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IMPACT OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC ON RURAL EDUCATION IN INDIA: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

All the forces of life are subject to change; this is the sole constant. Similar to what everyone had been doing over the previous few years, COVID 19 brought about a change in how people worked, lived, and implemented ideas. Education in India needed to be shaken up, particularly in rural areas where there were many prejudices and societal norms that needed to be overcome. Several organisations ran education programs and took action to make primary education mandatory for all citizens of India. Although every sector of the world economy was shut down for a very long duration due to the COVID 19 pandemic, this was the worst slowdown of the century and caused a decline in overall growth.The Indian education system was hit hard, just like other industries. While metropolitan institutions were able to continue offering online courses, the number of rural students attending classes quickly declined. The biggest challenge was distributing online education in rural India because every student has a right to continue his/her education, which shouldn't be interfered with in any way. This study aims to shed insight on the difficulties the rural primary and secondary education sector encountered during the epidemic and its long-term effects. A thorough SWOT analysis of the current and prospective opportunities is provided, along with suggestions for the necessary improvements in the sector of rural education. The spillover effects of COVID 19 on the education sector have sped up technological advancement, which is covered in depth in this study.

Keywords: Education, COVID 19, the Indian educational system, and the Indian government

INTRODUCTION

A virus that poses a threat to the entire globe was found in China at the beginning of the year 2020. There have been a great number of deaths worldwide due to the virus, which is still spreading. While the most devastating stages of the disease have passed and the number of sufferers has been increasing at exponential rates, both developed and developing economies are working on a treatment. The growth led to a number of countries implementing lockdowns, closing off certain industries, and suffering medical services. In March, India implemented a lockdown to protect the populace. closing factories and offices that generate significant sectoral earnings. Another issue was the addition of security measures for large gatherings, particularly those involving minors, such schools and colleges.Due to the lack of other options, the peak time for all session beginnings and final exams was in jeopardy. The issues were widespread and expanded in a worrying manner. As the public assembly fell, starvation and poverty became more prominent social problems. The daily wage earners and minimum wage workers were dying from hunger rather than diseases. Given the size of the country and the number of receivers, one measure simply cannot be sufficient to prevent the spillover. People were returning to their home towns from cities, and spillages were increasing.While the virus spread rapidly through metropolitan areas, rural India was the safest place to dwell despite being without access to food, transportation, or education.

India experiences a significant imbalance between rural and urban growth since rural areas in India still lag in many areas, including access to basic commodities. The COVID period saw the introduction of this holistic strategy, which is everything that is necessary for national growth.Regarding the disparity between rural and urban areas, Indian education appears to perform well in terms of literacy, household costs, technology ease of access, etc. This prevents village students from receiving an adequate education, as evidenced by data that shows that between July 2017 and June 2018, 4% of rural households had access to computers, compared to 23% of urban households. (The Financial Express, 2020; Education in Time of Covid: Pandemic Amplifies Rural-Urban Digital Divide). According to a Ministry of Human Resources (MHRD) research from 2020, COVID 19 had a significant negative impact on the learning of nearly 240 million school-aged youngsters.According to an NCERT survey, 27% of all participants lacked a laptop, computer, or smartphone to participate in online learning. (Lalhriatchiani;

PadhiBalakrushna). The rise in child labour as a negative effect leading to school dropouts is another piece of evidence in addition to the empirical findings.

Many promising students' futures have been destroyed by this time. It is exceedingly difficult to resume academics once they have been interrupted owing to personal issues, not in Indian communities. The number of children in the family determines how much they can afford to pay for their education while still managing to make ends meet.Many street vendors who abandoned their families in the villages in order to work and send money encountered this reality.

Studies and reports demonstrate that good eLearning gives traditional methods the upper hand, resulting in children's attention and convenient teaching habits. While it is well known that electronic platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram have made it easier to transmit large amounts of data, lecture notes, and presentation materials. The system that was aiming for efficiency has now undergone a significant transformation due to simple methods of testing, grading, and tutoring.

Education pedagogy has undergone a significant shift as a result of the invention of experimental teaching and learning methods that promise flexibility and the educational experience as the cherry on top. Numerous virtual platforms with online repositories, e-books, and other online educational resources have been introduced by MHRD and UGC. During this period, integrating electronic media with education was quite popular. Even people without the financial means to own smartphones can benefit to some extent from distance learning. (JENA, 2020)

Rural India has long since made little adjustments, relying on the slow construction of roads and other infrastructure. Village kids attempt to challenge their minimal level of education in the domain of education as well. There are extremely few schools that offer these kids the fundamental instructional tools and infrastructure. The path to a better education is paved by aspirants who plan to study; the remainder remain in their intellectually obscure regions. The majority of the village's residents are born and die in the same area, passing on the same plot of land to their offspring.

Only the rural population in India has had access to traditional/conventional living. Adopting the government's plans for health and education means that the governing party is not only ignoring rural India's ability to survive, but also expelling the money set aside for its improvement. Another field where inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of faculty, books, and reading materials are commonplace is education. No rural household can afford the rapid increase in educational costs that urban areas experience, leading to an increase in dropout rates.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

All age groups of pupils have been impacted by the rapid development of COVID-19 on such a big scale. The ongoing disease's spread, travel restrictions, and the nationwide shutdown of educational facilities all had a noticeable impact on students' academic performance, social lives, and mental health, as previously stated (Gonzalez et al., 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has had particularly devastating effects on kids from rural backgrounds (Bao, 2020). The lives of pupils may be negatively affected by these actions in the long run (Cohen, Hoyt, & Dull, 2020). Due to COVID-19, all educational activities were moved online, which proven to be quite difficult for rural educations, where little progress has been noted worldwide.

The pupils' academic lives have been affected by a long-term lockdown's impact on family income, their lack of access to digital resources, and their patchy internet connectivity. According to recent research, more than 1.5 billion kids worldwide are currently denied access to a basic education (Cao et al., 2020). Additionally, many independent students' incomes have been impacted by the same. The mental health of the pupils has been impacted by changes in daily routine, such as a lack of outdoor activity, altered sleep patterns, social isolation, familial stress, and financial pressure, among other things (Cook, 2009; Cohen et al., 2020).

Due to their predominate involvement in farming in rural areas, students pay less attention to higher education than is typical. Each student in a family needs an effective Android phone, time off from their farming jobs, extensive internet sessions, and a quiet place to study online (Cook, 2009). It was noted that not everyone could afford the same. Financial inefficiency was discovered to be a significant factor in keeping many untouched pupils from attending school for the duration of the lockdown (McCarthy, 2020). Previous

research showed that this could have increased these students' sentiments of helplessness and guilt (Gonzalez et al., 2020; McCarthy, 2020).

Additionally, many students were unable to carry on their studies even after getting their own Android phones since they were unaccustomed to or untrained in using educational applications and search engines (Saha, Barman, &Chouhan, 2020). In the past year, a great deal of study has been done on the consequences of COVID-19 and lockdown on student learning. This study has discovered numerous reasons and negative impacts of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic on undergraduate learning.

GOALS OF THE STUDY

1. To investigate the impact of lockdown on rural schooling
2. to determine how educational planning has an effect on rural education trends
3. to carry out a SWOT analysis for the online pedagogical paradigm shift.

STUDY QUESTION

What impact does lockdown have on rural undergraduate students in India during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RESULT ANALYSIS METHODS

Students in higher education who were at least 16 years old made up the target audience. All of these are Indian undergraduates. From 1st September 2020 to 30th January 2021, a poll was performed online and offline to gather the data. A variety of online quizzes were held, and a structural questionnaire link utilising a "Google form" was provided to students over WhatsApp in order to examine their interest in online education. The information was gathered from both physical classroom following college reopening and online class attendance during the lockdown. 93 males and 172 girls were selected from a total of 265 students for this study. All of these are local to the same village and vicinity.To evaluate the participants in the study's learning state, a straightforward percentage distribution was utilised. The information from the previous year was compared in addition to the academic year 2020.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

According to the current survey, an average of 14.7±3.2 (15.5%) of the 265 total students were enrolled in online courses. Only 33.6±5.6 (19.3) of the 172 female pupils were actually present. However, only 8.2±2.4 (8.7)% of the 93 male students had online presence. From the third week of January 2021, physical education lessons were once again offered. After that, it was noted that the same kids' classroom attendance was roughly twice as high as their online presence. According to the data, there were 35.47 percent of students present overall, 42.44% of whom were female, and 22.50 percent of whom were male. The aforementioned information demonstrated the value of physical classes over virtual classes.Rural students were shown to prefer offline classes despite the fact that online schools offer several advantages over them locally (Bernard et al., 2004).

The participation of students in webinars and online tests also demonstrated how many students were consistently missing from all e-learning events. Only a small number of students attended the aforementioned campus events, as evidenced by Figures 1 and 2. Even though the necessary facilities were available and many students appeared neutral toward such activities, this may be the result of a lack of interest in online learning.

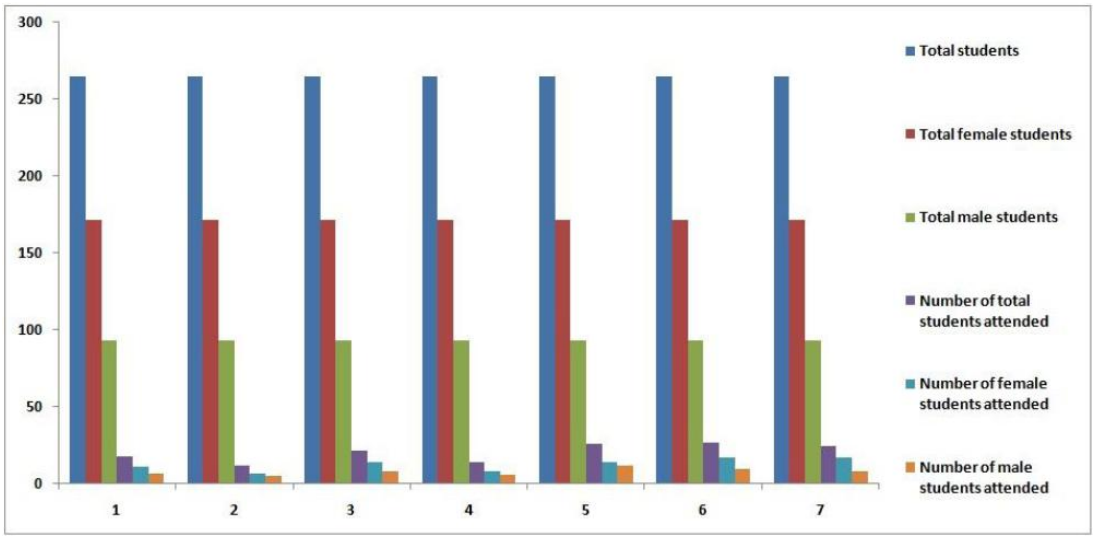

Figure 1 shows the number of college students who participated in online quizzes offered by the institution during the lockdown and following its reopening for the population under study.

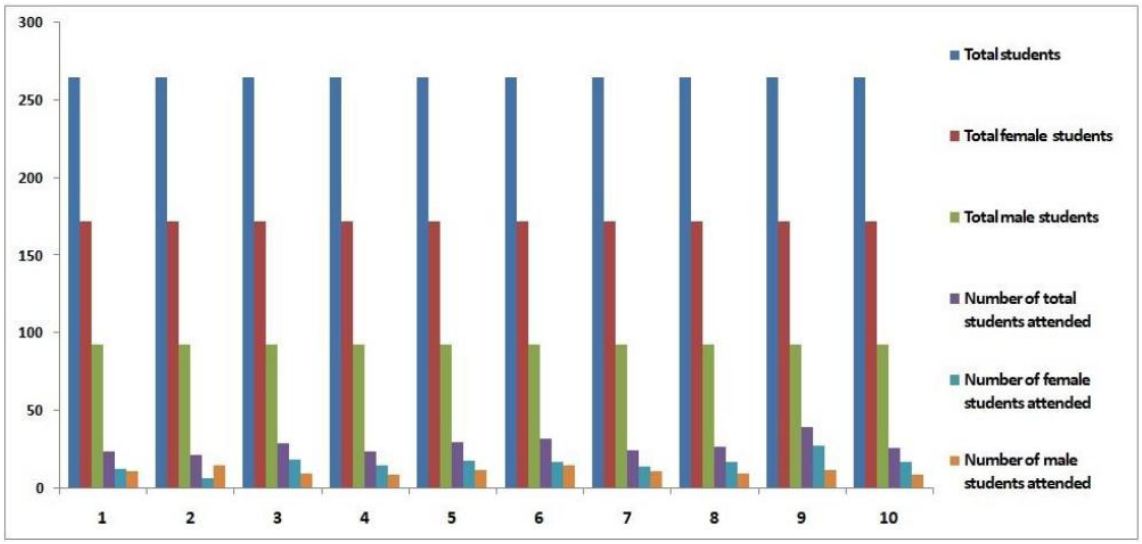

Fig. 2: The number of students from the population under study who attended various webinars throughout the lockdown and reopening of universities.

Since of e-learning, students can take classes from any place they choose. Online lectures can also be recorded and shared afterwards. Additionally, this enables students to access the course materials whenever it is convenient for them. Additionally, e- education lowers expenses because it does away with the expenditures of student meals, transportation, and, most crucially, a paperless learning environment that is less expensive and better for the environment. But at that time, pupils were also less interested in online learning. Additionally, a comparison of student attendance records from the academic years 2019–20 and 2020–21 revealed that many students did not return to the institution after it reopened.Since there were nearly 82.6% of students in the institution prior to COVID-19, that number dropped to 35.5% after that time. In order to understand the factors in this particular region, several students were questioned. The results demonstrated that students dislike e-learning because they can learn just as much from being around their classmates. Although there are less in-person interactions between students and teachers in an online course. The students frequently feel alone as a result of this. The difficulty of maintaining focus on a screen for extended periods of time was one of the main reasons why pupils showed decreased interest.

Students are more likely to become quickly distracted by social media or other websites when learning online, as many students have stated. Internet connectivity is a major issue for online learning, particularly in remote areas. 18% of the students in our study population were unable to enrol in online courses because of poor internet access. Learning

may not be continuous if students or teachers do not have a reliable internet connection. This was perceived as being a negative factor for the online education process.

A family may not be able to afford to provide each student in the family with a dedicated gadget or phone, lengthy hours of internet access, or a quiet place to study. 13% of students in our sample population don't have Android phones. Due to their lack of access to cell phones due to their financial situation, many students were completely excluded from class throughout the whole lockdown. Previous research showed that these types of students experienced increased emotions of vulnerability and embarrassment on platforms for online classes.

Less than 15% of Indian rural families have internet access, compared to 42% of Indian urban households, according to the National Sample Survey on Key Indicators of Household Social Consumption on Education in India report for 2017–18. Farmers, workers, and those in the poorest households cannot afford a smartphone or a computer. Similar results were found in the current survey, which found that nearly 94% of students come from families who are farmers.

Many students were unable to access online learning even after they had their own smartphones because they were unaccustomed to or untrained in the usage of educational applications and search engines. This is a big concern in rural and lower socioeconomic neighbourhoods, according to earlier statistics. Accessibility to the Internet comes at a major expense to the user, as well. This method has caused many underprivileged students to experience despair and anxiety in addition to keeping them from participating in digital learning. The pandemic has shown the system of hierarchy and ingrained inequalities between the rich and the poor in Indian education.A more effective educational strategy can help such underprivileged students improve their financial situation. The same issue has resurfaced as a barrier for the same pupils as a result of online programmes.

Another significant factor contributing to the lower attendance of students in online classes is their excessive use of social media and other sources of distraction. Additionally, it was observed that many times, despite having all the tools necessary to take online classes, students do not focus on their studies. Additionally, several students were observed using their mobile devices in offline classes.The identical scene may be seen in numerous

locations where high school and college students frequently use social media, diverting them from their studies. This is a significant difficulty in the modern era as well.

E-learning, however, is changing isolated rural places. While many people are taking advantage of what online learning has to offer, local governments are having trouble incorporating high-speed internet facilities. Additionally, fluctuating power supplies and outdated electronics are a problem for residents of rural areas, which was found to obstruct seamless access.Recent statistics also showed that pupils in rural India lack access to the most up-to-date technology and levels of internet content that urban Indians take for granted every day. A smaller proportion of students in villages own desktop or laptop computers than do those in cities.

They rely on their family members' smartphones to learn and attend lessons, which makes it a taxing activity. Long periods of time spent consuming information on small screens have been found to be harmful to students' health.

For more than ten years, our nation has been seriously concerned about the digital gap and digital literacy. Many teachers and students in rural areas lack the technical proficiency of educators and pupils in urban areas. Some research revealed that while working, both teachers and pupils experience discomfort. Here, there is a critical need for the government, lawmakers, and civil society organisations to work together to develop an equitable, user-friendly digital interface that would enable teachers and students to engage in uninterrupted learning.

This study may offer in-depth understanding of the precise state of affairs in isolated rural areas of central India. When developing measures to aid students during this epidemic, higher education institutions may find these insights useful. Moreover, it is critically necessary to develop effective measures to support education in the COVID 19 age. Additionally, using the same study to several zones may also help to advance greater understandings.

CONCLUSION

In light of the current pandemic, online classes have emerged as a substitute for traditional ones. Technology services like smartphones, computers, the internet, and other devices should be seen as necessities rather than extras. The information presented here paints a

picture of a remote rural place where kids prefer traditional courses to online ones. The main causes were that students didn't have access to smartphones, there was inadequate internet connectivity, there weren't many facilities for accessing online data, etc. The same survey also showed that as the majority of students come from farming households, they must work in fields in lieu of attending online classes.Additionally, this analysis reveals that among the students under study, less face-to-face connection between the teacher and students, absence of peers, network issues, and new class structures lead to annoyance, dissatisfaction, and anxiety. Here, it was noted that there had been a sharp decline in the number of students attending online classes. It may be possible to boost students' interest and approach in online classrooms by using technologies like social presence during the course, personal information requests, encouraging student involvement, and facilitating video communications.

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