REVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON PRIMARY EDUCATION

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Abstract

The paper explores the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the subsequent closure of schools globally. The pandemic has caused irrevocable damage to the education system in human history affecting almost every country worldwide. The presented paper is an effort to understand and analyze the impact of learning loss, and its adverse effect on the learning outcomes of the upcoming generation. The loss of learning so caused is not simply the curricular learning that children's world had acquired if schools would have remained open but also include the ability to read, the ability to write and the ability to discuss; since all these abilities are the foundation to further learning. The author has reviewed various such studies done worldwide and the interventions carried out. Findings of these studies suggest that there is an adverse impact on marginalized children, girl children and children of migrant labourers. It also emphasizes the impact of learning loss in terms of language skills (reading, writing, speaking) along with the mathematical ability of the children. Another insight of the study is about the psychological stress on students, parents and caregivers due to the long closure of schools which is exponentially higher for vulnerable families. The catastrophe of education is also seen in learning poverty (the inability of a student to read and understand a simple story by the age of 10). This learning poverty is feared to be increased from 53% in low and middle-income countries to up to 70% due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The review comes out with various kinds of research done in this field and there is a need to take urgent action for minimizing the impact on all the stakeholders.

1. Introduction

Studies across the world have indicated that school closures during the 1st, 2nd & 3rd wave of the Covid-19 pandemic & subsequent lockdowns, have a significant negative impact on the learning levels of children, especially with children from disadvantaged backgrounds

being affected more **severely.** The COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries and all continents. Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94 per cent of the world's student population, up to 99 per cent in low and lower-middle-income countries[1]. The disruptions caused by COVID-19 to everyday life meant that as many as 40 million children worldwide have missed out on early childhood education in their critical pre-school year.[2] This **loss of learning** is not simply the curricular learning that children would have acquired if schools remained open. It includes the abilities that children have forgotten due to lack of usage.

2.Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic First, Second and Third Wave on Marginalized Children and Girls and Children of Migrant Labourers.

The impact of the pandemic is overwhelming for marginalized sections and girl children. A report by Child Fund India,[3] mentions that a delay in opening schools in India will increase 47 per cent in girl student dropouts rates which could further lead to an increase in child marriages, early pregnancy, gender-based violence and trafficking in future.[4]

The impact of the period of school closure in India has implications for strategies that the public education system and other stakeholders working with this system need to adopt in the coming months. The impact is expected to be heightened for children of migrant labourers who are expected to drop out of school to provide financial support to their families or have returned to their hometowns during lockdowns.[5] As reported by Action Aid Association (India),[6] during the first wave of the pandemic, approximately 18 per cent of migrant children accompanied their parents to a worksite, while the percentage rose closer to 100 per cent during the second wave. In India, around 1.47 lakh children lost one of their parents.[7]

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[1] UN report 'Education during COVID-19 and beyond(August2020)

[2] UNICEF, "Childcare in a global crisis: the impact of COVID-19 on work and family life", Gromada, Anna; Richardson, Dominic; Rees, Gwyther (2020). Childcare in a Global Crisis: The Impact of COVID-19 on work and family life, Innocenti Research Briefs no. 2020-18,

[3] Perception, Fears and Readiness for Reopening of Schools'report by Child Fund India (March 2021)

[4] UNESCO, "COVID-19 Education Response: How many students are at risk of not returning to school?" advocacy paper, June 2020

[5] The eighth edition of the ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work, Oct 2021

[6] Together Against Covid campaign by Action Aid Association (India),2020

[7] The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights report based on BAL SWARAJ PORTAL-COVID CARE.

The responses by teachers during ASER Survey ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) (Rural) 2020 Wave 1 and ASER (Annual Status of Education Report), 2020 Digital Recheck confirm the same. One of the responses is, "Last year the child who was in class 3 is now in class 4, and in the current session, very little has happened. So, in this situation, the child will be in class 5 (in the next session). How can that child be brought to class 5 learning level? Worse, mostly the situation is that some children have not even retained learning levels of class 3." (Teacher, Madhya Pradesh)

Recent global estimates suggest that school closures, unequal access to technology-based educational inputs used for remote learning, and other related disruptions due to the pandemic are likely to result in **'learning loss'** and **higher dropout rates**.[8]

2.1. Impact of Learning Loss

There is an increase in the share of upper primary-aged children across the world below the minimum level of proficiency by 25 per cent due to COVID-19. Data published by World Bank on 28 April 2021 indicates that 53 per cent of children in primary schools in low- and middle-income countries were living in learning poverty which may increase to 70%. Learning poverty indicates the inability of the students to read and understand a simple story by the age of 10. After analyzing the impact detailed guidelines' Students' Learning Enhancement Guidelines', were issued by, the Department of School Education M/o Education Govt. of India. A study, undertaken in January 2021 by Azim Premji University,[9] reveals the extent and nature of the 'forgetting regression' kind of learning loss (i.e., what was learnt earlier but has now been lost) among children in public schools across primary classes because of school closure during the COVID-19 pandemic.

(a) Learning loss in language: The observations show that 92% of children on average have lost at least one specific language ability from the previous year across all classes. 92% of children in class 2, 89% in class 3, 90% in class 4, 95% in class 5, and 93% in class 6 have lost at least one such specific ability from the previous class.

(b) Learning loss in Mathematics: 82% of children on average have lost at least one specific mathematical ability from the previous year across all classes. Illustratively, these specific abilities include identifying single- and two-digit numbers; performing arithmetic operations;

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[8] Learning Enhancement Guidelines by NCERT, August 2020
[9] The loss of learning for children during the pandemic, Field studies by Azim Premji University,2021

using basic arithmetic operations for solving problems; describing 2D/3D shapes; reading and drawing inferences from data. 67% of children in class 2, 76% in class 3, 85% in class 4, 89% in class 5, and 89% in class 6 have lost at least one such specific ability from the previous class.[10]

It is critical to understand that this learning loss is not limited to public schools. The learning of significant numbers of children in private schools has also been interrupted by the pandemic. As very little actual learning and 'online teaching' has occurred; mostly, instructions and supplemental resources have been shared.

(c) Learning for Teachers

Covid-19 is a new phenomenon not only for the learning process but also **for the teaching process**. Teachers also need to be sensitized to the need to ensure there is no learning loss in children and therefore adopt different means to reach each child. Teachers may be trained on the different formats for teaching-learning-assessment in online modes and offline modes for NDLD and LDLD students in particular. More than ever, it is now that teachers need to understand the need to focus on teaching and learning based on **Learning Outcomes** and assessing the child in a manner that measures the achievement of learning outcomes [11]

3. Rebound of SYSTEMS

Any remote teaching needs to be appropriate for the local context, considering issues such as availability, accessibility and affordability (Dabrowski et al., 2020).

The UN report 'Education during COVID-19 and beyond, August 2020 recommends ways to suppress the transmission of the virus, planning thoroughly for the reopening of schools, protect education financing and coordinating with all stakeholders, and strengthen the resilience of education systems for equitable and sustainable development. Reimagine education and accelerate positive change in teaching and learning urgently. But it fails to prepare any blueprint.

UNESCO, "COVID-19 Education Response: How many students are at risk of not returning to school?" advocacy paper, June 2020 observes that a massive number of students will be unlikely to return to their educational institutions unless urgent actions are taken. Measures must be systemic and multisectoral, including addressing both drivers of exclusion

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[10] The loss of learning for children during the pandemic, Field studies by Azim Premji University, 2021

[11] Survey of Ministries of Education on National Responses to COVID-19, jointly supported by UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank, April 2021

in education, such as **push** factors (those inherent to schools and education systems) and **pull** factors (those related to social, economic and cultural conditions). The crisis revealed that most, if not all, education systems were seriously unprepared and ill-adapted to ensuring continuity of inclusive education and learning and there was an urgent need to put in place learning systems that enable lifelong and life-wide learning opportunities for all.

The Childfund India survey was carried out in 20 backward districts in 10 states: Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal in November 2020. These states had witnessed a very heavy inflow of migrant labourers and their children faced immense challenges in re-enrolling in schools due to a lack of documents. Teachers state that a further delay in the opening of schools will increase the dropout rates of girls (47%), and child labour (52%), and widen the learning gap (57%). The report says 64% of Children worry that without additional educational support they will not be able to cope with the curriculum and may drop out; teachers worry about increased dropouts.

Azim Premaji University conducted the study covering 16,067 children in 1,137 public schools in 44 districts across 5 states. Effective school-level strategies will require to factor in these nuances, and this calls for a finer understanding through more detailed and continuing research in this area over the ensuing academic years.

Psychological Support for children during COVID 19 UNICEF, A manual for parents and caregivers focuses on the psychosocial care of children and prevention of violence in spaces where children stay (child care institutions, families, temporary isolation facilities, NGO shelters, etc. COVID-19 is also bringing new stress on parents and caregivers.

Survey of Ministries of Education on National Responses to COVID-19, jointly supported by UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank, April 2021 shows that the alternative modes of teaching and learning do not ensure **equitable quality learning for all students** due to various factors such as unequal distribution of time of teachers, students having differential access to technological devices, and lack of support for learning at homes in several cases. As a result, the closure of schools is likely to lead to loss of learning and deficiencies in the achievement of students' learning outcomes in a complex way.

Monitoring impacts on learning Outcomes (MILO) UNESCO project to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on learning outcomes and measure any learning loss by reporting against Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator 4.1.1b.(By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. indicator 4.1.1- Proportion of children and young people (a) in Grade 2 or 3; (b) at the end of primary education; and (c) at the end of lower secondary education achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex,)

PRAGYATA guidelines for digital education and the **DIKSHA** platform for teaching and learning; '**Anytime, Anywhere Learning' with** content for all including children with special needs are impressive initiatives. (Department of school education and literacy, MHRD, Government of India).

The National Council for Educational Research and Training (**NCERT**) developed the 5Ps Model- Patience, Planning, Preparation, Perspective, Perseverance for Effective Class Management during COVID 19. Learning Enhancement during COVID-19 for students was divided into 3 categories mainly a) for students without digital devices; b) for students with limited access to digital devices; c) for students with digital devices. Enhancing learning outcomes guidelines consists of Teacher capacity building for continuing teaching through different modes, Learning Outcomes, Curriculum mapped to learning Outcomes, Mental Health and Well-being, Social Distancing, Teacher-Parent-Community Partnership, Accessibility to various modes of digital Education – full, limited or none etc. Adapted modes of assessment, Special interventions for the differently-abled students and Identification of children of migrant labourers was stressed.

The Central Board of Secondary Education, KVS and NVS conducted a google survey in their schools and collected data from students, teachers, school principals, and parents on the present teaching-learning scenario. A total of 18188 students, 3543 teachers, 253 principals and 12614 parents participated in this survey. The survey sought to obtain information on participants" opinions about online education, and the use of different digital and other tools, of NCERT. The findings revealed that about 60-70% of the shared that the teaching and learning during the COVID-19 period were joyful and satisfactory. About 20-30% of stakeholders shared that they had difficult experiences and about 10-20% said that it

was burdensome for them. While about one-third of the students were comfortable with online assessments, the remaining 3/4 of students did not find them suitable.

The Annual Status of Education Survey (ASER) is conducted every year since 2005 by Pratham, a non-governmental organization operating in the field of education and has been publishing a report on Indian children's ability to do basic reading and arithmetic tasks. ASER 2020, Wave 1 survey focused on key questions regarding the provision of, access to, engagement with, and challenges concerning remote learning during school closures. What resources do families have to support children's learning at home? How are families and other community members helping children with learning activities? etc.

As per ASER, 2021 findings are; that at an all-India level, over 80% of children with parents who have studied up to Std IX or higher had a smartphone available at home, as compared to just over 50% of children whose parents had studied till Std V or less. However, even among children whose parents are in the 'low' education category, over a quarter bought a smartphone for their studies since March 2020. But mere smartphone availability does not translate into access for children as though over two-thirds of all enrolled children have a smartphone at home (67.6%), and over a quarter of these have no access to it (26.1%). Both these surveys gave a reasonably fair picture.

4. Assessing the Impact in Remote Areas of India

To find out the impact of the COVID Pandemic on primary education in different geographical locations, a study/survey was undertaken by the author. The Survey was conducted through questionnaires in Primary and Upper Primary schools which covered responses from Head Teacher/Principal, Teachers, Expert in Education and School going Children in various border areas of India, mainly Atari and Dera Baba Nanak in Punjab state bordering Pakistan, Ruxaul, Jogbani and Rupaidiha in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh bordering Nepal and Sutarkandi in Assam, Srimatpur in Tripura, Petrapole in West Bengal and Dawki in Meghalaya bordering Bangladesh. In addition, Moreh in Manipur state bordering Myanmar was also surveyed. The details of the study are indicated in Table 1.

The survey opines that there was a complete washout of the academic year for these areas. This compounding learning loss will expectedly be more for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who access the public school system. The surveyed schools/teachers; being remote to the remotest places in India were deprived of the network,

online education. 0% accessibility is reported in the survey. No Online classes were feasible due to a lack of network. In online classes where a network was available by any means only 30%-40% of children had smartphones. But due to connectivity being available only when electricity is available, severe connectivity issues being in remote areas, only 4 to 5 hours of teaching in a week was possible intermittently. Students' feedback is that no learning material was received during school closure, so education suffered. It also created a hindrance in learning for many. Thus, it is observed that students had to mostly rely on mobile phones for their teaching-learning.

Table 1: Impact of COVID-19 pandemic in Primary Schools in Border Areas of India

S.No.	Schools surveyed in	Border	No. of School	Head Teacher / Principal	Teacher	Expert in Education	Students	How the coronavirus pandemic & closing of physical schooling in 20-21 has affected the quality of education	How many students in your school have access to online education (%)	online classes for students or not during the entire pandemic situation from March 2020 onwards?
1.	Attari	India-Pakistan	5	5	3	1	1	Badly affected.	being remote a were deprived of the network, and online education for most of the school closure.	No classes
2.	Dera Baba Nanak	India-Pakistan	6	4	0	4	2	Regular learning is hampered.	No Response	No response
3.	Jogbani	India-Nepal	3	2	2	1	2	No Online teaching	nil	No classes
4.	Raxaul	India-Nepal	10	2	3	7	11	No Online teaching	nil	No classes
5.	Dawki	India–Bangladesh	3	3	3	0	3	Schools remained closed. No teaching as no connectivity	10% May be	No comment

6.	Petrapole	India – Bangladesh	4	4	4	4	4	Basic learning like reading, writing and speaking ability/skills among children is found to be affected.	30-40%	30 % maybe
7.	Srimantapur	India – Bangladesh	4	4	4	4	4	Regular learning is hampered.	25% May be	No Online classes
8.	Sutarkandi	Indo-Bangladesh	4	4	3	2	3	No Online teaching	Do not know	No Online classes
9.	Rupaidiha	India-Nepal	5	5	5	-	70	The physical social, and psychological-emotional aspects of learning among children are affected.	Online classes where the network was available by any mean was only 30%-40%	No online classes for most of the pandemic period.
10.	Moreh	India-Myanmar	3	2	3	4	3	No online classes were conducted due to the lack of infrastructure and inaccessibility of network in remote areas.	0% accessibility is reported in the survey	No Comment
Total			46	31	28	27	103			

Source: Authors Own Survey

5. Psychosocial Support for Children, Teachers and caregivers during COVID-19

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to expand in India and the world, only one thing is certain: the current outbreak will have a profound impact not only on the health and economic situation but also on the psychosocial well-being of societies across nations.

School closures are preventing children from access to learning and limiting their interactions with peers. Children may feel confused and at loss with the current situation, leading to frustration and anxiety, which will only increase with overexposure to mass and social media, especially among adolescents.[12] Levels of stress will be exponentially higher

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[12] Psychological Support for children during COVID 10 :A manual for parents and caregivers-UNICEF

among vulnerable families. For children who are children of migrant labour, there is a high likelihood of an increase in violence, including gender-based violence, domestic violence etc.

This has implications on the mental wellbeing of the students – an aspect which should be catered to with emergencies through curriculum and pedagogical changes. However, a business-as-usual approach as schools reopen will not work.[13]

1. Conclusion

Given the social, cultural and geographical diversity in the country, following only one model of teaching and learning will not work**.** Due to Poor Internet/ Network Connectivity/Signal. Sharing and use of the content for online classes was difficult through mobile phones. Lack of knowledge of using devices for effective educational purposes. Teachers were not well-versed with Online teaching methodologies.

Childhood is a critical period in any human's life, which marks the foundation of the personality and emotional resilience capacity of any person. The shock of the COVID-19 crisis on education has been unprecedented. It has set the clock back on the attainment of international education goals and disproportionately affected the poorer and most vulnerable. Principles of access, equity and inclusion that must form pillars of school education are likely to be further tested in these circumstances. The dramatic social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have brought the need for continued and regular monitoring of learning outcomes to the urgent attention of educational policymakers, practitioners and communities. Families, schools and educational systems were able to offset much of the impact of the disruption.

In a country like India characterized by multifarious diversity and constraints in terms of availability of resources (ICT infrastructure, electricity, budget, skilled manpower), switching over to digital modes of education was full of challenges. Local decentralized planning and implementation is the need of the hour for which various States/ UTs level organization such as School Boards, DIETs and National level organizations such as NCERT, CBSE, KVS, NVS need to join hands for a change that will sustain post-COVID-19 also.

Such collaboration is observed during this review. It is recommended to continue the teamwork in future. It will help to continuously enhance the quality of education and skill

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[13] Students' Learning Enhancement Guidelines, Govt. of India, M/o Education, Department of School Education and Literacy.

development of the large student population and we can then, leverage the demographic dividend in the coming years.

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