

Understanding Educational Responses To School Closure During Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case For Equity In Uttar Pradesh

Richa Malaviya

Ph.D. Scholar,

National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi

Vineeta Siroh

Professor,

NUEPA, Delhi ;Honorary Academic Fellow of Australia India Institute, University of Melbourne

Abstract

With the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India, decided to close the schools on March 23 2020 in Uttar Pradesh and other parts of the country. The shut down of schools was a strategy to alleviate the spread of virus. This paper addresses the steps taken by the government of Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) to meet the educational needs of students in pandemic and the impact of school closure on the most vulnerable. Hence, this paper aims at identifying the severity of educational inequity that is visible through school closures. The study suggests that the state government need to take more concrete and sincere efforts to address the inequity issues in school education.

Keywords: School Education, COVID-19, School Closure

Introduction

After the historic disturbance created by COVID-19 pandemic, most of the schools across the world are reopened but education is still in its recovery phase. The pandemic affected more than 1.5 billion. Students and youth being the most vulnerable, were the most affected (UNESCO, 2020).

It has been the largest pandemic the world has ever seen - affecting all the parts of the globe with the twin shocks of health emergency and economic recession. Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, with 240 million people, home to every sixth Indian, is among the worst affected in the country

and its people are suffering even as authorities insist the situation is under control. The state had nearly 191,000 COVID active cases in 2021 and thousands of new infections were being reported daily - though numbers are believed to be much higher - and this has put the state's creaky health infrastructure firmly in the spotlight, reported (BBC News, 2021)(India coronavirus lockdown).

According to the World Bank Report (2021), Uttar Pradesh also suffers from shocks which lead to localized learning interruptions. The big digital divide of India was highlighted during pandemic when shift to e education was initiated to minimize education loss of school children. As per a study only 24 percent of households having access to the

internet (Das 2020).

This paper is a broad analysis to provide a bird's eye view of responses made by respondents concerning the impact of COVID 19 on education across the state. It attempts to analyse the direct impact of school closure, identification of initial impact on learners, their families and also on the education system as whole. It also includes the contextual factors that could have supported or hindered learning majorly to the disadvantaged section of the state who are disproportionately affected by the pandemic. It also focuses into the challenges faced by the teachers in conducting online classes including the initiatives taken by the state government to reduce these challenges. Finally, it presents the recommendations and lessons suitable to bridge the gap between reality and manifesto of India's education policy.

Review of Literature

Since it is quite visible that COVID-19 is about to bring a long term impact on the entire educational industry. In regards to it, UNESCO emphasizes on the role of teacher and students in the educational settings by pointing towards the flexible learning pathways that we need to adopt in the coming years.

“We need to understand that, the world is facing many disruptive and uncertain challenges now and learning is the only greatest humanity's renewable resource in 19 order to respond to these challenges and invent alternatives, yet education doesn't only respond to the changing world, education transforms the world but to create the future we want, we need to rethink education. Thus it is the right time that we need to reimagine how knowledge and learning can shape our future. Therefore, we must now debate and discuss and re-envision the

ways education enables us to become what we want to become for ourselves, for each other. We need to think together so we can act together to make the futures we want.” (UNESCO 2021)

As per ASER report (2020), it is evident that more than 49% for children in 6-14 years age group are enrolled in the government schools and nearly 39% are enrolled in private schools. However, ASER report 2018 demonstrated that there is subsequent lesser number of student enrollment (private school) between 2018-2020 for both boys and girls however the decrease is higher for boys in standard I to V and girls in standard VI to VIII.

Jena (2020), in a study on the impact of pandemic on education in India highlights the various measures taken by the Government of India to make education accessible for all the students in this time and to highlight the various positive impact of the steps taken by the government on education and how students are being benefitted by their initiatives. The study has also enlisted the negative impact of the pandemic on the education sector of the country.

Some of the strategies through which we can control the disruption of education system and help the education system in this pandemic time include use of suitable and relevant pedagogy for online education, flipped classrooms. The teachers and students/learners should be oriented on use of different online educational tools and even after this pandemic ends and schools reopens the teachers and students must continue to use online tools to enhance teaching and learning process (Pokhrel, 2021).

As per report published by (Pratham, 2020), overall 21% of students received learning materials/

activities through different mediums of which higher percentage of private school children received the learning material. Most common medium of sharing the learning material was reported to be WhatsApp in private schools however accessibility of learning material through visits was more common among government school children. Among the enrolled students, nearly 58% of them reported to have not received any learning material and the most common reason was not having a smart phone (28.4%).

Though, it was clearly imperative to tackle the digital divide that made the goal of online education challenging to achieve in state like Uttar Pradesh, where only 84% percent of U.P. (East) residents have access to internet (TRAI, 2019). Internet usage also varies according to class and gender. Another survey finding clearly demonstrate that nearly 40% of young adults (age-group 15 to 29) were able to access the internet however this figure was 48% among men and 32% for women, gap of 16% points. The state is also experiencing widening consumption inequality in urban areas. (World Bank Report, 2016). Research says that poor households have less access to the learning resources, including books, computers, skill building lessons or tutors (Bradley, Corwyn, Burchinal, McAdoo & García Coll 2001).

Referring to the 16th ASER Report (2021) produced by Pratham Foundation (Rural) on 17th November 2021 says that schools were under complete closures resulting in increase in government school enrolment by 13.2% i.e number rose from 49.7% in 2020 to 56.3% in 2021, as per Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2021. Also learning material availability to students rose because schools were shut and students were

learning at home themselves. One of the parent said they shifted their child to government school due to financial problem as many good private schools are closed. Another said, they are moving back to their native places so planning so opted for government school. Same time it was also evident that, due to pandemic, there was an increase in learning material available with the students. As per ASER 2021 report, from 79.6% students having learning material in UP schools, this number rose to 91.3% this year. The survey also noted that there is clear increase in number of students taking private tuition this year (19.6% were taking tuitions in 2018, 32.9% in 2020 and 38.7% in 2021)

This paper discussed the measures taken by Government of Uttar Pradesh in the provision of educational opportunities to children during the pandemic. This is followed by conducting a study to understand the issues related to access and equity for girl students in the schools under study

Rationale

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected the vulnerable sections globally. With school closures, schools have been substituted largely with online education, underprivileged children have been worse hit. Not surprisingly, girls have been affected a lot more. In India education of several girls was already affected due to gender, class, structural hierarchies. Girls were already in less number to get four years of education. Therefore, girls are likely to be first to get whisked away from their studies towards domestic duties. (Schleicher, 2020)

As per the Policy Brief on Gendered impact of COVID-19 pandemic on education of school-aged children in Uttar Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh

is a state, rife with casteism is likely to face the impact of pandemic, especially among its poor and marginalized sections of the society. Miranpur is a town in Uttar Pradesh, where this study has been done. It is not much prosperous and situated away from the society. Most of the people do farming or a small business to run their houses. The town consists of congested markets, madrasa, old houses, schools and some new private schools have been opened in past few years. People living here donot have proper medical facilities. They go to Muzaffarnagar (city nearby) for medical care and treatment.

In the light of this situation, the study has been conducted focusing on the area specific situation in Uttar Pradesh.

Objectives

Since the author is focusing on the state specific situation in Uttar Pradesh. Therefore, the following objectives were developed-

- To highlight the various measures taken by Uttar Pradesh government for school education sector during this pandemic.
- To highlight the impact of the COVID-19 on education system of Miranpur.
- Provide insights into the impact of responses taken by the government for most impoverished students.
- To enlist the negative impact of COVID-19 and to put some effective suggestions to continuing education in this pandemic time.
- Critically examine the impact of COVID-19 on equity and learning outcomes.

Research Methodology

This is exploratory case study majorly based on the ex post facto content analysis and secondary data, media articles, etc. in detail. This study typically analyzes the interviews (open-ended and conversational communication), available literature and secondary data available on the education system.

For the study researcher surveyed 16 girls from Miranpur (town) situated in Muzzafarnagar district studying in Madrasa, M.S. Public school and M D International Public School. We found in our sample that marginalized groups inhabit areas mostly abandoned by the upper castes. Nearly half of the families are SC/STs, 30% OBC and 30% Muslims. The average family size was large (9). Majority of men were employed in low-skilled labour, one of them said he had his own land for farming. The research design is case study approach done with the help of primary and secondary data. Qualitative research approach has been adopted by the author through open-ended and telephonic communication.

Schools under Study

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic starting from the last week of march 2020 until the end of March 2022, several cities and towns in Uttar Pradesh imposed with curfews, quarantines, and lockdowns to restrict the spread of infection among people.

Schools in Uttar Pradesh are run by both government and private organizations. The state follows 5+3+3+4 education system. There are more than 9000 schools divided into primary, secondary and senior secondary levels.

The children studying in government schools

are in depressing condition as there is no electricity or proper ventilation. School Principal Neelima Gupta was quoted as saying, “We are helpless. We are living in a hell-like condition because of the laxity

of the education department. We tried our best to get electricity connection for the school but no one listens to our pleas.” After hesitating a bit, the students also accepted that they are always exhausted during summer.

Many schools face similar conditions. Anupama Jaiswal, minister of basic education, UP, told India Today TV, “Our government is committed in improving the condition of the primary schools in the state. A lot of work needs to be done and we are trying our best to achieve this.”

Therefore, the schools which were accessible to conduct study in Uttar Pradesh, especially in the town Miranpur during the Pandemic May 2021 were Madarsah Jannat Nisha, M.S. Public school and M D International Public School have been selected for the study to conduct interviews and as the researcher was staying close to these schools.

M.S. Public school and M D International Public School schools had classrooms, library facility, computer lab, science lab, playground. Madarsah Jannat Nisha do not have proper infrastructure, drinking water facility, books supply.

Impact of Covid-19 Lockdown

The first wave of Covid-19 took nearly 180 daily cases to reach the peak value of 7016 on September 11, 2020. In 2020, as per ministry’s data U.P. reported 75 cases on 22 February. In next 48 days, five day daily average of cases rose from 75 to 7000 and next 7000 cases were added in mere 4

days (Asrar, 2021).

The second wave of Covid-19 had a devastating impact in the state. This new surge has crippled the complete medical infrastructure of the state. Kanpur, Prayagraj, Lucknow, Gautam Budh Nagar, Ghaziabad and Meerut experienced the worst. In the month of April 2021, state reported 396,176 cases- 9% of the country’s tally with 34,379 new cases every day. From 24th March 2021 to 15th June 2021, sharp increase in the number of covid cases were recorded. After 15th June 2021 covid-19 cases are seen to decline (The Times of India, 2021).

Uttar Pradesh is facing problems such as unemployment, illiteracy, lack of quality education, low performance which has certainly lead to high dropouts and makes children less motivated and often neglect studies.

It is the economic cycle that works as a multiplier effect. While a study confirms the ratio of urban-rural enrollment in schools is nearly differs from 7:5 which is 60% of students in rural areas, lack of basic reading skills, Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) from 32 in 2009-10 to 24 in 2015-16, single teacher schools continue to be a major concern in rural parts of the country (Kavishwar Ajay, 2018).

However, these problems were alleviated due to large number of migrant workers moving back to villages with no options in towns like Miranpur. The impact of the closure in Miranpur was not quite unusual as even before the pandemic there were schools that were devoid of teachers, headmasters, and other necessary staff members in the village. The period of closure is replaced by online education in pandemic. Zoom, WhatsApp, Google classroom have become the sources of communication between the teachers and the

students

Therefore, to address the challenges of remote learning MHRD has undertaken several initiatives in association with the state government to help the students, scholars, teachers and learners by emphasizing upon online classes on regular basis, helping students with eBooks, depository, and providing them e-materials for learning. Evaluations and assessments took place with the help of Quizzes and projects (Education Report, 2020).

State Initiatives

When the Prime Minister Sh. Narendra Modi announced the lockdown measures on national television, he gave only 4-h notice to the public to prepare for the confinement when most of them were not prepared. Critiques however argue that if the government would have given even 4 days to prepare, the workers struck inside cities would have safely reunited with their families. India's leading epidemiologists have strongly criticized the government's instant lockdown as thoughtless, unscientific, and draconian . Nevertheless, the World Health Organization has duly appreciated the vigorous lockdown measures as timely and comprehensive. Sadly, those who had suffered the most during these two policy misfortunes were the poverty-stricken and socially stigmatized people. (Agoramoorthy G, 2021)

In order to improve the digital access in pandemic times, Government of Uttar Pradesh has taken multiple initiatives to improve the accessibility of primary education by starting Mission Prerna and Operation Kayakalp, wherein the actual learning outcomes are fulcrum along with necessary resources for infrastructural arrangements.

The U.P. Government also launched a five year plan that other states followed (Gupta, 2020). This five year plan was disseminated among the population of 1.8 crore primary school students after curating subject wise vernacular digital content for children. Through this plan the government has tried to pool in multiple resources and services by utilizing its strong network by connecting with global organizations - Central Square Foundation, Samagra, Sesame Workshop India, Pratham, Khan Academy, Google, WhatsApp, the TeacherApp, UNICEF, MHRD, Doordarshan-Uttar Pradesh and All India Radio (AIR) (Gupta, 2020).

The following are the five steps-

Step One: Launch of free mobile application for students belonging to 3 to 8 years of age group for improving children participation and learning. This application has 3 high quality.

EdTech apps for children - Chimple, Math Masti and Bolo.

Step Two: MHRD has launched of Diksha National e-learning platform for school students in the form of videos. UP's SCERT along with content cell based in Lucknow has also uploaded more than 3000 videos within the QR codes. Even Khan academy, international non-for profit educational organisation, has provided more than 1000 self-learning videos for school students.

Step Three: Dissemination of the educational content through parents' smartphone by U.P. government. For that, more than 1000 Whatsapp groups have been created with Basic Shiksha Adhikaris (BSAs) and Head Teachers.

Source: Shantanu Gupta (2020), CM Adityanath's 5-step plan for UP students under

lockdown that other states can emulate, The Print

Data Analysis

In order to understand the impact of Covid among girl children studying in government schools, interviews were conducted and the data was thus analyzed thematically. Subsequent subsections discuss the themes emerged from the study.

Education Access

Education is a right of every child, yet due to pandemic, for many of the children, especially those belonging to the most vulnerable section of society, across the state, education was not accessible.

According to ASER Centre News (November 18, 2021), UP, “enrolments in government schools rose by 13.2% percentage points in 2021 as compared to 2018 which was highest in the country, closely followed by Kerala having 11.9 percentage points.” The survey also found a steady increase in children taking private tuitions as parents wanted supplemental learning support for their children during the pandemic. “UP witnessed a rise of 19.1 percentage points in the number of students joining private tuitions or coaching in comparison to 2018. About 19.6% students were taking tuitions in 2018, which rose to 32.9 % in 2020 and 38.7 % in 2021.” However, Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2021 also revealed that though “smartphone ownership increased in houses but as many as 34.3% of UP students could not access smartphones for learning purpose.”

Uninterrupted education online relies on the availability of and access to digital infrastructure

including the Internet, laptops and phones. While students in urban schools tend to have better

access than those in rural schools, inequalities across class and gender still impact who can and cannot use these tools. These educational access issues are further compounded by other constraints such as unreliable electricity supplies, home environments and study spaces, etc. (Times of India, 2021).

When interviewed some of the responses recorded are narrated below regarding the educational access for girls in the selected schools under the study .

Sakeena said-

I want to go to school and study but my school is closed since last 1-2 years, I used to study in Madarsa with other students. Though some boys are still going there to study but my parents are not allowing me to go due to this disease. They want me to learn household chores. I am 12years old. I know cooking and all the household chores. We don't study due to pandemic. My elder sister and I take the responsibility of all the household chores. I used to enjoy going to Madarsa and study but pandemic has changed everything for me. My parents are looking for work opportunities as we are facing financial crunch since pandemic started. Earlier my mother used to work in school as maid, now, because schools are closed, she is struggling to find work. My father doesn't work but shouts at my mother for money as he is an alcoholic. He does not want me to study because I am a girl. My elder brother lives at my relative's house in Bombay and he has completed his class 10th. He does not want to come home and help my parents. My second brother also does not do anything, though he just roams around. As he has studied till class VI he often teaches me Mathematics and Quran lessons.

The statement of the girl clearly indicates that,

girl wants to get education but is still deprived of learning for various reasons. Not only she there are many other girls diverted towards household chores, presssureized for early marriage as everyone couldn't afford education. People didn't have food to eat how can we expect them to ask them to make their children go to school. Poverty has affected a lot of people especially the poor girls belonging to vulnerable sections of the society.

Rahat of class VIII said:

We are studying in day school so our school authorities are discussing about re- opening of the school from July end 2021, Online classes are going on now, however school is shut down for pre-schoolers as they are very small and run here and there, 1 year back their parents used to come to school in afternoon hours from 2pm to 4 pm with them and sit in the classroom so that they follow madam's instruction, now due to pandemic everything has stopped for them. I am satisfied with the online classes as I have ample of time now

It seems that the girl is able to access the education and is not facing any educational barrier as of now, but she is showing concern towards education system of pre-schoolers as they are small and so for them face to face learning is essential.

Given that many children are living below poverty line in Uttar Pradesh, many students lack access to technology and learning resources, thus online learning is available only to those who can afford it. This excludes large number of students, thus mitigating their access to learning. As a result, many students find themselves trapped at the periphery of the educational system, while their more privileged classmates still continue to learn. Here are some of the girls having problem of

educational access due to poverty.

Affordability

Referring to Hindustan Times (September 08, 2020) , Sanjay Sinha, director, State Institute of Educational Management and Training (SCERT) says, "UP's poor ranking could be attributed to the fact that there is no proper continuous programme. The Sakshar Bharat Mission programme ended on March 2018. Now, Padhna Likhna Abhiyan, a new initiative is coming up under the New Education Policy-2020."

Uttar Pradesh, unlike most of the states, struggles in providing stable electricity. Prolonged power cuts is an everyday routine in Uttar Pradesh. This state's intermittent power supply is a significant hindrance to online learning. In India, most populous state, almost everyone depends on generators, including the schools. According to data survey report conducted by Smart Power, 84% figure for households with electricity connection could have been lower. According to the report, 90% of the households had an electric pole within a distance of 50m distance.

Within this figure, 84 % of the households actually had electricity connection but they did not

make the use of electricity connection because they could not afford one. The report also revealed that only 75% of all households used electricity, and 16% used non-grid electricity sources, half of which also have grid connections. (Non- grid sources include: solarhome systems, rechargeable batteries, mini-grid electricity, diesel generators). The Government of

U.P. had promised to give free laptops to all young people seeking admission in universities and

colleges with 1GB free internet in a month. Even earlier governments also distributed laptops among students but it is disheartening to observe that many students despite having devices are not being able to access to education through virtual mode because of acute power crisis in the state (The Hindu, 2019).

Ritika of class IV said that they don't attend online classes due to poor internet connection. "Internet comes and goes", they have TV in their home but because of electricity problem in the city they connect TV to the rechargeable batteries to watch Doordarshan channel.

Electricity cable theft is common in night time, shops do not have enough grocery material, women safety after 5 pm in the evening is a major concern.

Mahima of class V said

"we have only two mobile phones in our house and our phones are not touchscreen so we cannot read or understand education even if we get enrolled. To get educated now, one needs to spend money. I don't know when my school will re-open, there are no updates as of yet. I feel attending school was better, my parents did not have to spend much plus I used to get mid-day meal there. I am waiting for the pandemic to end and get updates about my school. Its been so long I have been to school. Now, I feel I forgot how to read and write properly."

Digital divide and financial crisis has structured the society into many groups. Some students despite having mobile phones, readiness towards learning couldn't learn. Some facing connectivity issues. The problem of the digital divide is complex, lack of connectivity therefore is a growing impediment to human development.

Shalini says-

"I am 14 years old now, my parents are looking for a groom for me. I have studied till class VI, because of pandemic and financial crunch they do not see any future of mine in education. Earlier they wanted me to work as teacher in a school but now situation is changed. We don't have proper electricity here, electricity theft at day or night is very common here, because people don't have money to pay the electricity bill. In summers, the situation of electricity is worse, everyone struggles and fights for electricity or cleanliness. So, my parents are confused whether I should do a beautician course or a short-term computer course so that I can earn some thing or do household chores or get married. Once I start earning I will resume my

studies again. I was a very good student in school, my teachers used to praise me but now sitting whole day in our house has become difficult for me plus there is no news about reopening of school. I don't know what to do now. Earning of my father is less as he is a vegetable seller at the market."

Both, poor access to school education and economic hardships due to COVID-19 puts girls at a higher risk of gender-based violence and forced child marriage. It is due to financial crisis that many families wanted their girls to get married off as they couldn't find any other option to ensure safety of their grown up daughter. ChildLine India has reported a 17% increase in distress calls related to early marriage of girls this year in June and July as compared to 2019. (Sonawane, 2020)

Karuna says -

"My parents are agricultural workers (farmers) and because of decline in profitability of cultivation, failure of govt. policies, has created panic situation

for them. Since the pandemic started there is continuous fall in income, and they are investing a lot on farms that has caused economic squeeze. There is major decline in food grain productivity and a lot has happened in the city due to market imperfection and caste structure which has bagged us with great economic loss. Because of which education has been impacted a lot. We are unsure if we will continue education or have to sit at home for life. As now we did not have enough to fulfill our daily requirements. So my father and relatives go to local market and help the shopkeepers in calculation and in return her father gets paid Rs.100 to Rs.150 per day and sometimes instead of money the shopkeeper gives him some grocery food items. We use rechargeable battery for night time as electricity does not come properly in night or day time. Further, electricity is too much costly for us so they generally buy electrical connection in summer only and not in winters. In winter my mother completes her daily tasks before evening time so that we can sleep as sun sets and our next day starts with sunrise.”

The COVID-19 pandemic impacts are also being felt by the food and agriculture sector. Every year, Indian farmers face risks such as low rainfall, price volatility and rising debts. But risks from the COVID-19 pandemic are putting new challenges in front of a sector that is already under threat.

Those who lost income due to the pandemic have been almost twice as likely to spend down assets or savings, leaving them less able to cope with continued or recurrent income losses. (YONZAN, 2021)

Loss of Learning space

Additionally, a prerequisite requirement for

digital learning is the availability of quiet space to study. Although the Supreme Court of India mentions that the right to dignified shelters is a necessary component of the Right to Life under Article 21 of the Constitution of India., the

statistics according to 2011 census show that 329,125 people (18.56% of population) were houseless. Research has further confirmed the inadequacy in housing circumstances of Uttar Pradesh, particularly in the low-income population (Olotuah & Aiyetan 2006), who contributes majority of populace. According to 2011 census, 24.67 crore households are there in India. Of these, 68% are rural households and 32% urban households. According to NSO data, over 52.9 percent of households in the state of Uttar Pradesh had exclusive access to toilets in 2018, however 37.7 percent did not have access to toilets. Sanitary facilities in the most urban dwellings are grossly inadequate. If this is the actual reality of low-income families, how can children in these homes find a study space at all, and talking about quiet place without distraction is a thought to be pondered upon. As these groups of children may have to face distractions from their family members who already have plans for space.

Kanchan of the girl said-

“I am 12 years old, I studied at my village in Madhya Pradesh till class IV, we shifted to Miranpur 2 years back. We live in juggi (temporary shelter), we are family of 5 people, we don't have much space to study, when I used to go to school, I used to get books there, now here I don't have any facility to study, my father is a painter, he works on contract. We stay 5 months at this place next 6-7 months depends on the city wherein he gets painting contract. So my parents don't want me to study because taking admission in any school requires

money. We are facing a lot of financial crunch. We just get drinking water here, electricity comes and goes. I play with my elder sister whole day, when it is rainy day, our house gets filled with water, so we sit on trunks and cook food there. It takes 2 to 3 days to let our house dry, we sleep in wet place, I wish our school gets reopened at least I get to talk and play with my friends there, we used to learn together”

Clearly indicates many of the parents are not willing to admit their child in the school because of their financial problems and old mindset.

Teacher Preparedness during COVID

Emergency closure of schools has brought sudden changes in the work culture of the schools as now they have to find alternatives to face-to-face instruction in order to guarantee students' continuous education.

It has certainly sparked debates across the state to ensure students continue their learning therefore preparation of teachers to deal with online education is a necessary aspect that the state government is discussing. Without adequate application of Information and Communication technology (ICT) devices, internet/mobile access through educational stakeholders, educational offerings simply cannot take place easily now and thereafter.

State Government need to prepare teachers to better map and restructure the school education system and as a necessary step they must integrate digital technologies for every stage so as to fulfil the needs for future crisis.

For teachers, the shift to online education

has meant rethinking lesson plans to fit a very different format. “You sort of have to redo all of the curriculum so you can teach it online, because a lot of it was dependent on you being there and leading the students through certain things,” says teacher at M.S. Public School.

“All educators right now are in a mess, transitioning to online in such a short period of time is really tricky... one day we were in school, and the next day, the whole world was kind of flipped upside down.” says teacher at M D International Public School

Tarun of class VI said-

“we do have smart boards or smart classes in school. Our teachers are taking classes online though some of them don't even know how to use computer properly.”

Pinky of class VIII said-

“we know computers better than our teachers. They even don't know how to upload a file on google drive and how to screen share. So even those who wish to study or can manage studies online eventhey can't study because teachers are not techno savy. I feel, I and some of my classmates are better at computers and internet than our teachers. Our teachers just know how to type on WhatsApp. But problem is they cannot teach entire syllabus on WhatsApp.”

The statements given by students clearly indicates that the teachers need to be updated with ICT and its application as students feel they are better at using ICT. However, at some schools they don't have proper computer labs so it is a tough task even for teachers to teach if they don't have proper ICT infrastructure. Further, school administrators

should embrace problem-driven approach and seek to add value to their organization and society by helping address pressing problems and grand challenges. School managers and funders need to make the most of the quality and potential contribution of the school education system in producing better educational offerings and not see them as sources of internal cross subsidies to the extent that they become depleted.

Concluding Remarks & Suggestions

COVID-19 Pandemic has unprecedentedly changed the entire landscape of the nation, posing several challenges for the respective state governments in India. The impacts of the pandemic have penetrated through all three major sectors of the Indian Economy, namely primary (agriculture and allied activities), secondary (industrial and manufacturing), and tertiary (health, education, telecom, tourism, etc.).

We interviewed 16 children, mainly girls between age 7 to 14 years in UP. The responses given by the interviewees clearly showed that majority of the girls were uncertain about returning to school on reopening. The pandemic has not only affected their learning situation, but has also added to the uncertainties of continuing education. This also suggests that boys are no less

vulnerable, as despite facing less restriction on mobility or responsibility for domestic work they are facing problems in accessibility of education.

Since online education remained as the only option to prevent discontinuity in teaching learning process during the pandemic, millions of children belonging to disadvantaged section of the society couldn't access education due to little or no digital

access. Uttar Pradesh government undertook multiple initiatives like mission Prerna, Operation Kayakalp and pool in of multiple resources and services by utilizing its strong network.

The paper examined the issues related to school re-openings by presenting state's current measures and providing some suggestions to ensure inclusion of vulnerable students in education systems.

Orders were being issued regarding promotion of all the school student still class VIII without conducting exams. Isolation wards have also been set up in all the 75 districts of the state and medical staff is being appointed and provided necessary training to resume education in the state. The government is also discussing to take step towards promoting of remote learning in the state.

Challenges were many as no one is able to predict the impact of COVID-19 and its transmission rate. Therefore, the government has taken decentralized approach in such a highly populated state with decentralized structure. Digitalization is highlighted in the NEP 2020 and in the COVID-19 response to strengthen access to quality education, but there are multiple challenges and several reasons why it should be part of the response only. It is because schools perform multiple functions beyond academic learning; there is a risk of widening disparities in accessibility of quality education because of digital divide; and it will be very expensive to ensure that digital resources are reaching every student.

This sudden shift from offline to online education brought many challenges, including mental health issues which indeed call for the presence of skilled professionals in schools. One of the biggest advantages is that it has fostered the use

of information technology in delivering lessons.

Given that many children are living below poverty line in Uttar Pradesh, many students lack access to technology and learning resources, thus online learning is available only to those who can afford it.

A move to more digital working is inevitable and is already happening for the majority. Nevertheless, access to technology and connectivity remains an obstacle for many communities. The problem of the digital divide is complex, lack of connectivity therefore is a growing impediment to human development.

Thus both poor access to school education and financial hardships due to COVID-19 puts girls at a higher risk of gender-based violence and forced child marriage.

Correspondingly, the statements given by students clearly indicates that the teachers need to be updated with ICT and its application as students feel they are better at using ICT. However, at some schools they don't have proper computer labs so it is a tough task even for teachers to teach if they don't have proper ICT infrastructure.

Additionally, parents, teachers, students, governments, and development partners can work together to deploy effective mitigation and remediation strategies to protect the COVID-19 generation's future. School reopening, when safe, is critical, but it is not enough. The simulation results show major differences in the potential impacts of the crisis on the learning poor across regions. The big challenge will be to rapidly identify and respond to each individual student's learning needs flexibly and to build back educational systems more

resilient to shocks, using technology effectively to enable learning both at school and at home.

Additionally, adding digital services with social protection schemes such as ration/direct benefit transfers to families can also help in reducing the digital divide. Setting up of digital hubs in communities in order to help students, parents to solve the issues while using technology and spread of basic knowledge related to computer specially in the remote areas that are completely offline. Further as a prerequisite to the above, investment in electricity supply, even in the remotest part of the state is a must.

Further, it can be suggested that, students can be encouraged to take the benefit of the educational programs on television and radio or some other innovative practices needs to be followed to ensure access to all. However, it is to be considered that everyone in the state cannot afford TV or mobile phone especially low-income earners and the poorest of the poor. Even the places where TV is available the problem of power supplies or issue of affordability of electricity connection exists. Learning can be broadcasted through radio will have unintended beneficiaries such as out of school children and illiterate parents. Additionally, partnering with mobile network operators can be done to provide free or subsidized data for educational purposes for teachers and students for low income and vulnerable groups as well.

Additionally, newspapers can also be circulated weekly. Though this might not be a popular option as it does not involve the technologies that can compete with the western world. The newspaper if deployed could solve the problem of educational inequity by ensuring all students are engaged in learning. We must be considerate for all students

irrespective of their socio- economic background. We must think creatively and devise ways to support learning of each student in this trying time. We need to look for offline strategies.

Another recommendation is investing in teachers by providing them continuous support so that they can provide e-learning and online education to all their students in this time and afterwards. More studies and monitoring is the need of the hour to understand how teachers who participated in training programmes transferred their learnings in digital schools. Ultimately, all teachers should be tech-savvy if all children are to gain from tech based

education. (UNICEF and UNESCO, 2021)

Another suggestion is development of distance learning strategy for the most vulnerable and marginalized by identifying the areas where such communities reside, seasonal migrants. Based on the profile of disadvantaged children, context given solution must be designed to reach them. As most of them live in rural areas therefore alternative distance learning solution needs to be deployed. As distance and self-learning methods cannot fully substitute in-class teaching by trained professionals. Therefore priority needs to be given to key foundational programs. In addition to reaching and teaching, it is important to address the reasons for children being at risk and provide them safety circle to stop them from dropping out. For example, girls belonging to poor households, family should receive appropriate social protection packages and additional incentives to encourage girls to remain enrolled and understand their full potential.

Without a doubt, coronavirus pandemic has adversely affected our lives. In Uttar Pradesh, the education system in the state has witnessed a drastic impact of the pandemic as the children belonging to socially disadvantaged and low income groups are the hardest hit because of school closure. Absence of intentional strategy to protect the opportunity to learn in this period will result in severe learning loss for children.

Given the significance of education as foundation of overall development of state and country, we must strive to ensure equitable education for all the students. Education needs to be incorporated in response to pandemic as pandemic still persists in some parts of the state. This pandemic situation must be taken as learning for everyone who is a part of education system to reconsider our perceptions of education. If everyone rises to task then only it is possible to harness lessons on how to adapt learning to continue in challenging times and support learners, especially for marginalized children.

References

- Agoramoorthy G, Hsu MJ. How the Corona-virus Lockdown Impacts the Impoverished in India. *J Racial Ethn Health Disparities*. 2021 Feb;8(1):1-6. doi: 10.1007/s40615-020-00905- 5. Epub 2020 Oct 26. PMID: 33104967; PMCID: PMC7587164.
- Annual Status of Education Report (ASER). (2020, October 28). Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2020 Wave 1. ASER 2020 Wave 1 - Rural. new delhi: Published by: ASER Centre B-4/54 Safdarjung Enclave New Delhi 110 029 Phone: +91-11- 46023612.
- Baxter, Pamela & Jack, Susan. (2010). *Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design*

- and Implementation for Novice Researchers. Qualitative Report. 13. 10.46743/2160-3715/2008.1573.
- BBC News. (2021). Covid in Uttar Pradesh: Coronavirus overwhelms India's most populous state. U.P.: BBC News.
 - Correspondent, HT (Sep 08, 2020). UP literacy rate poor than national average: Report.
 - Hindustan Times
 - <https://www.hindustantimes.com/education/up-literacy-rate-poor-than-national-average-report/story-04cd30glcG2IchqkB0TLaJ.html>
 - Das, U. (2020, November 17). How did rural India learn during lockdown?. Idr. https://idronline.org/aser2020-covid-education-in-rural-india-during- id=Cj0KCQiAmaibBh-CAARIsAKUlaKQtqXIAL- b5rbcoX-KuQ1KNFp8TkTrKK0iMaApGvEALw_wcB
 - Government of India, Ministry of Education department of School Education and Literacy. (n.d.). Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2019-20. Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2019-20
 - Gupta, S. (2020). CM Adityanath's 5-step plan for UP students under lockdown that other states can emulate. The Print
 - Herguner, B. (2012). In Pursuit of Equity: The Capability Approach and Education. 2(5). Quezon City 1111, University of the Philippines, Philippines: www.iiste.org. Public Policy and Administration Research www.iiste.org ISSN 2224-5731(Paper) ISSN 2225- 0972(Online) Vol.2, No.5, 2012
 - Hindustan Times. (2022). Review meeting: Uttar Pradesh poised for 100% Covid vaccination, says Yogi. lucknow news. Hindustan Times.
 - MHRD online: Online learning resources of MHRD. Retrieved from <https://www.mohfw.gov.in/pdf/vividh19.pdf>
 - Ministry of Health and Family Welfare . (2022, June 13). Update on COVID-19 Vaccine Availability in States/UTs . PIB Delhi.
 - Mogaji Mary, Idowu. Understanding Educational Responses to School Closure During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case for Equity in Nigeria, CCEAM, Volume 48, Number 1, 2020
 - OECD. (2020, November 19). The impact of COVID-19 on student equity and inclusion: supporting vulnerable students during school closures and school re-openings. OECD.
 - Pandey, G. (2021, April 20). Covid in Uttar Pradesh: Coronavirus overwhelms India's most populous state. BBC.
 - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-56799303>
 - Pravat Ku Jena (2020a): Challenges and opportunities created by Covid-19 for ODL: A case study of IGNOU. Int. J. for Innovative Research in Multidisciplinary Field, 6(5):217-22.
 - Pravat Ku Jena (2020b). Impact of Pandemic COVID-19 on Education in India. International Journal of Current Research. 12. 12582-12586. 10.24941/ijcr.39209.07.2020.
 - Pravat Ku Jena (2020c): Online learning during lockdown period for Covid-19 in India. Int. J. Multi. Edu. Research, 9, 5(8): 82-92.

- PRATHAM. (2020, OCTOBER 28). Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2020 Wave 1. Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2020 Wave 1. NEW DELHI: Published by: ASER Centre B-4/54 Safdarjung Enclave New Delhi 110 029 Phone: +91-11- 46023612.
- Pokhrel S, Chhetri R. A Literature Review on Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Teaching and Learning. Higher Education for the Future. 2021;8(1):133-141. doi:10.1177/2347631120983481
- Sonawane, S. (2020). The Gendered Impact of COVID-19 on School Education.
- Times of India. (2021). Covid distress forced Uttar Pradesh parents to shift kids from private to government schools: ASER.
- Creswell, John W Creswall , Qualitative inquiry & research design Choosing Among Five Approaches. University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Second Edition
- Singh, S., Roy, D., Sinha, K., Parveen, S., Sharma, G., & Joshi, G. (2020). Impact of COVID- 19 and lockdown on mental health of children and adolescents: A narrative review with recommendations. Psychiatry research,293,113429. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113429>
- The Lancet Psychiatry. (2019, december 23). The burden of mental disorders across the states of India: the Global Burden of Disease Study 1990–2017. Science Direct- The Lancet Psychiatr, 7(2), 148-161.
- Tewari, M. (2021, November 18) Covid distress forced Uttar Pradesh parents to shift kids from private to government schools: ASER. TNN <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/in-up-pandemic-distress-forced-parents-to-move-kids-from-private-to-govt-schools-aser-study/articleshow/87767837.cms?from=mdr>
- UNESCO. (2020, July). COVID-19 response –remediation Helping students catch up on lost learning, with a focus on closing equity gaps. (2).
- UNESCO. (2021, October). India Case Study Situation Analysis on the Effects of and Responses to COVID-19 on the Education Sector in Asia. © United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2021.
- UNICEF LACRO. (2020, November). Education on hold COVID-19: A generation of children in Latin America and the Caribbean are missing out on schooling. Education on hold COVID-19: A generation of children in Latin America and the Caribbean are missing out on schooling. Latin America and the Caribbean, Latin America and the Caribbean, U.S.
- World Bank Group. (2016, may 20). Uttar Pradesh Poverty, Growth & Inequality.
- Weiss, E. G. (2020, september 10). COVID-19 and student performance, equity, and U.S education policy. COVID-19 and student performance, equity, and U.S. education policy Lessons from pre-pandemic research to inform relief, recovery, and rebuilding. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.
- Yasir Rashid¹, Ammar Rashid², Muhammad Akib Warraich¹, Sana Sameen Sabir¹, and Ansar Waseem. Case Study Method: A Step-by-Step Guide for Business Researchers. In-

ternational Journal of Qualitative Methods
Volume 18: 1–13 a The Author(s) 2019 Article
reuse guidelines: sagepub.com/journals-permissions DOI: 10.1177/1609406919862424
journals.sagepub.com/home/ijq

- YONZAN, C. S.-P. (2021). COVID-19 leaves a legacy of rising poverty and widening inequality.
- World Business Council for Sustainable Development. (2020)

Blended Learning In Education: A Digital Approach Of Teaching-Learning In Twenty-First Century

Dr Seema Yadav,

Assistant Professor,

Department of Education, The Bhopal School of Social Sciences, Bhopal

Abstract

The education of the twenty-first century requires individualised, effective, and collaborative teaching-learning experiences that are anticipated to change the entire educational system from the conventional face-to-face mode to a technologically-based independent mode where the primary focus will be laid on maximising the potential and creativity of the students. A blended learning strategy based on modern digital learning environments has replaced it in recent years. Blended learning helps students develop skills like self-control, agency, and problem-solving. In addition to promoting the use of the innovative teaching technique, blended learning has been shown to be successful for teaching other crucial teamwork-related skills like creativity, innovation, team-based communication, and responsibility. The use of online instruction to facilitate independent, interactive, and collaborative learning among students is part of blended learning, which is a powerful and effective strategy for increasing competitiveness.

Keywords: *Blended learning, Collaborative teaching-learning, Digital Era, Innovative Method*

Introduction

The integration of technology-assisted teacher education and spreading knowledge of the Sustainable Development Goals have received increased attention with the arrival of the digital era (SDG) (Chin et al., 2019). The foundation of the majority of nations' modern educational systems is the promise of equal educational opportunity for everyone, despite differences in ability (Yaqun, Rebrina, Sabirova, & Afanaseva, 2020). There are now more opportunities for alternative and non-traditional learning at all levels of education and training because to the Internet technologies' explosive growth in recent years.

In recent years, a blended learning approach

based on fresh digital learning environments has taken its place. Almost 1.5 billion pupils in 191 nations have been affected by the COVID-19 epidemic, which has created considerable issues around the world. By implementing online or hybrid learning, faculties—and degrees in the health sciences in particular—have been challenged to be creative, adaptable, and quick (Roper-Padilla et al., 2021). During the pandemic, teachers began offering blended learning courses online. Certain sections are on platforms, while others are zoom courses (Kamalitdinovna, 2021). Since the advent of digital media, students' traditional learning habits and levels of involvement have changed. Students' e-learning habits are impacted by the use of digital media. Also, it is accommodating in understanding