



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor (RJIF): 8.4
IJAR 2023; 9(10): 256-263
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 06-09-2023
Accepted: 08-10-2023

Dr. Nagendra MP
Associate Professor,
Department of PG Studies in
Sociology, Government Arts
College, Bangalore,
Karnataka, India

COVID-19 and online school education: Subaltern sociological perspectives

Dr. Nagendra MP

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22271/allresearch.2023.v9.i10d.11888>

Abstract

The World is today reconciling to the aftereffects of the pandemic COVID-19 that struck all countries in the world in March 2020, leaving a long trail of deaths, disability and irreparable loss of lives and livelihoods, particularly to the poor and marginalized in developing nations. Besides the medical aspect of what factors caused the virus, whose multiplications are striking the people even to this day, that they have not freed from its deadly trap and tentacles. After this medical ill-significance of the pandemic, comes its economic impact. Much has been written about how millions of families were washed away in the milieu created by the pandemic that took away young and old, males and females and the third gender, poor and rich, politicians and business tycoons to common man/woman.

One of the important fall out of this pandemic has been its impact (by way of derailing) on the education system, educational institutions and mode of learning, examinations, and conferring degrees that would take the students/youth towards building their careers, which have become greatly important in the post-pandemic days in all the countries, but more in the developing ones.

Sociologically, impact on educational system has its causal effect on the primary institution of family from where the youngsters get socialized. This paper attempts to look at the impact of COVID-19 on students in schools, in particular where online education or learning was introduced following the lockdown due to the pandemic.

Keywords: Pandemic, COVID-19, online education, poverty, vulnerable communities

Introduction

The whole world came under the grip of Corona Virus or COVID-19, that hit every country, every home, and individuals in one way or another. The world in early 2020 had a very devastating and profound effect in a multitude of ways. All institutions of society - like the family, school, church, government or private offices, business, trade, political and cultural systems have been affected drastically and suffered because of the pandemic, as it was called. Earlier also, the world had seen many other instances of loss of human lives, caused by genocides, wars, epidemics and other natural disasters, but something of the like of the tragedy and suffering that the COVID-19 has left behind seems to be having no parlance in the last few centuries of world history.

COVID-19 and Impact on Education (Learning Modes)

This paper has attempted to present the findings of a sociological research upon 'how COVID-19 has affected the learning process at school level, which experienced much stress and pressure as a result of the pandemic. As it is now history, normal working of schools and universities was brought to a halt. Students had to carry on their learning through self-study. Everything came to a standstill and schools, colleges, anganawadi centres, professional coaching institutions and training centres- all were under lock down. The children could not come out of homes, due to the threat of infection, had to wear masks all the time and stay at home. Therefore, scholars and international organizations described the virus attack as one of the deadliest in recent human history. It was so not just from human health point of view, but without any exaggeration that it created a furor and crisis among the students and parents alike.

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Nagendra MP
Associate Professor,
Department of PG Studies in
Sociology, Government Arts
College, Bangalore,
Karnataka, India

Box 1. Global Situation regarding such Viruses

The pandemic was a catastrophe and led to unprecedented crisis. Because corona virus outbreak was the only one to lead to disrupting of education for a large scale and long time. The earlier outbreaks such as SARS in China in 2003 led to closure for 3 weeks in Singapore and 2 months in China. Some large gatherings like sports etc were abandoned to avoid disease spreading. H1N1 (Influenza) outbreak in Mexico in 2009 also led to 2 months closure of schools. The MERS outbreak in the Middle East in 2015 led to closing of schools at a national level for a two weeks period. Ebola outbreak in 2014 & 2016 in some of the West African countries led to closure for up to 7-9 months causing learning gaps, school drop outs especially among the secondary school students from low income HHs. A bunch of other disasters like earthquakes, Tsunami, floods, and other natural disasters have caused disruption, drop outs and child labour etc., to contribute to HH income among poor people.

After the WHO declared COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 11th 2020 to prevent the rapid spread of the virus SARS-CoB-2 that caused COVID-19, governments (109 countries immediately, and 150 countries by April 2020) across the globe suspended normal functioning of schools among other institutions. It was partial closure to complete shutting down of pre-primary to upper secondary level where at least 80% of enrolled children were affected. Some countries followed partial closure (a) open in certain areas only (b) open for certain age groups and grades/classes and (c) open with reduced class hours. Sweden switched to distance learning. Korea, Lithuania and Australia reorganized syllabus to reduce the loss. But the educational systems were unprepared to handle the sudden clamping of lockdown and affected schools. Educators, students, and parents to swiftly adapt a new method of learning as the reality.

In India, like in many other countries, new methods of transferring knowledge during the lockdown period were adopted. Box 2 presents a few of them.

Box 2. The Case with India

1. **Distance Learning:** Distance Learning (DL) is quite old in the educational system of the country and we have IGNOU and several state level Open Universities engaged in imparting DL for the graduate and post-graduate levels. This came to help in many countries during their school closure period. Remote learning and teaching began to emerge. This marked a great shift from face-to-face to remote teaching and learning. Thus, both teachers or instructors and students were part of the interactive new process. But the families on both sides were also involved informally and indirectly in making the infrastructure available, maintaining discipline, quiet surroundings, assistance in HH work for the teachers by husband and/or other members of the family. More than anything sharing the only smart phone of the family held by the husband with the teacher wife and/or student son/daughter.
2. **Other forms of Distance Education:** Besides Distance learning directly from the teacher, the students were also provided alternatives. These included on-line teaching through digital platforms, *Edusat* programs on the Television and Radio, Learning packages in printed

form - such as Worksheets, Textbooks etc. These were useful aids to teachers who could transfer knowledge in actual time through virtual learning platforms. The difference was in the gap between countries in doing this. The developed countries were those with already existing digital learning platforms, and other aids. But countries which were poor or developing had to use television and radio broadcasts/programs.

3. **Hybrid Learning Model:** Once the pandemic's transmission risk reduced, then the governments allowed the schools to reopen but partly. At this time the schools adopted the Hybrid approach to transfer learning, called as "blended learning". Blended learning is a combination of conventional class-room based learning and online education. As the name suggests it combines the modern technologies with class-room based traditional learning methods. This gave much flexibility and ease of learning better by secondary school students. However, to reduce any possibility of disease to spread the interactive lessons were lowered in number. Wherever possible Microsoft Teams was used for certain types of learning such as preparing assignments, group projects, discussions, peer-based seminars, etc. Lot of resources and materials were supplied by teachers to improve learning and get promoted to next class. Thus, hybrid learning was found to be a suitable educational approach to tackle the void created by COVID-19. It was found to be better than DL.

3. Objective of the Paper

Of relevance to the paper is to investigate how the extended closure of schools as also the uncertainty that surrounded it affected the students. The closure of schools and stoppage of education/coaching affected or disrupted, reportedly, about a significant proportion of their educational progress (restricting our analysis to the school going children). The government only estimated it to be around 253 million children whose studies were disrupted due to lockdown.

4. Analytical Framework of the Paper

The paper, set in sociological framework, has viewed education as a systematic and structured process of learning; there are two sides to it: formal education provided by schools, colleges, & other institutions of learning and the informal learning that the individuals acquire in the family through socialization. Both help in preparing them as citizens to realise and practice the various roles and responsibilities in their society. The process of education typically involving curriculum, instruction, assessment, and evaluation promoting intellectual and physical development, also fosters critical thinking, and creativity [Lave \(1982\)](#) argued that a variety of settings and forms enable this process such as classrooms, online or distance learning, experiential learning, and practical training. Dewey's work (1938) emphasized the significance of experiential learning, in which learners actively engage themselves with their environment to construct knowledge and meaning. The importance of social interaction was highlighted by [Vygotsky \(1978\)](#) and Piaget ([1952](#)) where the students and teachers enter into a cultural context that facilitates cognitive development. The Social Learning Theory of Bandura (1977) ^[2] helps in insights into how children

actively construct knowledge and understand the world through their interactions and experiences. Mayer (2008) has stressed upon strategies that teachers and parents use to make the children learn through innovative instructional strategies such as multimedia are the contributions of the Cognitive Load Theory by John Sweller in 1988. It stressed that the working memory is capable of grasping a small amount of information at one time. Hence teachers much avoid overloading knowledge in order to get quick results and maximize learning. Constructivist theory highlights the role of active learning and the importance of organizing information into meaningful structures or "Schemata". Social Inequality of Disease-Striking.

From a sociological perspective, this paper takes note of an important fall-out of the pandemic on our society where social inequality based on caste and ethnicity determined access to measures undertaken by the political system to address the needs of citizens, such as education of school children. Under such circumstances, a state of anomie and social pathology is imminent as per Durkheim. The danger that the pandemic kept at the doors of the already troubled vulnerable sections of our society - like the Dalits, tribals, and other 'very poor' was that they were the unfortunate victims being affected at a higher level than the better-off categories, by the virus, on account of their poverty, lack of proper or inadequate dwellings/housing structures, unhygienic & absence of basic facilities of drainage, toilets, safe drinking water etc. Job loss during lockdown has led to thousands of families returning to native villages.

Impact of the Pandemic and Social Upheaval

The pandemic resulted in affecting the education of particularly children from homes of weaker sections in all countries (over 1.57 billion children in 191 countries, accounting for approximately 91 per cent of the world's child population, UNESCO, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). It was reported by the UNICEF that nearly 600 million children were uprooted in their lives in South Asia, including in India. This section of our paper attempts to look at the impact on the education (schooling) of children as a result of the lockdown imposed due to the virus attack. It is now history that the spread of the pandemic led to closure of all schools and other educational institutions across the country in March 2020 till a long period. The government labelled it as an interim measure to respect the central government's order as the only way to control the spreading of the virus. Not only the educational institutions, but all offices, factories, work centres, shops and practically everything was shut down. Arrangements were made to access daily needs of groceries etc., and essential services. It is beyond the scope of the paper to dwell upon these issues.

Table 1: Students in Primary and Secondary Education in 2018-2019

Class	Govt. School Children	Children in Govt. Aided Schools	Children in Private Unaided Schools	Others
LKG to 5 th class	24,26,773	4,19,044	32,12,568	42,846
6 th to 10 th class	19,62,304	10,18,460	22,39,657	2,09,071
TOTAL	43,89,077	14,37,504	54,52,225	2,51,917

Data source: Department of Primary and Secondary Education, Karnataka

5. Methodology and Source of Data: A brief study was carried out to assess the situation in a setting that is semi-rural and semi-urban (changing) one. The capital city of Karnataka, Bengaluru's one taluk located in its Urban district, viz Bengaluru East Taluk and D B Halli Grama

Semi-urban/Semi-rural Areas and Vulnerable Communities

Our first attention is towards the children from the rural and semi-urban areas, who reportedly form around 84 per cent of the total school going children in the state. Of them an estimated 70 per cent attend government schools. Both government and privately run schools (and all higher-level institutions of learning) were closed down during the lockdown period, the brunt of denial of learning was more noticed in the case of the children from rural areas and among them those from deprived communities. The basic deterrent was their parents' poverty and unemployment (caused by the pandemic) most of them being daily wage earners. Government schools enroll mostly students from these poor and vulnerable sections. The facility of home education and the use of electronic gadgets like smart phones and laptops with internet facility was difficult for them. The highlighting by UNESCO that 14 crores of primary and 13 crores of secondary school students were affected by this upheaval caused by the pandemic in the country is not an exaggeration.

Online Education

Here, we discuss how online mode of education has helped the post-COVID-19 situation that affected regular classroom learning. Its timely benefit to help students to access learning and continue their studies (UNESCO 2020). It also offered choices of modes of learning such as videos, simulations etc., with the digital and technological advantages available. However, it also had several disadvantages, the prominent one being lack of face-to-face interaction with teachers and fellow students for greater clarity, socialization and extra-curricular activities, debates, collaborative learning, tests, and examinations- all integral for achieving holistic learning and personality enhancement. The traits of online learning is quite challenging as the students are expected to be very smart, innovative, self-disciplined & motivated to learn and more than anything responsible for their success or failure in exams. There is no physical supervision. Added to these is the infrastructural disadvantages like failure of electricity, internet facility, own computer or smart phone, suitable physical set up like privacy, lack of any disturbance of household chores (for teachers), noise and others (Jena 2020)^[8]. Several factors determine its effectiveness for both the teacher and the student who have to be mentally connected throughout the process (Gopal *et al.* 2021)^[5]. The Department of Primary and Secondary Education, Karnataka, has documented that during 2018-19, there were over 79,000 schools and 1.15 crore children.

Panchayat in this taluk formed the study area as example of a changing zone between rural to urban.

6. Profile of Bengaluru East Taluk: Bengaluru East taluk is one of the taluks of the district of Bengaluru Urban. Its

total geographical area is 129.48 sq kms. There are 59 villages and one town in the taluk. The taluk gets an average of 59.8 days of rain per year, but normal rainy days are much more. Its main crops are ragi & horticultural crops.

According to the Census 2011, the taluk contains 24537 households of which 22683 live in the rural pocket and the remaining 1854 households are.

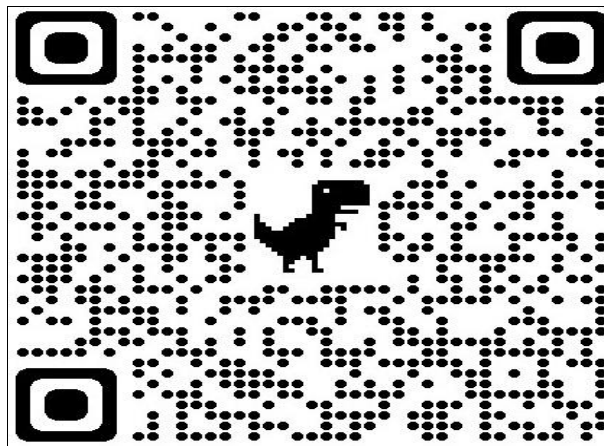


Fig 1: QR code for map of Blore urban Dt villages

residing the BBMP area (urban). The total population of the taluk is 102607 persons of whom males comprised 53699 and the remaining 48908 were women. 47.61 per cent of people of the taluk stay in the rural area (villages) and the remaining 51.75 per cent are staying in the urban area (census 2011). Children in the age group of 0 - 6 years of age formed 12.71 per cent of the population and were 13041 in number. The density of population is 792 persons per sq km. The sex ratio for the taluk was 911 as per census 2011 as against the average 973 for the state as a whole. There is an increase in sex ratio in this census 2011 than it was in 2001. It has improved in the urban part of the taluk. Sex ratio for urban areas was 932 and for rural it was 909. According to the Census 2011 again, 24.43 per cent of the total population of the taluk were from SC background and 2.27 per cent are from the ST communities. In its religious composition, the taluk had the majority Hindus (91.09%) with 102607 persons, followed by Muslims forming 4.33 per cent (4444 persons) of the total population. The Christians formed 3.95 per cent with 4055 people, much more than the other religious minority communities such as the Jains and Sikhs with 0.07 per cent (75 and 70 persons

respectively) and Buddhists with 0.06 per cent or 63 persons.

Literacy rate for the taluk stood at 69.28 per cent. For males it was 75.19 per cent and for females 62.8 per cent; for those residing in urban areas, it was 63.22 per cent and for rural residents, 69.80 per cent (Bengaluru Urban district at a Glance 2014-2015, District Statistical Officer, Bengaluru Urban District).

Profile of DB Halli Grama Panchayat in Bengaluru East Taluk

D B Halli is a GP head quarter village of Bengaluru East Taluk in Bengaluru Urban district, located at about 9 kms from the capital city. The taluk in Bengaluru Rural district, viz., Hosakote, is the nearest town at 5 kms. The village code is 613165. D B Halli has a population of 1224 living in 310 households, as per census 2011. Males are 639 persons and females 585 (47.8%). The village's literacy is 69 per cent and female literacy rate is 30.4 per cent. The village is also a headquarter village for the Grama Panchayat. The total geographical area of D B Halli is 193.95 ha. The GP has as a rural local body, 7 villages under its jurisdiction and

33 elected members. There are a total of 3 government schools, but a number of international schools are in the vicinity run by private agencies located enroute to Hosakote, Varthur, K R Puram, Hoodi etc.

Table 2: Profile of D B Halli

Particulars	Details
Total Area	86.25 ha
Non-agricultural area	0.73 ha
Total Irrigated Area	59.73 ha
Total Population	1224
Total No of Houses	310
Female Population%	47.8% (585)
Total Literacy rate%	69.0% (844)
Female Literacy rate	30.4% (372)
Scheduled Tribes Population%	4.4% (54)
Scheduled Caste Population%	35.9% (439)
Working Population%	39.5%
Child (0 -6) Population by 2011	151
Girl Child (0 -6) Population% by 2011	39.7% (60)

Source: Census 2011

Majority of the people are marginal farmers and dependent on the bore well for irrigation for horticultural crops. Dairying is their subsidiary occupation. The proportion of SC (35.0%) and a few households belonging to one ST group (4.4%) were mainly landless and eke out their living

Table 3: Schools in the Study Area

Sl. No.	Type of school	Management	Category
1.	Government Lower Primary School	Dept. of Education, GoK	Primary with Grades 1-5
2.	Green Dot International School	Private Unaided	"-----"
3.	Paloma PU College Bandapura	Private Unaided	Higher Secondary with Grades 11-12

Source: Blore Urban Dt website

Of them, girls were more 55 and remaining 20 boys. Hindus being the majority, barring 10 Muslim students, the remaining were Hindus. Being government school, the majority were from the vulnerable groups like SC (32), ST (8), Lower OBC (10) and dominant caste Vokkaliga (20) and Muslims (5). Majority of HHs represented 13 students in the age group of 6-7 years in primary school) and 43 students in the age group of 8-10 years and 10-16 years (26 girls and 17 boys). 16 students studying in PUC and 3 ITI course formed the remaining sample. Barring 3 students who were studying in private school, the remaining were in Government institutions.

We have already noted above that the parents of these children were from lower income group pursuing agriculture plus wage labour. In 5 cases, the father worked in a private firm as service staff. 2 were teachers themselves; 4 had petty shops including a tea shop. In their age group the mothers were age between 25-35 (30 women) and 35-45 (45) years old. The highest educational level of mothers was Middle and High school (drop outs). There was not much difference between parents' education, and mothers were relatively better educated with 2 of them having gone to college.

Mothers, sisters, and grandmothers of the children from the respondent HHs worked in nearby agricultural farms as wage workers, in Garments, in construction sites, stone crushing/quarry, etc. Their average earnings per month for women is Rs.10000 -Rs.15000 (65%) and Rs. 15000-Rs.20000 for about 30 per cent. Almost all houses had working mothers. We have to note here that due to lock down, the parents were severely affected and HH poverty

through wage labour - on farm and by resorting to migration to Bengaluru and nearby towns. Muslim population were mainly landless and ran cycle repair shop, smithy, and leather work as livelihood options. The children studied in the government school (80%) and in two private schools run by a Church. Only those HHs with children studying at secondary school level were selected as the sample. and data was collected using a structured questionnaire. Besides, focused discussions were held with parents, students, teachers, representatives of the local organizations like SHGs and SDMCs.

The sample consisted of 75 students in the age group of 12 to 18 years studying in classes 6-12 formed the sample. Data was collected soon after the lock down was lifted in 2021 and by seeking the help of a non-government organization called Grameena Mahila Oookoota (GMO), whose representatives facilitated smooth process of interacting with the parents and others. The children of the poor and SC, ST and Muslim households seek education in government schools attracted by incentives like free education and certain aids like free uniform, books, bicycle, free medical check-up twice a year, mid-day meal and such others.

The following table presents the grim picture of admission to government schools not only in our field area, but in general, there is a preference towards private schools by the parents who can afford such education.

had increased. The closure of schools had affected, more than loss of education, mid-day meals to the children who depended on it as their only source of nutrition. The government had arranged for free distribution of ration kits to the poor and BPL families. But that came with many constraints. Efforts undertaken by the GP, the district administration, supported by NGOs and donors was quite good but not adequate considering the indebtedness of parents. before the lock down they used to earn around Rs.700/- to Rs. 1000/- per day (by men) and women earned Rs. 500/-. But work was not regular and half a month they were unemployed. Being closer to city and real estate boom all around, construction labor was sought after due to better availability and high wage rates. But it was possible for only the young men below 35 years. Those who were older and not used to its hardship had to continue in agricultural wage work, where rates were relatively lower (Rs. 500/- to Rs. 700/- for men Rs. 300/- for women). The seasonal nature of agriculture forced them to take up other activities to augment the income from agricultural labour. MGNREGS fetched wage rate of Rs.309/-, but timely work and funds were problems of the GP.

The above narration summarizes the fact that people whose children went to government schools in the study area suffered much in terms of income generation and sustainability of livelihoods during the lock down period. Under such circumstances, closure of schools and offering online education was a shocking decision to which the parents and concerned students reacted variously. Let us

now analyze the information obtained from the study under the following headings:

7. Discussion of Findings

(a) Necessary Preparation for Online Education

For online-education to be effective there is need for basic infrastructure with the right type and adequacy of devices. These form the integral parts of the learning process in the virtual mode. Televisions, smartphones, computers, or laptops are the devices relevant for this purpose. It was here that our study located the basic lacunae in the case of 90 per cent of respondent Hs. The parents expressed limitations for possessing them independently. The most common asset in all families was the television. The next device was the cell phone and in 60 per cent of cases a smart phone. About 35.3 per cent possessed both (a television and a smartphone). But what is of concern for the sociological analysis is the nearly 10 per cent of respondents who had neither of them - a television or a smartphone.

While this was true of the students and their families, it was shocking to learn that even many teachers/instructors also expressed difficulty in possessing a smart phone. The fact is that the family possessed one or at times two, but they were in the custody and use by the head of the family and/or the grown-up son who was working. The students have reported that they used to borrow the phone from father or elder brother (8%). Those who could not do anything simply lost all classes for 6 months. Even when they somehow got possession of a smart phone, data packages, internet cost/charges and electricity bills proved very dearer for most of them.

The teachers also being deprived of possessing the right equipment/tool was a real handicap for them. About 13 per cent of the teachers stated that they had tried to purchase a smartphone by raising loan from friends/relatives, ending up also in paying heavy interest rates. Given their lower-class status and some of these teachers in government schools also hailing from vulnerable caste background, it was not feasible for them to finance on the right equipment all by themselves - a phone, *l'et al.* one buying a laptop.

There are many sensitive but sociologically important issues here. For example, there were students who were left to live with the grandparents in this village, while the parents had gone on migratory labour to Bengaluru city or far off towns. Commuting was not economical and they visited on week ends or once a month etc. The grandmother who took care of the primary school going children or those in their early years of secondary education was not conversant with these devices and their usage.

Some mothers had raised loan in their SHG to purchase a phone, but delay in obtaining the loan from the bank and other such issues costed the education of the daughter.

(b) The learning Process: Time Allocation and Grasping

For those of the respondent HHs who could somehow come over the challenges of facilitating children's online studies through the right gadget, the second major challenge was to achieve the utility of what was being taught in the online mode. As there was practically no supervision by the teacher and the child/boy/girl never heeded to parental control under some pretext, or because the parents were themselves busy with their work, discipline and concentration to online classes was not adequate. After the classes, the students did not engage in recapitulating what was taught, or write down

notes. Home work was given but it was again to be submitted as worksheet online, which many could not upload as expected. Volume of teachers' voice, speed of talking, absence of a black board for checking spellings, diagrams etc., were the others difficulties. Clarity in grasping was limited and a lot of time was spent by them in exchanging notes on WhatsApp, but in the process, chat and/or watch videos, play games etc was not uncommon.

Thus, it was reported by parents and students, that they lagged behind studies (54%); partially benefitted (32%) and depended on internet and friends (43%). Power failure and poor internet connectivity impacted massively. Creating the right atmosphere at home to concentrate to hear, and grasp was lacking. As it was lockdown, all members of the family stayed more or less at home. There were some households that practiced home based production for a livelihood. For example, the 4 weavers' families had looms installed at home the sound of which affected children's online studies. In another few cases, the huddled housing structure in low-class areas, with people talking loudly, pressure cookers whistling, or toddlers crying - all these were disturbances.

Another matter that was prominent in our findings is that for many of these households, catching up with online education itself took several months after it was in fact initiated. In the process their children had lost much of the portions covered already and could not perform well in tests, assignments, and exams.

© Role of the Family (Parents) and Teachers (Instructors)

There are two other components to understand the process and effects of online education in the rural setting: the family and the instructor. Taking the family, i.e., parents in our study area, it was found that they were (mostly hailing from backward area and categories) looking forward for their children to obtain quality education and get into government employment (unlike themselves who were wage earners). Education was viewed as a solution for their socio-economic problems and poverty. Some mothers were PUC educated but most of them were primary or secondary school dropouts; hence unable to guide or coach their wards. An appreciable factor is that they did not discriminate and show gender bias had placed equal emphasis on daughters' studies, nevertheless pulling them to involve in HH work 'to prepare for life after marriage as house wife'. But this explanation did not hold good for the post COVID times and introduction of online education, because of job loss, sudden declaration of lockdown, mounting loans and a period of shock and vulnerability. Even those who were in middle class level fell down, not to speak of those who were already BPL and very poor.

The announcement about digital learning placed before parents and teachers an immediate preparation: devices to make it work - smart phone or laptop, internet facility and uninterrupted electric power supply. More than 65 per cent of parents were from the poor economic background, living in rented premises and crowded lanes near bus stand, market place, outskirts in slum like dwellings. They were migrants but 2,3 or more decades ago when things were totally different. Changes in these years had not brought economic success to all. Some had to lose agricultural lands for the KIADB the government's board for industrial area development, for SEZs (special economic zone activities)

and mainly for real estate due to IT and BT boom from 1990s onwards in that part of Bengaluru city. Thus, despite being aware and witness to heightened technological development all around, when online classes were announced, the economic condition of the parents was pathetic. Besides job loss, irregular earnings, indebtedness and harassment from moneylenders, a notable factor was the presence of two children for example one in 8th class and another in 11th simultaneously needing to attend online classes. The result was loss of classes up to 6-8 months postponing buying a smartphone, but affecting studies. In about 18.7 per cent of cases, as the mother was educated (PUC) she was able to listen to the class lecture and note down points. Some of them even contacted teachers by phone or WhatsApp for seeking additional points or clarifications. But the deprived were the marginalized and socially hitherto excluded sections. Some of the fathers incurred the wrath of adolescent sons for this reason, who even threatened to leave home, comparing how 'other' parents have helped their children. On the whole, it led to much conflict and chaos.

(d) Peer pressure, misuse, and wayward behaviour

An important fallout of the above distraught sons (even some daughters) was getting close to those classmates who had the infrastructure. Combined studies (online watching), was the pretext but after that much misuse followed: watching movies, videos on Facebook, Instagram or on dangerous unwarranted platforms like TikTok, messaging/chatting, music, capture selfies to exchange, and even some love affairs - placing mothers especially who were expected by mother-in-law and husband to 'keep an eye' of children, arrest their behaviour as they were getting out of control.

Many parents had purchases smart phones on installment basis, there was difficulty in financing for data package etc. some of them had to be taken from father who used it while at work or driving an auto or cab.

(e) Teachers/Instructors

Teachers (also termed as instructors) form an important part of post-COVID imposed online system of transferring the course to students at the school level. A few teachers from the local government schools/PU college or + 12 were interviewed for this study, which revealed that:

1. None of them had any prior experience of teaching online courses;
2. They faced difficulty in conducting them without support from the department of public instruction in Karnataka, in the form of supply of needed devices (like smart phones or laptops/computers);
3. Only 4 out of 8 teachers had a smart phone (3 owned by their husband) and 2 had to buy raising a loan from moneylender; 2 others had to wait for colleague to complete his classes to use the same phone (such arrangements).
4. Although every teacher had a phone, it was not or the level to be used for conducting classes as they were ordinary phones; or to send and receive messages.
5. In a few teachers' cases, they used their college going son's laptop for virtual mode teaching; learning to use it was a challenge for some of them, the son had to sit next to her and guide all the time to commence and close, increase volume etc.

6. In majority classes either the teacher could not be on video for technical reasons, or the students. So, it was anonymous. one teacher expressed her anxiety that "there was no guarantee that the students listened to me or they understood, they didn't ask any questions. Assignments were sent online which were no guarantee that they wrote them; in some cases, the mother had helped or they had used to google to copy and paste.
7. "There was also group of students attending together in one student's house, but may be they were not attentive and were engaged in non-academic activities.
8. There was lack of clear guidelines from the government, but preconditions were many: such as not to force students to have too much screen time, not 2 hours before bedtime, not to engage in cybercrime, to monitor device usage, etc".

As a result, it was only after lockdown was lifted, every business, activity was opened up that both parents and teachers realized the harm that use of devices had created for students, more than doing good. Girls complained of continued messages, danger of forwarded of photos etc. thus, the impact was culturally causing damage to the naïve, poor families, which were already victims of living in a zone where there was rural life but amidst speedily rising urbanization and cosmopolitanism.

8. Concluding Remarks

This brings our discussion to a significant lapse on the part of the government while introducing online education among school children. It relates to the neglect of creating awareness about internet safety and cyber security as part of this transition in delivery of educational services at school level, which lapse has resulted in series of unforeseen consequences. As COVID and other viruses are still haunting our society even to this day, certain lessons must be learnt out of this mess created by the sudden clamping of online learning process at the tender age of school-going children, that too without any preparations and training on their, parents' and teachers' part. It is crucial for school administration, parents, and policymakers to recognize the significance of integrating the new techniques and modes of learning into the school curriculum. Educating students about responsible online behaviour, identifying, and reporting cyberbullying, protecting personal information, and avoiding potential risks can help mitigate the negative impacts of online access. While online education presented new possibilities, it also exacerbated existing inequalities in society. Rural areas, which had limited exposure to online learning prior to the pandemic, faced significant challenges in terms of access to electricity, internet connectivity, and devices. This digital divide further deepened the disparities between urban and rural areas, as well as between affluent and underprivileged families.

Teachers in government schools in rural areas were ill-equipped to navigate digital platforms, lacking both the necessary pedagogical skills and suitable devices to ensure a stable internet connection. Their limited knowledge of internet safety guidelines further compromised the safe usage of digital platforms by students. Concerns were raised about students' excessive use of social media, indicating that the shift to online education had a predominantly negative impact on the social environment of secondary school students in rural areas. This study's findings point towards the urgent need to address the digital infrastructure gaps and provide comprehensive training and support to

teachers and students in online education. Bridging the digital divide and promoting digital literacy will be crucial in creating a more equitable and inclusive learning environment for all students, thereby overcoming their socio-economic, geographical, and cultural vulnerabilities. Some of the efforts of the GoK to address the needs of students in schools were:

The government of Karnataka following national level policy orders, had to resort to clamping a lockdown and announcing online teaching to keep abreast of educational processes. Although this system was practiced quite some decades ago in the developed nations, the developing ones with their socio-culturally linked backwardness and inequalities found it a challenge to successfully implement virtual classroom model. Other efforts of the government included:

Vidyagama & Chandana Vahini Programmes

Introduced in August 2020, this programme of the Department of Primary & Secondary Education, GoK, aimed to take education to the doorsteps of children and in rural areas too, enabling the teacher-student meet in public places like playgrounds and others. But rise in COVID cases led to its discontinuation by October. Chandana Vahini in collaboration with Prasara Bharati conducted online classes for grades 1 to 10. But due to heavy criticisms about the long screen time for small children, it was rescheduled covering only class VII onwards.

But the inevitability of introducing online classes through creating digital platforms, or portals, DTH channels etc., was understandable, they came as a blow to the parents from marginalized and hitherto socially excluded communities, particularly in the village, semi urban society that was complete with problems of school drop-out and/or out of school children, poor or low enrolment rate, sex-based bias in enrolment and retention (with girls withdrawn from schools mostly at secondary school level as they were needed by poor households to assist mother in HH chores and also because they were nearing the age of attaining puberty; large family size with more girls born in expectation of birth of a male child, etc.). came under further difficulties in facing this change in type of learning. To the already existing gap between rural and urban areas, internet penetration "aggravated the gap between public and private schools" (Bairagya *et al.*, 2020) ^[1]. Lockdown had brought in deprivation - peer learning, participation in games and sports, and Mid-day Meal. For parents, lack of work and income, dependence upon the ration kits provided by NGOs and panchayats to meet their daily food requirements was not a viable and long-lasting solution for their hunger.

Impact on teachers

The teachers suffered not less due to the impact of lockdown-induced online teaching. They were troubled by socio-economic disabilities in access & using the devices. Loans had to be raised to own them. The second related to provisioning a congenial atmosphere at home to undertake teaching for long hours, ensuring no disturbance or noise, uninterrupted power supply, efficiency to speak clearly on the device, listen to students' doubts, questions and offer clarifications, ask questions, conduct evaluation etc. lack of prior experience, training to conduct classes in online mode, power shut down, lack of interest by students, absenteeism among them etc. They felt being pushed to such virtual teaching mode without proper and prior preparation or

training. The significant gender dimension is that most of the teachers being women, and hailing from poor and low-income households, they were burdened more due to HH duties - multi-tasking took a toll on their well-being, leading to fatigue and frustration.

Impact on the Students

Last, but the important issue is how access to the internet transformed the behaviour and attitudes of many students. Use of devices was not discontinued after retaining normalcy. The infrastructure set up at home continued to be utilized by mainly boys, as they had freedom to spend time outside home and hang out with friends for long hours, in the pretext of combined learning/studies. Arrogance, disobedience etc have been reported by parents, particularly if they were raised by widowed mother or grandparents. For some of them, parents have complained of learning gradually moved away, leading to diversified bobbies like chatting, sharing photos, surfing websites, cyberbullying, or watching films etc. with no academic focus. In some cases, girl classmates/students were targeted with photos in their peer circles, etc. parents and teachers have expressed helplessness in dealing with this deviant behaviour and inculcate good using habits among some students. Sociologically this is an important phase where more research is in need.

References

1. Bairagya I, Manasi S, Thomas R. COVID-19 pandemic and primary education in India: Does it cause more inequality between public and private schools? Working Paper 503, ISEC; 2020.
2. Bandura A. Social learning theory. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall; 1977.
3. Bandura A. Perceived self-efficacy in cognitive development and functioning. *Educ Psychol.* 1993;28(2):117-48.
4. Dewey J. Experience and education. New York: Macmillan; 1938.
5. Gopal R, Singh V, Agarwal A. Impact of online classes on the satisfaction and performance of students during the pandemic period of COVID-19. *J Educ Inf Technol.* 2021;26:6923-47.
6. International Journal of Educational Research. 2011;9(5):82-92.
7. Jain *et al.* Teachers and COVID-19: Challenges of a pandemic. In: Delhi's Education Revolution. London: UCL Press; 2022.
8. Jena PK. Impact of pandemic COVID-19 on education in India. *Int J Curr Res.* 2020;12(7):12582-6.
9. Jena PK. Online learning during lockdown period for COVID-19 in India. [Internet]. [cited 2024 Jul 15]. Available from: [specific URL if available].
10. Mishra L, Gupta T, Shree A. Online teaching-learning in higher education during lockdown period of COVID-19 pandemic. *Int J Educ Res Open.* 2020. [in press].
11. OECD. Learning remotely when schools close: How well are students and schools prepared? Insights from PISA. Paris: OECD Publishing; 2020.
12. Pokhrel S, Chhetri R. A literature review on impact of COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning. *High Educ Future.* 2021;8(1):133-41.