shifting from offline mode to the online mode of Education

Schools and Higher Education Institutes had no choice but to go with the online mode of teaching and learning, since it was the only panacea for Education. The Education Ministry in India announced "Online is the apparent solution" (Amandeep Shukla, Hindustan Times, May 3, 2020). New teaching methods for the delivery of education online were introduced to prevent further interruptions to students' studies. (Johnson et. al., 2020; Di Pietro

et. al., 2020). Shifting to the online mode of teaching and learning is a difficult process (Kapasia et al. 2020).

While these measures are not absolute, they have proved inadequate and could have long-term consequences on the lives of students. (Cohen et al. 2020).

Challenges of Online Education in India Poor Digital Access and Digital Divide

In a country like ours, transitioning from face-to-face teaching to online learning was quite a challenge. However, educational institutes in major cities of India could make, some progress towards online learning. Most students living in TIER II and TIER III cities cannot easily access the internet due to inaccessibility of smartphones and other devices, high costs of data, poor broadband connectivity, as well as inefficient use of technology.

The India Internet report 2019 has documented that 51% population from major cities and 27% of the rural population has the luxury of internet access thus leaving a vast majority of student population, from the reach of education "There has been a technological curve for us to scale. In rural areas and among the economically weaker section, access to e-learning has been a major issue due to bandwidth connectivity issues"(Amita Wattal, 2020).

Two-thirds of the world's children, i.e. 1.3 billion people between the ages of 3-17 years, did not have internet connection in their homes, preventing them from learning vital skills needed to compete, in the modern economy, the UN report revealed. Even the students between 15-24 years unconnected at home were around 63 per cent, i.e. about 759 million. Online measures and procedures taken were knee jerk reactions not fully thought through, somewhat half baked, insufficient, and inadequate. However, not everyone is online ready.

The digital divide in the country and the lack of online content in regional languages (Amandeep Shukla, Hindustan Times, May 3, 2020) becomes a major cause of disrupter of continuing education through online mode

Reluctance to Online Mode of Teaching

Most Indian educators and teachers viewed online training with skepticism, questioning its approach, accessibility, and efficacy . The time spent by students on online classes did not comply with the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD) (Department of School Education & Literacy Ministry of Human Resource Development 2020). Limited class interaction and inefficient time table significantly affected the satisfaction levels among students and efficient digital infrastructure and digital skillset for both students and teachers are still posing a challenge. So called online classes are ineffectively executed video forms of rational classrooms (Ramaswamy and Babu, June 27, 2020).

Stress Emanating From the Families

Along with the digital divide, the stress of their parents due to death of an icing member in the family , job loss of parents, loss of health care and child care make it much harder for these, families to attend to children who are being home schooled and are struggling with ad-hoc efforts at remote learning. (Garcia and Weiss September 10, 2020).

Impact on Education

Despite our advancement in science, technology and Education, the present scenario has thrown a huge challenge at our preparedness, exposed the fault lines and raised many questions. Some of the following questions definitely need the attention of academicians, educators, policy makers and teachers as well.

- What are the areas which require immediate attention of the authorities for providing uninterrupted education across various verticals of gender, class, caste, geographical regions etc.?
- Could the changed styles of teaching and learning remain there forever, or post pandemic, we will continue with our traditional styles of teaching and learning? Are these Changed styles of teaching adequate and sufficient?
- Are we a digitally inclusive society to change to online mode of teaching? Are our teachers skilled enough for this Changed style of teaching?
- Do we need to upscale the budget for our Education? What would be the future budgets in education?
- Isn't that an extra cost for parents and teachers?
- Are we on the threshold of a changed world order — a new era that will be significant turning point in the world history?
- Whether this disruption will lead to any substantial change in our lives?

Though these questions can find an answer in the future, but we have seen some short term changes happening in the fore front of Education. This disruption has resulted in most governments around the world having temporarily closed educational institutions in an attempt to contain the spread of the pandemic. Though in some cases , teaching is moving online and schools seeking parental involvement through home schooling) Not only teaching is moving to an online mode but Student assessments are also moving online or new strategies of the assessments are thought of , with a lot of trial and error and uncertainty for everyone. Many School Boards have simply been cancelled their assessments. Importantly, these interruptions will not just be a short-term issue, but can also have long-term consequences for the affected cohorts and are likely to increase inequality.

According to Blandine Ledoux and Kati Segniagbeto(2019) the crisis will have a significant impact at two different levels:

1. There is a huge risk to the most marginalized populations .Many of the students from such sections of the society may never return to their class rooms once the Pandemic is over, it may be more so true in the case of girls. There will be a measurable loss in the acquisition of basic skills, particularly for the most disadvantaged children (Quinn et al. 2016; Cattaneo et al. 2017). It is highly likely that the current pandemic will have a dramatic long-term impact on students' competencies and increase existing education inequalities.
2. It will adversely affect the education systems in low-income countries .The Governments need to come forward with extra budgetary allocations in the Education sector and such additional resources for not so rich countries may be an area of concern.

However we have seen UNESCO coming in support of countries in their efforts to mitigate the immediate impact of school closures, particularly for more vulnerable and disadvantaged communities, and to facilitate the continuity of education for all through remote learning. Continued Education must be ensured when so many children today cannot go to school (UNESCO Director General on March 24, 2020).

The Way Forward

It is argued by some the Education and health will receive a tremendous impetus by the governments across the globe. It will provide fresh opportunities for these countries to make renewed efforts for changing the dynamics of Education.

Blandine Ledoux and Koffi Segniagbeto (2019) also point out that the crisis will provide lessons that can be used as opportunities. 'It has the potential to transform educational service delivery in many countries, especially distance learning. Countries that are able to take advantage of this will prepare themselves well for the future of education in the 21st century.' In addition, they add, 'school health has never received the attention it deserves in the educational programmes of developing countries. This crisis is undoubtedly an opportunity to redesign curricula to give school health the place it deserves.

The International Commission on the Futures of Education, established by UNESCO in 2019 has recommended the following ideas. The Commission is of the view that the ideas if implemented will address the issues of quality in education. These ideas can work well for the education which got hugely disrupted during COVID 19 pandemic.

1. Commitment to strengthening education as a common good. Two important indices for the progress of nations is Health and Education, the Govt. should strive to work on these indices in order to improve them.
2. Redefining the meaning of the right to education .Right to education should address the issues of connectivity and easy access to teaching and learning through digital means also.
3. Valuing teacher collaboration. For the cause, of educating the children, families and communities must come together and collaborate with the school teachers. Complete autonomy and flexibility to act collaboratively with parents must be provided to the teachers.
4. Encouraging the participation of the students, youth in Education. The students and youth should be given enough opportunities encouragement and for the effective participation in the Process of Education.
5. Transforming the physical spaces of school. The physical space of the school must become the platforms for creating social awareness for satiating the pangs of hunger, malnutrition and poverty.
6. Ensuring the availability of free and open source technologies .One of the most important recommendation made by the commission is easy accessibility of Open educational resources and digital tools. The Educators and the students should work in a collaborative approach to develop content and pedagogies to suit the needs of the students.
7. Incorporating scientific knowledge in the curriculum. The stakeholders of Education have to reflect deeply on curriculum, pedagogy and place a major emphasis in the pursuit of scientific knowledge.
8. Protecting domestic and international financing of public education. The pandemic has weakened the several decades of progress and advancement. The governments world over, the international organizations, and all other agencies of education and development must come forward to strengthen protect and finance Education systems public health and other social services .
9. Addressing issues of inequality through global solidarity. The pandemic has exposed the fault lines of our societies, power imbalances in a global context and how global system exploits inequalities."

The Indian Scene

Ministry of Education, Govt. of India has come out with a Comprehensive COVID document on 4th May, 2021 .The document outlines detailed action plan involved on Access, Retention, Continuous Learning, Capacity Building and Stakeholder engagement. The document also has highlighted the following measures for making sustained efforts for making Education accessible and equitable along with ensuring quality in education.

- ❖ Identifying out of schoolchildren and integrating them into the mainstream, as well as ensuring long-term enrolment, retention, and transition;
- ❖ Ensuring cognitive development of students and sound Academic learning
- ❖ Up scaling the skills of teachers for blended and home-based learning including student assessments processes.
- ❖ Providing the support for nutrition, for socio-emotional wellbeing; Facilitating Digital education and monitoring, tracking and remediation.

In addition, in light of the current pandemic scenario, the government has incorporated the following components of Samagra Shiksha into unique and targeted actions.

- Providing supplementary material to children for enhanced learning
- Enhancing the Library funds for providing of reading material to students
- Providing special training Children with Special Needs and out of School children.
- Support for out of school children of age group 16 to 19 years through NIOS/State open schools.
- SMC training for Enhanced community participation and parental support
- Making Teaching learning Material available at ECCE and at primary level
- Using the resources of village Panchayat's for online learning
- Leveraging electronic media for content dissemination
- Providing Special Grants to schools for sanitization and hygiene
- Grants to teachers to raise knowledge of internet safety and security and to enable them to utilize online educational resources.
- Promoting online content development and dissemination by providing adequate financial assistance.
- Grants for teachers for accessing NISHTHA training over DIKSHA platform.
- Composite school grants to maintain learning continuity, with at least 10% going to water, sanitation, and hygiene in schools.
- Ad-hoc grants of Rs 5228 crores have been approved for the states under the Samagra Shiksha scheme and we expect an additional amount of Rs. 2,500 crores to be released soon to ensure continuity of various educational initiatives.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed potential and weaknesses while revealing human resourcefulness. It is a time for pragmatic and quick action, but it is also a moment when we cannot neglect science. Blandine Ledoux and Koffi Segniagbeto (2019) point out that the crisis will provide lessons that can be used as opportunities. 'It has the potential to transform educational service delivery in many countries, especially distance learning. Countries that are able to take advantage of this will prepare themselves well for the future of education in the 21st century.' In addition, they add, 'school health has never received the attention it deserves in the educational programmes of developing countries. This crisis is undoubtedly an opportunity to redesign curricula to give school health the place it deserves.'

An educational emergency plan with social and educational objectives will be needed to restore children's socio-emotional and cognitive skills. The individual and social costs of not intervening are just too high, unfair and unequal. It is the responsibility of states and countries to ensure the right to education in these difficult times.

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