

INTERFACE BETWEEN THE PEDAGOGY AND RIGHT TO EDUCATION OF CHILDREN DURING COVID-19

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Abstract—COVID-19 caused unprecedented education crisis to the children population across the globe. The pandemic and its related policy responses – home quarantine and social distancing, have impacted nearly every part of children's worlds. Economic and social distraction caused by COVID-19 has serious impact on rights of child and their well being, especially right to education. Nationwide school closure during pandemic presents the destruction of children's education and teaching-learning process which ultimately has the serious long-run effect on children development and economy of the country. To continue the learning process and to limit the education loss, traditional classroom has been transformed to digital classroom to access education through virtual world. However, due to lack of resources and unstructured approach, the measures caused inequalities and serious adverse impact on the rights of education and development of the children. The study highlights the impact of online education on children during COVID-19.

Keywords: COVID-19, Right to Education, Online Education

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I. INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of novel corona virus COVID-19 has far-reaching, long-term and devastating impact on every facet –economic, health and education system, and all groups of people, more seriously the rights of children across the globe.¹ To respond the emergency situation and to limit the effect of COVID-19, most of the countries in the world have adopted a number of measures including social distancing, behavioural changes to home-isolation, closure of educational institutions, business-establishments and community and nationwide lockdown. Commotion caused by the COVID-19 posed serious risk to the children, particularly to their education, learning and wellbeing. Due to global learning crisis, the education sector has lost three decades of progress that is considered as the greatest education emergency in the modern history.²

While children have been spared from direct health effect of the COVID-19, almost in all countries, in all-ages children are affected by socio-economic impacts, and in particular areas, the mitigating measures have resulted inadvertent caused more harm than good. In some cases, it has immense lifelong impacts on children that caused pernicious risk and lead to the enduring effect for society as a whole. The COVID-19 caused widespread loss of job and income that led to the economic insecurity among families which increased risks of, *inter alia*, exposure of children to domestic violence, sexual exploitation, increase their anxiety and stress and condense access to essential family and care services. In addition, with the increase of death toll, a great number of children become orphan and exposed to abuse and exploitation.

The COVID-19 had an astounding impact on global education. As estimated by the United Nations Organization (UNO, 2020) almost 1.6 billion students in more than 190 countries across the globe has affected by the pandemic. It has impacted 94 per cent of the student population which gone up to 99 per cent in low and lower-middle countries in the world. The Report of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2020) reveals that the closures of educational institution across the world affected 9.1 million teachers out of which 63 million teachers are untrained and unable to coping up with the astounding challenges. The UNESCO Report reveals that nearly 32 crore student population have been affected due to nationwide lockdown to maintain social distancing and minimise effect of COVID-19 in India, where more than 13 crore children of 9 to 12 standards were severely impacted. To respond the crisis and to meet the dire need of the students, online learning is the best solution to disseminate and acquire knowledge by using technology

¹ On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of COVID-19 as a public health emergency of international concern (WHO, 2020a). On 11 March 2020, the WHO declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a global pandemic (WHO, 2021). Till 27 January 2021, 2,181,192 people died, and in 219 countries and territories 101,546,529 persons have been infected by the COVID-19.

² Save the Children, Hidden Impact of COVID-19 on Children's Education, 2020, 28.

and digital solutions. It keeps children connected to the outside world besides learning and entertained.

II. ONLINE LEARNING DURING COVID-19

Following worldwide lockdown due to COVID-19,³ the world had experienced a gigantic educational crisis. While India is facing major crisis in every sector, the nastiest smack sector is the educational sector, as the situations had been compelled to cancel most of the examinations for final assessments.⁴ It forced to immediate closing of schools and other educational institutions and suddenly moved to the rapid online learning approach through digital platforms without planning and testing that led to massive online learning movement in the history of education in India. Both government and non-government organisations and ed-tech companies have made their efforts to support the school system to make a smooth transition to the digital world. To facilitate the process, continuous efforts were made to provide customised teaching materials fit for virtual classes.

Such inadvertent challenges demonstrate how essential to develop technological knowledge and to maintain a healthy relationship with technology, to understand how to manage digital risk and become a responsible consumer of technology. While most of the educational institutions earlier reluctant to change the traditional pedagogy, the pandemic compelled to introduce digital classroom to mitigate the educational losses.

India has a huge education market with 1.3 billion population where 35 per cent of its population below 15 years of age.⁵ Indian school education system is regulated by different boards with unequal standards. The effect of COVID-19 hits the most to the poorest and rural educational institutions and widened the existing inequalities. Albeit the respective State government has mandated to provide sufficient infrastructure to the educational institutions, in the absence of premeditated action plan, the transcendent approach of learning had to face a number of challenges, *inter alia*, large student-teacher ratios, infrastructure and lack of technological training among teachers. Only a handful of teachers and students that could adopt and afford technology acquired benefits from it. In addition, massive digital divide is existed in urban and rural Indian schools. The pre-existing educational disparities exacerbated the crisis by reducing the

³ 188 countries across the globe have imposed countrywide lockdown. UNESCO 2020. 27 countries closed down before COVID-19 cases were recorded. CGD 2020.

⁴ The data shows that at least 58 countries and territories had to postponed or rescheduled examinations, whereas 11 countries had cancelled exams completely. UNESCO, 2020.

⁵ Pankaj Kumar Samantara, "COVID Challenges to India Education System", available at <<https://digitallearning.eletsonline.com/2020/06/covid-challenges-to-india-education-system/>> (last visited 18 February, 2021).

opportunities for many of the vulnerable children, who are living in poor and rural areas, to continue their learning.⁶

To ensure that there is no hiatus in the education and to minimise the impact of lockdown on teaching-learning process, the Government of India has introduced free digital online programs including Study Web for Active Young Expiring Minds (SWAYAM), National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER), DIKSHA portal, e-Pathshala, SWAYAM Prabha, National Digital Library of India (NDLI), etc.⁷ Besides, e-VIDYA platform, launched by Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi with 12 new DTH channels, one for each class to reach out to all strata of society. The primary objective of the initiative is to facilitate students and teachers for interaction through digital platform for further learning. It was expected that students would get full opportunities to access to classes by using the digital platforms that help the students to obtain study materials, allow them to engage in online classes and interact with the teachers like physical classroom setting. Such efforts are beneficial to a sizable segment of the school-going population.

The new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 also emphasises for digitalization of Indian education system. Survey carried out by the National Statistical Office (NSO) in 2017-18 has already been highlighted the probable danger from sudden swing to online education in India. The survey shows that since three-fourth students in the country does not have the facility to access internet at home and in absence of comprehensive action plan and infrastructure, there is a risk of excluding a great number of students from its benefits. The study also highlights that 89 per cent student population do not possess computer and digital devices. It manifestly reflects that sudden move towards online teaching during pandemic, though in theory a significant number of students have accessed online teaching, in practice, they have to adopt inconvenient approach viz. smart phone, as a substitute of computers. Even a section of poor students, who could not manage to acquire smart phones, remain beyond the benefits of online education.

III. EFFECTIVENESS OF ONLINE EDUCATION

To meet the unprecedented and unanticipated catastrophe in the field of education that emanates from nationwide closure of educational institutions, digital classroom is the only and best option for transferring and sharing knowledge to mitigate effects of crisis on education. It was designed to facilitate the students to continue the learning process by providing flexible time schedules for classes and places along with quality contents during home quarantine. Digital devices and internet facilities have assisted the children, teachers, parents,

⁶ United Nations, Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and Beyond (August 2020) 1.

⁷ Ministry of Human Resources Development, Press Release, 21 March, 2020.

authorities and caregivers to access quality resources to continue teaching and schooling from home.

Objective of the initiation is to make education equally and easily accessible to all the children- both rural and urban and public and private educational institutions. Unlike physical school-based education, sharing the education through online platform is cheaper as to cost of transportation, accommodation, school fee, and other expenses. Along with point-black lectures with technology it may engender blended learning and flipped classrooms which contribute to develop interest and learning potential of children.⁸ It helps children to learn any time and from anywhere that ultimately contributes to develop the enduring process of learning. Digital technology also provides space for children's recreational activities and embrace with psychological and social supports. It assists public interaction amongst children and contributes to digital savviness.

Worldwide studies carried out by the Save the Children highlights that 96% schools were completely closed- either physically or remote learning, 2% schools was remotely open and 2% of schools was open in-person only for attendance.⁹ The study shows that 67% of children had no contact at all with teachers, where 73% children with disability and 66% children without disability did not have any contact with the teachers during closure of schools.¹⁰

IV. POSITIVE IMPACT OF E-LEARNING

During lockdown efforts had been made to maintain continuity of teaching-learning process by using digital technology in place of traditional schooling. As a result, currently education system is undergoing a silent revolution. The integration of digital tools with education has revolutionized school education system. Traditional schooling is now increasingly proliferated with virtual training materials and online courses. Even in the traditional tired and testing schooling systems and curricula, the most successful schools are those who have adopted the needs of the changing time and meet the expectations of the students, parents and society.

Unlike the classroom teaching, virtual classes insist to maintain self-discipline and greater amount of incentive and motivation. It requires setting one own goals, track progress and meeting deadlines. To make the teaching-learning process more effective, it facilitates with discussion forums, email and head-to-head support. In virtual space, animations can also be used

⁸ Shivangi Dhawan, "Online Learning: A Panacea in the Time of COVID-19 Crisis", available at <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0047239520934018>>, (last visited 18 February 2021).

⁹ Save the Children, Hidden Impact of COVID-19 on Children's Education, 2020, 23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*1

interactively for effective learning and communication. Students of higher classes in the school look for more autonomy and intellectual freedom; digital learning can assist them to pursue highly individualised learning programmes. Combined with personal interaction, real world exploration, and thorough assessments through digital world, can be highly beneficial to children's learning process. Students, who have accessed these opportunities, will greatly be beneficial for rest of their learning life.

Digital learning also provides the opportunities for the socially and economically weaker students, who have limited learning resources – teachers, textbooks and infrastructure, connecting them with the global network of e-learners, and exposing them to new ideas. Ultimately it democratizes the whole education system.

E-learning assists to create a curriculum strictly accordingly to the prescribed standards and distributes information uniformly among children. E-learning helps to reduce the chances of teachers getting cluttered between facts and opinions.

Before integration of e-learning during lockdown, a great number of student populations could not get the opportunity to access computers, tablets and even internet. Virtual teaching-learning programme acquainted children with the digital world and assists students to properly use the digital devices. Through this process children could acquire knowledge from home by maintain social distancing and thereby contributed to minimise the effect of COVID-19.¹¹

A sizable number of children routinely connected to the digital world and social media become an integral part of their lives. Various digital platforms, such as YouTube and other gaming sites may be used to teach students making teaching-learning process more effective and interesting. More and more children spend time on virtual world - internet to study, play online games, shop, watch movies, use social media, and chat, have helped children to reduce stress and anxiety and to relieve from depressed during lockdown.

The integration of information technology in education will be further accelerated the teaching-learning process and eventually online education becomes an integral component of school education system.

V. NEGATIVE IMPACT OF COVID-19

It is difficult to measure the potential losses incurred by the children in learning and in development of their human capital. Since schools are hubs

¹¹ Pravat Kumar Jena, "Online Learning during Lockdown Period for COVID-19 in India", available at <<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342123356>>, (last visited 18 February 2021) 3.

of social activity and human interaction, the closures of schools impacted not only students, teachers, and parents but have far-reaching economic and social consequences. Schooling provides essential learning and when schools close, children and youth are deprived of opportunities for growth and development. In response to school closures caused by COVID-19, the UNESCO recommends to use of distance learning programmes and open educational applications and platforms¹² that schools and teachers can use to reach learners remotely and limit the disruption of education. But lack of access to technology or fast, reliable internet access can prevent students in rural areas and from disadvantaged families and lack of access to technology or good internet connectivity is an obstacle to continued learning, especially for students from disadvantaged families. Consequently, only a small section of students could be able to access the online teaching.

Extensive digitalization of education system to compensate education loss during lockdown has its own challenges. Through the virtual classroom it is difficult to deliver the same level of education to all the students, especially who belongs to the rural India. To remote access of online classes both the teachers and students had to depend on their own resources. A significant section of students, living in rural areas do not have access to computers, smart phones, and internet services get leftovers in the process of learning and remained at the risk of falling behind. Students from privileged backgrounds with the support of their parents could continue to access the way of learning opportunities, while the disadvantage students' sections remained deprived of the learning process with the closure of schools. This learning crisis has exposed many inequalities and inadequacies existed in Indian education systems- from lack of computers, internet facilities, technical training for digital learning and supportive environments needed for such learning process to vast disparities between resources and needs. Consequently, both the children and teachers in rural areas had to struggle to acquire digital devices and internet facilities for digital classes. Besides, internet connectivity is a common problem in rural India; parents faced difficulties in engaging online classes with single computer where there are siblings. Further girls have less access to digital technology as compared to boys, which have reduced the girls' participation in digital learning process.¹³ As a result, extensive use of digital tools may broaden inequalities among children that caused long-lasting educational gap among them and their human development.¹⁴ Besides, not all students have the required, skill, knowledge and resources to keep themselves safe online.¹⁵

¹² Where more than two-thirds of countries have introduced a national digital learning platform, only 30 per cent of low-income countries have done so. UNESCO, 2020.

¹³ <<https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/FactsFigures2019.pdf>> (last visited 18 February 2021).

¹⁴ *Combatting Covid-19's Effect on Children*, OECD, 2020.

¹⁵ UNICEF 2020.

Most population in India living in rural area, more than 70 percent of children of rural India attend government schools. To access digital learning is practically impossible for these schools and to borne the opportunity costs. In addition, children between 4 to 12 years of age group hardly possess smart phone and how to use it. Teachers had to connect with their parents' phone, and parents who used to work from home, struggling to manage their work with the digital learning of their children.

Children of poorest families had to face crisis of good home-learning environment. Since children are easily distracted, a structured home environment is preemprory to maintain learning continuity. A concerted effort is necessary to facilitate such structure where children can access the complete benefits of digital classes by employing a radius of cooperation mechanisms and engagement methods so as to foster "inclusion, personalization and intelligence".¹⁶

The UNESCO estimates that 826 million students across the world did not have access to a household computer and 43 per cent (706 million) had no internet at home. The estimates highlight that some 1.37 billion students in 138 countries worldwide and 32 million students in India were affected by school and university closure. Results, nearly 60.2 million schoolteachers and university lecturers were abstaining from classroom teaching.

Teachers had also to adopt the new pedagogical method for which most of them were not well trained to teach and conduct online assessments and had to face hardships in adjusting themselves in virtual teaching. Without choice, lockdown compelled the teachers to conduct classes and carry out assessment from home. During the digital learning process, they had to confront a number of difficulties including lack of digital technology – computer, internet, etc., to conduct online classes. There was no technical support to solve technical complexity that might have been faced during online classes.

School closures have severe impact not only on students, teachers, and families, but far-reaching economic and societal consequences. The long-term economic impact of this educational loss has been estimated by Hanushek and Woessman is of analogous to one-third of a year of schooling for the present student population.¹⁷ The education loss of student during lockdown due to COVID-19 will be the cause of skill loss that ultimately impacts their productive efficiency. They observed that for remaining period of the current

¹⁶ Dowson Tong, Senior Executive Vice President of Tencent and President of Cloud and Smart Industries.

¹⁷ Eric A. Hanushek and Ludger Woessmann, *The Economic Impacts of Learning Losses*, OECD Publishing, September, 2020, available at https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/oecd-education-working-papers_19939019 (last visited 18 February, 2021). See also A. Schleicher, *The Impact of COVID-19 on Education – Insights from Education at a Glance 2020*, available at www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm.> (last visited 18 February 2021) 4.

century the gross domestic product would be 1.5 per cent lower on average. As per their assessment the current value of the total cost would amount to 69 per cent of present GDP for a particular country.¹⁸ The effect of lockdown on students currently pursuing their learning at school, are more serious than any other group of people in the country. Longer the period of resume the classes to earlier level of performance will proportionately loss the growth rate of the country. The slower growth rate due to loss of skills of today's students will be realized only in long-run. Even after a long period school are slowly started to resumption of its classes, but the country has been continuously facing the decreasing economic growth. For instance, as estimated for the U.S., in case the student group in school throughout 2020 closures account a COVID-19 induced loss of skills of one-tenth of a standard deviation and thereafter if all groups of student resume the classes like prior levels, the 1.5 per cent loss of future GDP would be correspondent to a total economic loss of USD 15.3 trillion.¹⁹ It highlights that the effect of closure of school goes beyond the immediate impact on education to its multifaceted impact in the society due to COVID-19.

VI. INTERNET ADDICTION

The pandemic and its related policy responses have impacted nearly every issue of children's worlds. Application of massive e-learning platform to mitigate the education loss during school closure has long-run impact on children. A great segment of children are spending a significant portion of time with the digital world. The digital devices may help to mitigate some of the challenges caused by the pandemic; the extensive use of digital devices has its own harmful effect.

Compulsive use of virtual world for online classes has become a reason for high internet usage by children, increasing chances for misuse. Online classes have made it difficult to keep the children away from electronic gadgets. Parents who leave their children unsupervised, statistics prove that last few months online gaming has increased tremendously.²⁰ It is due to children bunking digital classes to sign up and play multi-level online games. Many children after marking attendance for digital classes used to play online gaming while classes were going on. Children are spending more time on various screens at home which is seriously affecting their health.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ As Google-KPMG Report, the online gaming segment is pegged at \$ 1.1 billion by 2021. India is among the top five mobile gaming markets in the world with around 300 million games. see for details Shelley Singh, "COVID-19 and Lockdown Accelerate Online Gaming", *The Economic Times*, 9 May, 2020.

Such children's behaviour can spine into internet addiction pretty fast, results considerable impairment in an individual's function in various life domains over a prolonged period of time. Especially children are at risk of developing "internet addiction disorder".²¹ Children's screen time and addiction are increasing on the whole. During and after pandemic more and more children are showing symptoms of mobile addiction that is causing behavioural problems.

VII. CONCLUSION

Responding the unprecedented crisis caused by the COVID-19, the UNESCO pleaded for use of digital classroom platform for teachers and schools to reach the students remotely and limit the educational distraction. A number of developed countries instantly shifted traditional classroom to the digital classroom to mitigate education losses. For developing countries like India, it was not feasible to convert the traditional classroom to digital classroom within limited time and without basic infrastructure. School closure during pandemic has brought the whole education system a halt. Although virtual platform was introduced for teaching-learning process in India, it has serious impact not only on children but the society as well. Most of government and rural schools are lacking infrastructure for online classes. Government schools and low-income private schools have completely shut down for lack of access to digital solutions. Barely insignificant private schools could have accessed digital classes who could manage to possess digital solutions. Even children who in theory could have accessed online classes, they would have to depend on inconvenient devices like mobile phones.

The pandemic highlights the problems, deficiencies and disparities existed among the Indian education system that failed to take adequate care for children. The crisis proved at the blended education system—traditional classroom and virtual classroom, is the urgent necessity to develop the quality of education and to meet the needs and challenges of time. To bring revolutionary reforms to Indian education system demands well-structured action plan emphasising the safeguards against potential risk and potential opportunities to leverage. The New Education Policy, 2020 also emphasises to prepare school education system to face such pandemic more efficiently, effectively and without prolonged distraction in the future and building a strong public education system in India.

²¹ Tomczyk, Lukasz, Solecki, Roman, "Problematic Internet Use and Protective Factors Related to Family and Free Time Activities Among Young People". *Kuram ve Uygulamada Egitim Bilimleri/Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*. 2019; 19(3), 1-13. Cited in: APA PsycInfo, available at <<http://ovidsp.ovid.com/ovidweb.cgi?T=JS&PAGE=reference&D=psyci6&NEWS=N&AN=2020-30497-001>> (last visited 19 February, 2021). However, excessive internet use has not been recognized as a disorder by the World Health Organization, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) or the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11).

As estimated by the UN, before crisis nearly one-third of the children population of the world were digitally excluded. It is a challenge to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, a blueprint for creating a more just world - “quality education” (fourth goal). One objective of this goal is to ensure by 2030, all children have the means to complete a “free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education.”