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Challenges of Primary Educational Stakeholders During Covid-19 towards Learning

Abstract

A pandemic is a highly contagious sickness outbreak that has a dynamic impact on the economy, technology, and education. It proved to be difficult for some people and an opportunity for others. According to the current research, the educational hurdles that the underprivileged population encountered during COVID–19 were made worse for them by a widening digital divide, poor levels of literacy among people in lower economic groups, and income inequality. The purpose of this descriptive study is to examine the challenges faced by different parties involved in government primary schools in the Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh, India, particularly during the pandemic, including parents, teachers, students, and administrators. Here, the researcher separated the data into six themes for analysis. Through discussion, the authors of this study highlight the difficulties faced by school administrators, including a lack of necessities, socioeconomic disparities, and inadequate training for remote instruction.

Keywords: Challenges, COVID-19, Primary Schools, Stakeholders, Technology

Introduction

World Health Organization (2020) describes coronavirus disease (COVID-19) as an infectious illness brought on by a recently identified coronavirus. The UNESCO (2020) study states that as of mid-April 2020, it has affected over 90% of all students worldwide; by June 2020, that number has dropped to approximately 67%. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected over 120 crore students and young people worldwide (Reimers, 2022). Over 32 crore students in India have been impacted by the numerous limitations and the countrywide COVID-19 ban (Tadesse & Muluye, 2020). Approximately 14 crore primary and 13 crore secondary students—the two most affected levels in India—are impacted (UNESCO, 2020). The World Health Organization states that maintaining social isolation should be the first line of defence against the coronavirus pandemic. Therefore, a lockdown was implemented in every country to segregate the affected individuals. There were closures of educational institutions such as schools and colleges (Sinha & Bagarukayo, 2019). In addition to the classes being suspended, all examinations for schools, colleges, and universities, including entrance exams, were postponed indefinitely. As a result, the lockout destroyed every student's schedule. In the annals of education, COVID's chance to shift from the rigorous classroom teaching paradigm to a new era of digital models is unparalleled, (Onaga,2023). Due to the lockdown, numerous educational institutions were forced to postpone their classes, exams, internships, and other events in favour of online options (Gillett, 2017). Teachers and students were initially confused and unaware of how to manage the situation when this unexpected disaster caused the closure of instructional activities. However, as time passed, everyone realised how much the lockdown had taught them about handling pandemics of this kind. Consequently, COVID brought challenges as well as opportunities for educational institutions to upgrade their facilities (Chang, 2012). The lockout has given educators and learners a glimmer of hope that online education will endure. Instructors use online applications such as Zoom, Google Meet, Facebook, YouTube, and Skype to conduct lectures and assign homework to students (Appu,2017). For effective communication, there are WhatsApp groups for parents, teachers, kids, and guardians where they can stay in touch and share their struggles. A similar thing occurs in India, where not all students have access to high-speed internet and technological devices, and they consequently suffer. Numerous modern educational institutions in India are now not digitally equipped to handle the abrupt transition from the traditional educational setup to the online educational system. With that students from privileged backgrounds were able to learn as they got the support from their parents and had alternative learning opportunities. However, the underprivileged remained shut inside their homes when schools were shut down. This disparity reveals many lacunas in our education system. Undoubtedly, efforts were made by the educational administrators for learning continuity. For those who had experience in "conventional classrooms," which were familiar environments for them, online teaching and learning would still be a hurdle (Spinelli et al., 2020). As a result, during the COVID-19 epidemic, educational administrators, such as principals and headmasters of government schools, encountered significant difficulties in upholding programmes, directing instructors, and coordinating the academic and auxiliary tasks of the school (Hyseni & Hoxha, 2021).

The formal education process starts with primary schooling. A child's primary education is a critical stage in their development, and the learning environment they experience there can have a lasting impact on them. During this stage, children leave their home setting for the first time to engage with and exchange ideas with children their age, which helps them develop their communication and confidence abilities (Mahmud, 2020). Prominent Cognitivist Albert Bandura in his Social Learning Theory, is on based that we learn in a social context from our interactions with others (Tadayon & Mohammad, 2012). Separately, when a child will observe the behaviours of Others, they develop similar behaviours. According to Bandura, imitation involves the actual reproduction of observed motor activities (Bandura, 1977). We consider the primary education of a child to be the first step towards his development and learning opportunities. The purpose of primary education is to make the child learn basic numerical and literacy skills. The National Education Policy, 2020 also emphasises that early literacy and numeracy development can be completed in the foundation stage, which is primarily focused on learning about the alphabet, languages, numbers, counting, colours, shapes, drawing and painting, indoor and outdoor play, puzzles and logical thinking, art, craft, music, and movement (NEP 2020). However, because they were getting their information from WhatsApp, elementary students, especially those attending government schools, suffered significant literacy challenges throughout the pandemic. Teachers found it more challenging to instruct students effectively online since they lacked the necessary training in this area. However, students attending government schools are typically from underprivileged backgrounds and struggle to make ends meet. For them, owning a smartphone with internet access is a fantasy.

Stake of Policy on Foundational stage

According to NEP 2020, a child's early years are the most important for their lifetime development as well as their physical, cognitive, and socioemotional progress. Many kids attend school to receive high-quality education. The care and education of children from birth to eight years old is referred to as Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in policy (National Curriculum Framework, 2005). Important components of early childhood education (ECCE) include self-help abilities, motor skills, hygiene, managing separation anxiety, physical development through movement and exercise, and feeling at ease among peers (Rashid, 2021). To nurture and develop a child's innate abilities and capacities of curiosity, creativity, critical thinking, cooperation, teamwork, social interaction, empathy, compassion, inclusivity, communication, cultural appreciation, playfulness, awareness of the immediate environment, and the ability to successfully and respectfully interact with teachers, fellow students, and others, supervised play-based education—in groups as well as individually—is especially important during this age range (NEP, 2020).

Globally, researchers also faced a similar concern (Tadesse & Muluye, 2020) found in their study that distance learning was challenging in developing countries because many parents had not been to school, and lacked ICT infrastructures, computers, radio, and television. The poor and digitally illiterate families with lower educational levels and children with poor learning motivation are more suffering in this situation and this increases inequality. Students in most rural areas may be forced to fully support their families in cattle herding and farming.

Need of the Study

Many parents, teachers, and students were attempting to adjust to a new "normal" and the difficulties associated with online learning because of the coronavirus that forced the closure of schools. One of the challenges with online schooling that has not received much attention is that it exposes the socioeconomic disparities that millions of families face. Regretfully, a lot of students lack the tools, resources, or surroundings necessary to learn and meet academic standards. Additionally, the Global Education Monitoring Report (2023) confirmed that while 91% of countries used online learning systems, just 25% of students worldwide could access these platforms.

There is now some hope for teachers and students to continue their educational activities online because of the lockout (Ali, 2020). In government schools, the method of teaching and learning has been altered to include explanation videos of textbook content instead of PDFs. This has affected how students learn in traditional classroom settings and seemingly increased the difficulties faced by educators and administrators.

A study was carried out from August 2020 to May 2021, during the pandemic, to determine the role that educational administrators played in helping the primary government schools in a Saharanpur district solve the issues that parents, teachers, and students were facing. The annual value of exports from the wood carving industry of Saharanpur is about Rupees 400-500 crores and it supports the livelihood of about 150,000 artisans. These illiterate artisans hardly earn 10,000 Rupees per month which is fulfilling their life survival. So, there are compelling reasons to research the children of these artisans who get enrolled in government schools and the challenges they faced during the pandemic at the time of lockdown (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020). Similarly, research conducted by Save the Children Romania (2023) titled "The Impact of COVID-19 on Children of Romania" emphasised the detrimental consequences of education during the pandemic. Due to limited access to online education, the pandemic exacerbated social and educational disparities. Individuals were subjected to marginalisation and prejudice, which further contributed to their psychological and educational consequences. With all the difficulties that our country was facing, researchers were compelled to look into the recurring problems that parents, teachers, administrators, and kids were having and how they could all work together to find solutions.

Objectives

➢ To study the resources and support that school administrators provided to parents and students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

➢ To study the challenges and strategies used by educational administrators to address them.

Research Design

The current study has a descriptive design and is qualitative in nature. In the current study, convenience sampling was used to pick 15 Basic Primary Government schools in the Saharanpur district (Saharanpur Block). Additionally, purposive sampling was used to select parents

and two school students, a boy, and a girl, from each school. The researcher created a schedule of interviews for parents and students and a questionnaire for teachers and the principal/head teacher of the school. Table 1

Demographic for Sample

Types of Samples	Collected Sample
Number of Govt. schools in urban area (Administrators)	15
Number of Parents	40
Number of Teachers	30
Number of Students enrolled in primary classes	50

Research Tools

In this research, two questionnaires were developed, one for teachers and one for school administrators. One of the questionnaires consisted of 15 items to know the challenges of teachers regarding online teaching during COVID-19 and another questionnaire was developed for Principal/Head Teacher to know their challenges regarding administration, which contains 12 items and two Interview schedules were developed for parents and students of primary classes respectively. These schedules were developed to know the challenges regarding online learning that they faced during the pandemic. Both the schedules were self-developed.

Major Findings and Discussions

Theme-1 Benefits of Online Education

✓ People are encouraged to favour online learning during the COVID-19 shutdown period for the following reasons: Online learning is advantageous since it offers instant accessibility to learning.

✓ The ability to learn took place when the students were at home.

✓ Little disease transmission while preserving social seclusion.

✓ Online education provides flexibility.

✓ Students can learn at their own pace owing to it.

✓ With a dependable internet connection, students can use PCs, laptops, tablets, or mobile phones to learn anywhere.

Theme-2 Socio-Technological Gap

Even though virtually all educational stakeholders benefit from online learning, many people still do not agree with this. Sociological or

technological factors could be at play, such as the fact that not everyone has easy access to computers and that internet connections represent a significant barrier for developing and rural regions (Ray, 2010). In addition, Bairagya et al. pointed out that while technology has many benefits, we should be mindful of digital inequality, which could have a significant negative influence on children who have abundant resources vs those who do not (Thomas, 2020). Online learning has become a viable choice and is practical in most industrialised nations where most students and teachers have access to personal computers and the Internet

Theme-3 Lack of basic survival needs

According to data on school education in India gathered by NUEPA in 2016, students from underprivileged social groups are more negatively impacted by economic shocks when it comes to their education (NUEPA, 2016). This statistic illustrates the socioeconomic circumstances of the underprivileged segment of society before the epidemic. Because their parents are usually daily wage earners, students at government schools were not fed during the lockdown and were forced to make do with the fewest supplies available to them. It is beyond their means to have smartphones and cover their data costs. Despite this, they used the money they got at the midday meal to purchase necessities.

Theme-4 Stress leading factors among the administrators

Head of instructions by the government, overseeing the students' education during a pandemic, humiliating them in Mohalla Classes, distributing food through government programmes, and explaining those directives to the parents of the students who lack literacy put principals under a lot of strain (Magdalena, 2023). Many schemes by the government refrained school administration from carrying on the academic work, which is another major bone of contention (Reimers, 2022) highlighted in their study that teachers' workload and stress have also been increased while creating communication and organizational challenges among school staff and between them and the parents.

Theme-5 Socio-economic Gaps

Teachers find it difficult to convey material from books since students from labour class groups rarely organise their devices, and explaining material through WhatsApp videos is particularly difficult for them (Yu, 2010). The pandemic has widened the socioeconomic divide between parents, which is a risk factor for their future education

because they are now forced to work to ensure their family's survival. For a parent who belongs to a disadvantaged group in society, this is the biggest problem.

Theme-6 Untrained for Online teaching

Principals as well as teachers had not received training regarding teaching online, they got the guidelines only from the authorities to teach through WhatsApp by sending PDFs of textbook worksheets or notes and making videos of the chapters from the books. In addition to this, teachers who worked remotely had to meet higher expectations in terms of working hours and learning requirements due to COVID disruptions, but again there has been inconsistent reaction in terms of training. Teachers were expected to incorporate technology into their pedagogy, student assessment, parent-student relationships and professional development (GEMR, 2023).

Likewise, the findings of this study also corroborated the finding that dealing with quarantine is a particularly stressful experience for parents who must balance personal life, work, and raising children, being left alone without other resources (Maria et al., 2020). This situation puts parents at a higher risk of experiencing distress, potentially impairing their ability to be supportive caregivers. The lack of support these children receive in such a difficult moment may be the reason for their more pronounced psychological symptoms. Policies should take into consideration the implications of the lockdown for families' mental health, and supportive interventions for the immediate and the future should be promoted.

An online survey of over 20,000 instructors across 165 countries, conducted by Zoomer et al., (2020) and Pota et al., (2021), reveals that 27% of teachers utilised technology to assess students daily throughout the pandemic, 29% did so weekly, and 20% did so once or twice a month.

Conclusion

The results showed that since students will not answer questions or get their doubts answered, teaching has essentially become a one-sided activity when distant learning techniques are used. Arora & Srinivasan's (2020) study also mentions lack of awareness, inadequate training, and network problems as obstacles teachers must overcome. Less attendance, a lack of intimacy, and a lack of contact because of connectivity problems were among the drawbacks (Arora & Srinivasan, 2020). Parents are making an effort to help their children by instructing them, watching classes on television, and making sure

that assignments given by instructors are finished. Still, just four or five pupils have been able to connect with a single teacher each day. Teachers may visit students at home to go over the material, respond to inquiries, and check assignments. As a way to check in on the student's progress, some instructors have also scheduled monthly parent-teacher conferences on the school grounds. With parents returning to work, it has become more difficult to stay in touch with students. While some educators tried to set up lessons via video conferences, this was rarely successful.

Educational Implications

➢ Due to their status as members of the underprivileged and lack of access to basic learning resources during the epidemic, students at urban primary government schools encountered numerous difficulties with online learning (Picciano, 2017).

➢ Teachers' primary duties will be to assist students in their academic endeavours and to act as mentors to them, as their mental and physical health has suffered throughout this period due to the inequality gap that has been exacerbated by COVID-19 (Jindal & Chahal, 2020).

➢ Teaching students creates difficulties because of the extensive changes in their prior knowledge and learning capacities. Additionally, in online classrooms, students should be provided with recommendations on how to focus better and be acknowledged for their unique personalities (Jena, 2020).

➢ In sequence for future educators to be informed about the pedagogy of online teaching, it is important to recognise the difficulties that teachers face during the online teaching and learning process while developing regulations or curricula for pre-service teachers (Swan, 2017).

➢ It is time to modernise our teaching strategies and find new ways to engage pupils intellectually while we are not physically present.

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डॉ0 मंजू गुप्ता
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डॉ0 राधाकृष्णन जी के शिक्षा सम्बन्धी विचारों की वर्तमान समय में प्रासंगिकता

सार

स्वतन्त्र भारत के द्वितीय राष्ट्रपति एवं देश के सर्वोच्च सम्मान, 'भारत रत्न' के अतिरिक्त 'ऑर्डर ऑफ मेरिट' 'नाइट बैचलर' एवं 'टेम्पलटन' पुरस्कार से सम्मानित उच्चकोटि के दार्शनिक, लेखक, धर्मशास्त्री एवं प्रख्यात शिक्षाविद डॉ0 सर्वपल्ली राधाकृष्णन जी के शैक्षिक विचार वर्तमान शिक्षा प्रणाली को समुचित दिशा देने में आज भी उल्लेखनीय भूमिका अदा कर सकते हैं। उन्होंने ऐसी शिक्षा पर बल दिया जिससे विद्यार्थियों की आत्मोन्नति हो, वे ज्ञान प्राप्ति के क्षेत्र में आत्म-निर्भर बनें तथा जीवन की चुनौतियों से निपटने में स्वयं सक्षम हों। उनका दर्शन भारतीय संस्कृति के प्रति उदार दृष्टिकोण, बहुजन हिताय बहुजन सुखाय तथा विश्व बन्धुत्व की भावना से ओत-प्रोत रहा है। वर्तमान समय में उनके मानवतावादी दृष्टिकोण को अपनाये जाने की अत्यन्त आवश्यकता है।

मूल शब्दः सर्वपल्ली राधाकृष्णन, शिक्षाविद, विश्व-बन्धुत्व, प्रासंगिकता।