

DIGITAL INDIA INITIATIVES AND ONLINE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA AMIDST COVID 19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

Educational institutions around the world have been closed since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Around 1.6 billion students worldwide were forced to be held in these homes. In India, educational institutions were closed in March 2020. As a result, 25 crore students from 15.5 lakh schools were forced to be confined to their homes. The 2009 'Right to Education' Act ensured everyone's education, but the coronavirus outbreak stopped people's basic rights. In this context, various online platforms such as 3 e-learning platforms, namely the National Education Resource Warehouse, DIKSHA, E-Path Sala Simpang Shagun; Swayam, Swayam Prabha, National Academic Depository, National Digital Library and Virtual Labs under the Digital India initiative help further education. But students from vulnerable communities are excluded from the benefits of online education. Seeing this situation, this article analyzes how the traditional education model has stalled due to the outbreak of the pandemic and the government's initiative to continue education. Using qualitative research methods, this article also analyzes India's virtual education infrastructure before and after the pandemic. Analytical work is based on secondary data. The e-platform currently supports learners, but this is not enough to include all. So, there is a need to strengthen the online platform as a mood alternative.

Keywords: COVID-19, Online Education, Pandemic, Right to Education, Vulnerable Communities.

ABSTRAK

Institusi pendidikan di seluruh dunia telah ditutup sejak merebaknya pandemi COVID-19. Sekitar 1,6 miliar siswa di seluruh dunia terpaksa ditahan di rumah-rumah ini. Di India, lembaga pendidikan ditutup pada Maret 2020. Akibatnya, 25 crore siswa dari 15,5 lakh sekolah terpaksa dikurung di rumah mereka. Undang-Undang 'Hak untuk Pendidikan' 2009 memastikan pendidikan semua orang, tetapi wabah virus corona menghentikan hak-hak dasar orang. Dalam konteks ini, berbagai platform online seperti 3 platform e-learning yaitu Gudang Sumber Daya Pendidikan Nasional, DIKSHA, E-Path Sala Simpang Shagun; Swayam, Swayam Prabha, National Academic Depository, National Digital Library, dan Virtual Labs di bawah inisiatif Digital India membantu pendidikan lebih lanjut. Tetapi siswa dari komunitas rentan dikecualikan dari manfaat pendidikan online. Melihat situasi tersebut, artikel ini menganalisis bagaimana model pendidikan tradisional mandek akibat merebaknya pandemi dan inisiatif pemerintah untuk melanjutkan pendidikan. Menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif, artikel ini juga menganalisis infrastruktur pendidikan virtual India sebelum dan sesudah pandemi. Pekerjaan analitis didasarkan pada data sekunder. Platform elektronik saat ini mendukung pelajar, tetapi ini tidak cukup untuk mencakup semua. Jadi, ada kebutuhan untuk memperkuat platform online sebagai alternatif mood.

Kata kunci: COVID-19, Pendidikan Online, Pandemi, Hak atas Pendidikan, Masyarakat Rentan.

INTRODUCTION

India is the second-largest populated country in the world comprising more than half of her population is under below 25 years of age (Agarwal et al., 2020). India is a population of more than 135 crore country; where above 60 crore population below the age of 25 years need a largest educational system. 15.5 lakh schools across the country has providing education of 25 crore students below the age of 18 years. School as a temple of education must play an important role; but due to the outbreak of COVID-19 all educational institution like schools, colleges, universities, and others have been shut down since early March 2020 for the safety of learners. The situation forced to confined 25 crore students of 15.5 lakh schools (Biswas, 2017) in the home. At that time globally 1.6 billion students are forced to be confined in their homes. This situation making huge disorders in the education sector not only in India also across the world. For combating the situation educational institutions across the world move to online mode of education. India also follows the same pathway for continuing the education of its huge learners. In the context of the online mode of education for India Novel Laureate Abhijeet Benerjee told to the Indian Express on 6th May 2020 that "my prediction is that many more people will now take online classes. One good news for people in India is that this kind of education model is extremely scalable. What had constrained education until now is the need for physical proximity" in The Indian Express. Novel laureate also stressed that online education is one of the 'good ones' still the situation. He rightly said that online education is now an alternative mode of education for continuing education in the pandemic situation (Bordoloi et al., 2021).

India is a country where more than 20 percent population living below the poverty line; where near about 70 percent of people are living villages and depended on agriculture and related activities for their livelihood; many villages till date discarded from the modern world in respect of roads connectivity, communication, electricity and other means of communication (Asher & Novosad, 2016). Near about half of the population of the country working in unorganized sector where uncertainty risk is high (O'Keefe & Palacios, 2020). More than 8 percent of the total population of the country are most vulnerable for every aspect of socio-economic life; they are living mostly in remote villages across the country. These vulnerable tribal communities educationally lagging from the other communities. To date literacy gap between the tribal people and others is more than 14 percent. The subject is more and more worsened in the case of tea tribes; tea tribes are those who are working as laborers in tea gardens and residing in quarters within tea garden areas. A long journey as workers in tea gardens they are educationally backward compared to other communities. The literacy gap of tribal people; those who are living in duras in West Bengal and depended on tea gardens and forests for their livelihood is 14.55 percent; which is more than the national average.

The learning of the tea tribe children is most affected by the outbreak of COVID-19. Students with special needs within the community as well as outside the community are in the most vulnerable condition due to the outbreak of COVID-19. 'Swabhiman' an NGO conducted a survey in ten states across the country and they found that 43 lakh students with special needs were severely affected due to the pandemic situation (www.hindustantimes.com). there is no research that looks at the situation, this article analyzes how the traditional education model stagnates due to the outbreak of the pandemic and the government's initiative to continue education.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research work is analytical in nature. The work primarily based on secondary data. Available secondary data consulted for the completion of the research work. Published articles on book, various website and newspapers consulted as sources of literature and data. Primary data also consulted for the work. Primary data from 18 (10 primary and 8 upper primary/secondary) schools of western duars region are consulted. After collection of data the qualitative result are draws through analytical mood (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Emerging Challenges in the Education System Amidst COVID-19

Due to the outbreak of the Coronavirus education system across the world badly halted for a long time (Jena, 2020a). The education system in India is the largest one across world for her largest population. The people of India till day depends on the public education system. But the pandemic situation immensely affected this largest education system in India. Continuing education through online mood from home started across world for combating the situation. Most of the developing countries across the world are suffering in the implementation of the online mode of education. India is the largest education system facing serious challenges to the implementation of an online mode of education for all, amidst COVID-19. Following major challenges are facing by the students from various standards. These challenges are:

1. Countries across world started online mood of education classes started in the pandemic situation (Mishra et al., 2020). But students mainly from developing countries are staying outside the facility because of their vulnerable socio-economic condition. Students from developing countries across the world are seriously facing such challenges. Students from every standard in India staying outside on the ambit of education due to their vulnerable position. Students from tribal communities, especially from tea tribes are badly suffering from the crisis due to their worst socio-economic condition. Right to Education act implemented for inclusion but now online education amidst COVID-19 started exclusion.
2. Private Schools across India started full-fledged online education; where education is treated as goods and students are come from higher strata of society (Sahithya et al., 2020). But to date, a large population of the country depends on public schools. But most of the public schools are not able to operationalize online mode of education due to their infrastructural weakness. Poor people, vulnerable communities are depending on public schools; so, the educational rights of their children are facing serious challenges. As a result, day by day gap is increasing between the students of common and elite people in the country.
3. Unstable electricity and lack of high-speed internet connectivity create another serious challenge to the online mode of education. Under 'Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana' and 'Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gram Jyoti Yojana' (www.india.gov.in) every village in India is connected to the power grid, but till the day many rural households staying outside the projects. At the same time low voltage till the daily reality in villages across the country which creates a challenge to the inclusion of every student in online education (Maity et al., 2021).
4. Internet connectivity in India till the day an ongoing project. Many villages and remote areas till not connected through highspeed internet. There are many villages across India to date not connected by the internet. For instance, Bijoy Nagar of Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh

was out of internet coverage since before the date of 1st August 2020. The border village of Arunachal Pradesh connected with a 2G internet connection on 1st August 2020 (Karmakar, 2020). This indicates such Bijoy Nagar are found across hilly and remote regions in India. So, lack of high-speed internet connectivity students of rural areas especially vulnerable communities is not able to participate in online classes.

5. Till the day most of the poor people have not smartphones. But smart phone is the precondition of participation in the online mode of education. Due to these consequences students from vulnerable communities losing their education rights amid COVID-19; which was ensured under the Right to Education act till before the pandemic.
6. In India 'Midday Meal' scheme running since 1995 as a nutritional scheme for increasing enrolment and minimizing the dropout rate before the completion of elementary level of education (Biswas, 2017). Due to the pandemic situation, the nutritional scheme is stopped and students from vulnerable families are facing a nutritional crisis. Presently government started to give food grains to the guardians of the students under midday meal scheme. But under this policy students cannot able to take midday meal every day at their home because of their poor condition. In maximum cases students are bound to share their meal with other family members.
7. In India, education falls in the concurrent list; every state is not equipped infrastructurally to providing online education in their schools. Public schools run by the state government in most of the states are not able to start online education till the day. Only few private-run schools of urban areas are started the facilities. Central government-run various schools across the country started online mode of education by using various methods for the aims of inclusion of every child. As a multi lingual country students from various state-run schools who are learning through their mother tongue as a medium of instruction are not able to access facilities from central governmental initiatives. This type of policy creates serious challenges to the learners and increasing the gap between the students of state-run government schools and central government-run schools.

Governmental Arrangement for Online Education in India

Government of India taking various initiatives to strengthen the virtual platform for education system across the country (Jena, 2020a). In India, there was already an infrastructure of virtual education since before the COVID-19 outbreak. One report mentioned that enrolment for various online courses was 1.6 million was in 2016 and was expected at that time it will grow 9.6 million by the end of 2021 (Biswas, 2020). Truly it is increasing more and more than expected number due to the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020 in India; although the arrangement of online mode of education expanding in the field of higher education. Digital India initiatives of the government now benefited the education sector nicely. Digital India initiatives of government comprise various projects in various areas relating to health, education, labor, employment, etc. As a part of digital India initiatives colleges and universities across the country offer online correspondence courses much before the COVID-19 outbreak; which now helping a large number of students in the pandemic situation. The following major initiatives are taken by the government to strengthen online mode education in India:

Implementation of 'Shagun' Scheme

'Shagun' is an online junction under which the Department of School Education, Government in India, and all states and Union Territories have launched several e-learning platforms. The name of the scheme 'Shagun' is derived from two different words i.e. 'Shala' and 'Gunvatta'. The word 'Sala' means school and the word 'Gunvatta' means quality. So, the meaning of 'Shagun' is quality education in schools. The primary aim of the scheme is to facilitate both teachers and students with a platform where they can interact, however through the digital medium for further learning. There are three e-learning platforms under the scheme; i) National Repository of Education Resources (NREOE); ii) *Diksha*; iii) *E-path Sala*.

1. **National Repository of Education Resources (NREOE):** Approximately 16,000 registered users are using the platforms where 14,527 e-learning resources are available. The platform is exposed to e-libraries, e-books, and e-courses for users. Under constructive repository there are 2779 documents, 1345 interactive, 4664 audios, 2586 images, and 6153 videos are available for users.
2. **Diksha:** The then Ministry of Education has launched National Digital Infrastructure for teacher's portal to equip teachers from class I to XII into the world of e-learning. Teachers and students both are facilitated by the portal. There are 80,000 e-books are available which help the students of XII standard of CBSE and NCERT students of states and Union Territories.
3. **E-Path Shala:** E-Path Shala is one of the important portals which help students to participate in the online mode of education. Through the web portal students from class, I to XII can access 1,886 audios, 2,000 videos, 696 e-books. The digital repository has been made available by NCERT to make sure that the students do not miss out on any important concept to be taught in the case. It is also available in several languages (www.india.gov.in).

Swayam

Swayam was launched on 9th July 2017 by the Ministry of Education. It is an initiative under the "Digital India" campaign taken by the Government of India in 2015 (Choudhury, 2020; Kumar, 2020). *Swayam* the meaning 'self' is a Hindi acronym that stands for "study webs of active learning for young aspiring minds" is an Indian massive online course platform. The initiative was taken by the then ministry for the students perusing education from class IX to XII, graduate and post-graduate level. *Swayam* facilitates study material at one destination. Students can access study material in the form of video lecture, reading materials, self-assessment tests, online discussions, and doubt sessions. The portal is connected to national coordinators such as AICTE, NCERT, IGNOU, UGC, NPTEL, NIOS, IIMB, for delivering updated quality content. Students registering for the courses at *Swayam* need not pay the fee as the course is free of costs, however, to get the certification registration is required for which a minimal fee has to be paid. This platform is playing an important role in the pandemic situation to provide virtual education.

Swayam Prabha

Swayam Prabha is an effective tool of learning launched by the then Ministry of Education, Government of India for the students who do not have internet access at their home (Jena, 2020b). *Swayam Prabha* is a group of 32 DTH channels which telecasting high-quality educational programs on a 24x7 basis using the GSAT-15 satellite. Every day new contents of at least 4 hours duration are flatted on the website which is 5 times in a day. Students of standard I to post-graduate levels can take facilities from the platform. The programme is available in DD free dish, set-top box, antenna and now it extended on other private channels for combating the pandemic situation. This type of initiative helping students across

the country. Except for these initiatives' government has taken other important measures to strengthen the online mode of education. Such initiatives are the National Academic Depository, National Digital Library, Virtual Labs.

National Academic Depository

National Academic Depository is a national database; initiative taken by the Ministry of Education, Government of India to hold academic awards issued by academic institutions in an electronic form. This virtual initiative of the government strengthening the virtual model of the education system across the country.

National Digital Library

National Digital Library is a project under the Ministry of Education, Government of India has given free access to the National Digital Library of India, where over 3,82,00,000 books and periodicals are available. In the lockdown period, peoples are benefited from the online library. These ICT-based initiatives of the government helping to continue the education through virtual mode in a pandemic situation.

Virtual Lab

Virtual Lab is an initiative of the Ministry of Education, Government of India under the National Mission on Education through ICT. The project aims to provide remote access to the lab in various disciplines of Science and Engineering. These types of governmental arrangements helping the learners at the time of the COVID-19 outbreak in India (Achuthan et al., 2011).

CONCLUSION

Right to Education' act 2009 was launched in April 2010 for ensuring the education of everyone, but the outbreak of coronavirus ceased the fundamental right of people. In that context various online platform of government such as 3 e-learning platform namely National Repository of Education Resources, DIKSHA, E- Path Sala of Shagun junction; Swayam, Swayam Prabha, National Academic Depository, National Digital Library, and Virtual Labs under Digital India initiatives helping to continue the education in the pandemic situation. But most of the students mainly from elementary level are not able to receive such facilities due to their unequipped condition. Students from vulnerable communities are excluded from the benefit of online education. Now 'new normal' is going on across the world; few countries are now started to reopen their educational institutions in the way of 'new normal' order. But in India, there is now going on the second wave of COVID-19; which creates more serious challenges to every aspect of human life than the first wave. In this situation India still not ready to reopen her educational institutions. But as India a largest number of learners across the world to be needing to rethink about her education system. There is need to strengthen existing online system of education for ensuring education of all in till the pandemic shall exist. There is need to give more priority in education sector by increasing expenditure in the sector. There is need to special vaccination programme for students, teachers and staffs.

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