

# Covid-19 Pandemic: Examining the Impact and Government's Efficacy for the Development of Education Sector in India

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## *ABSTRACT*

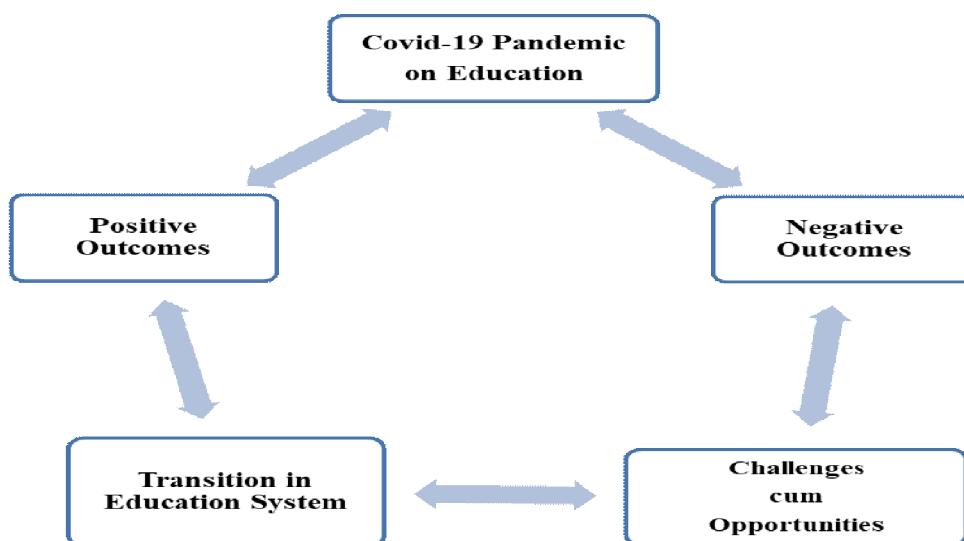
The massive spread of Covid-19 pandemic has stagnated almost entire sectors of the economy including education. This ultimately poses a huge challenge upon the vast multitude of humanitarian as a whole. However, its likely impact upon the education sector in general and teaching-learning outcomes in particular has itself put a big question mark. As such, campuses and students across the country are facing massive uncertainties. At such a point, it is imperative to have a diligent review for better resolving the overall crisis in education sector. The current paper, therefore, makes a modest attempt to identify both the likely impacts as well as the key challenges pertaining to the education sector. Moreover, Secondary Data, viz., the data released from the reports of various national and international agencies have been incorporated to study the key attributes of education during the pandemic. The results however, reveal that although the government is keen on formulating various policy initiatives by bringing in new dimensions and setting new trends in education, yet its effectiveness lies in its sound implementation. As such, it is desirable for the government to adopt reliable action policy plans so that the digitalisation process does not turn into a digital divide. This certainly creates an arena not only for the viable growth of the education sector but also for achieving the desired notion of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across the country.

**Keywords: Covid-19, Teaching-Learning Outcomes, Digitalisation, Sustainable Development Goals**

## **Introduction:**

The recent Covid-19 pandemic has posed some serious repercussions by not only hindering the desired educational output but also consequent shutting up of the schools and an even higher incidence of drop-outs which adversely affected the quality of human capital, thereby causing a vast inequalities and loss of economic welfare on a whole (World Bank, 2020). Unlike other sectors, education sector is also seriously been affected, therefore, it is very much essential to address these unforeseen issue in a decisive manner for transforming these challenges into opportunities. According to a report driven by UNESCO, reportedly 1.3 billion students were stand out of the schools due to schools' shutdown in lieu of the pandemic. With consequent lockdowns and exams postponement,

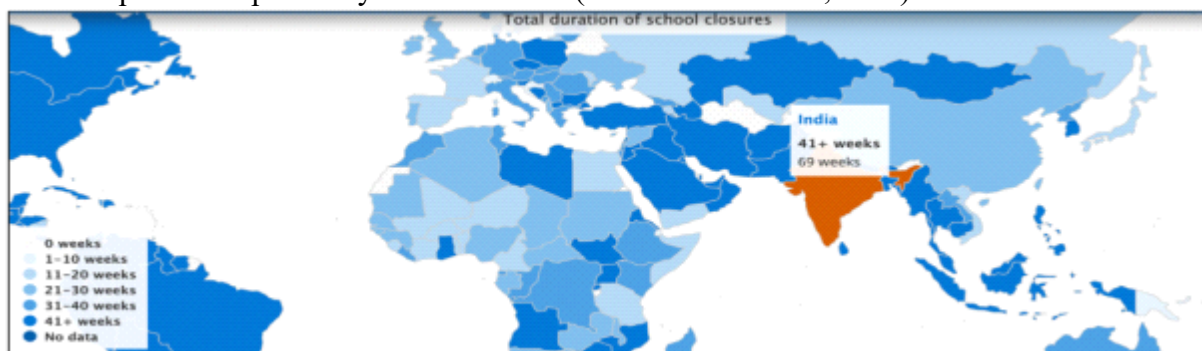
students are liable to strand at home, thereby causing severe distress and anxiety amongst them. At the same time, it has also a disrupting impact upon the teaching-learning outcomes and revenue of the institutions concerned. All these certainly manifold education crisis by creating uncertainties and a huge gap in the entire learning process. Also, shortage of digital connectivity and devices sidelined around one third of student for pursuing education in a better stance (UNESCO, 2020). Despite government has been keen on taking steps and calls for a drift towards the virtual mode of education, yet the issues of gender as well as the regional divide, lack of infrastructural set up and other financial crunch cannot be overlooked because this is what adaption and growth is all about.



### Impact of Covid-19 on Education Sector in India

Education has been a major linchpin for the development of any country. Since the outbreak of the Pandemic, consequent lockdowns and uncertainties has ushered the pace of technological advancement into the country.

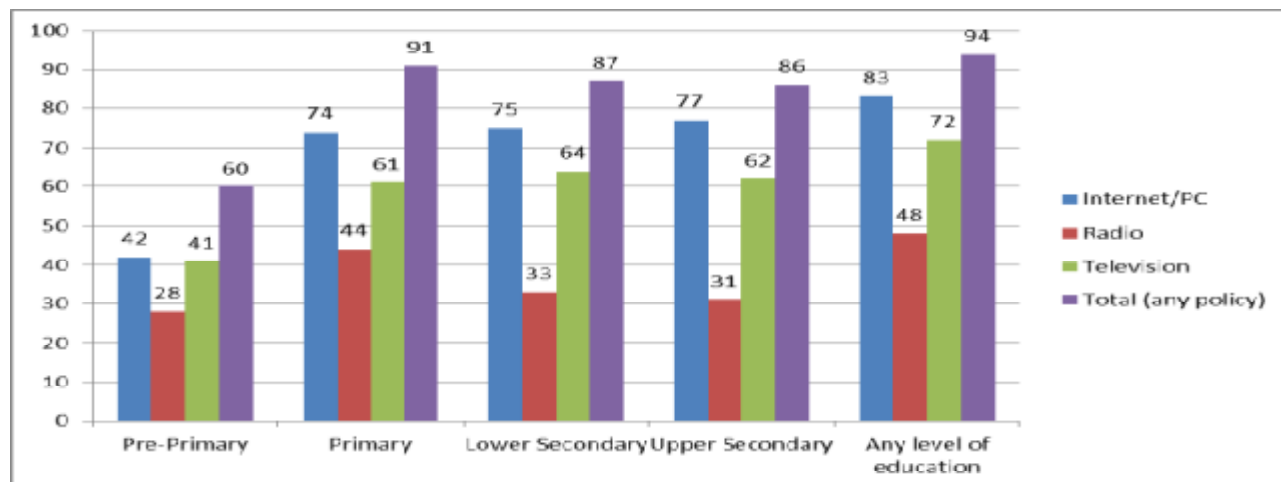
- **Closures of Schools and Postponement of Exams.** Outbreak of the pandemic brought with it several uncertainties and dilemmas. As per an estimate by OECD, schools closure have impacted at most 421 million children in 39 countries (Tam & El-Azar, 2020). As such, postponement in examinations, delay in admissions as well as degree awarding, shift to the online mode of education and maintenance of overall academic curriculum became quite challenging both for the policymakers as well as the stakeholders (Kumar et al., 2021). The map below highlights that some more than 69 weeks; schools in India were closed, thereby causing serious repercussions into teaching-learning process. The countries in Europe are comparatively in a better stand (Murali & Maiorano, 2021)



Source: UNESCO

● **Drift to ICT & Virtual mode of education.** The threat of pandemic has left no option, than to incur heavy reliance to the virtual and online education. According to a report by UNICEF (2020), the outbreak of Covid-19 has seriously affected over 320 million students because of the schools closures. Meanwhile, due to inaccessibility of digital devices and technologies, viz., computers, mobiles and tablets, both amongst the students and teachers further exacerbated the problems. Besides, both teachers as well students were required to be even

more technological savvy. As per a recent online survey, “In states like West Bengal and Bihar, only 7-8 percent of rural households have any access to the internet while only 18 percent and 21 percent of urban households have any access to the internet.” Amidst all, online classes and dissemination of information between teachers as well as students, via, various e-conferencing modes, such as, Zoom, Google Meet, Skype, Telegram, YouTube Live etc. even came into picture to make teaching-learning process ongoing (Jena, 2020).

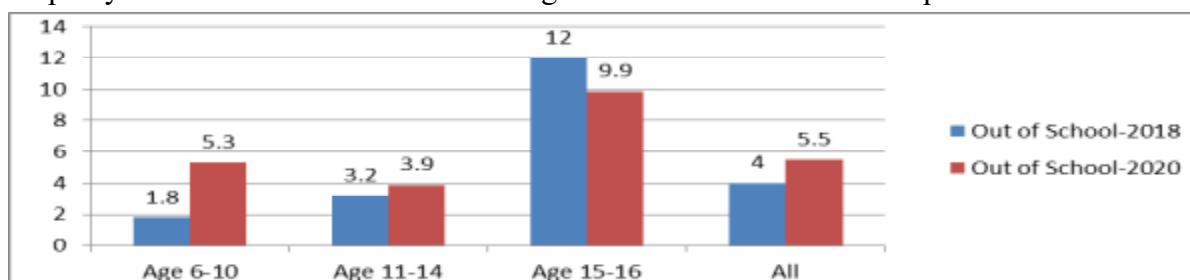


**Figure:** Share of countries implementing digital and broadcast remote learning policies, by education level (UNICEF, 2020)

**Sources:** UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank Survey on National Education Responses to Covid-19 School Closures (2020) and UNICEF country offices (2020).

“Across countries, the most common approach was digital instruction, which was used by 42 percent of countries for pre-primary education, 74 percent of countries for primary education and 77 percent of countries for upper secondary education. Many countries have developed broadcast curricula (television-and radio-based), especially for primary and lower secondary students.

• **Mental and Physical Health:** Closures of both schools and colleges compelled learners to become more of home sick. Children, particularly of younger age were inclined more towards mobiles and laptops, leading to their agitation and stiffness. Physical activities, outdoor games, companionship further took a back seat. Uncertainties of examinations, job related pressure, restricted social gatherings adversely affected their learning outcomes. The diagram below clearly reveals that the post-pandemic, i.e., during 2020 comparatively more of the Children are Out of the School than 2018. Some Children even could not complete their mean age of Schooling. The disparity is even more towards the female regardless than their male counterparts are.



#### **Out of School Children (in % 2018 and 2020)**

**Source:** ASER (Rural) 2020 Wave 1

• **Negative Impact on Employability:** Educational sector in India is valued at US\$101 billion and public spending on education sector and skill development is amounted to INR993 billion and INR30 billion respectively. However, where on one hand, skill institutes train some 10 million labour forces annually, on the other, subsequent lockdowns declined the employability of skilled labour force to 10-15 percent.

This certainly dampens not only skill but financial development as well. All these further induce unemployment (Kumar et al., 2021). Covid-19 induces withdrawal from jobs of several candidates, both from India and Overseas. Apart from this, various Corona related protocols have led to even cancellation and prolonged Government examination. In the worst case, students seemingly vent for food rather than their jobs (Pravat Kumar Jena, 2020).

- **Research and Scientific Development.** Covid-19 upholds two-fold impact on research. On one hand, researchers would find it difficult to gather enough data and do their experimental research as libraries and laboratories were not frequently open. Moreover, travel restrictions back and forth further exaggerated the problem. On the other, researchers were also getting good ‘me’ time to think, re-think and publish their papers in the reputed journals. Apart from this, several e-conferences, webinars, online lectures somewhat seem to be quite lucid in exchanging ideas across the globe (Pravat Kumar Jena, 2020).

### **Government Initiatives in Improving Education Sector amidst Covid-19 Pandemic**

Covid-19 has necessarily created havoc into the education sector. The Government along with the Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD), renamed as Ministry of Education (MoE) under the aegis of NEP 2020 along with the University Grants Commission (UGC) is taking numerous policy measures to mitigate the adverse effect of the pandemic on education sector. All these certainly require diverting the potential resources into productive channels and thereby recovering the lost learning into the track.

#### ***Some Major Initiatives on Education during Covid-19 Pandemic are:***

- **Pradhan Mantri e-Vidya** (<https://pmevidya.education.gov.in/swayam-prabha-tv.html>) Launched on May 2020 with the notion of ‘One Nation One Digital Platform’. It aims to provide quality education to the students who do not have access to the internet by unifying all efforts related to digital/ on-air education to enable multi-mode access to education’. Besides, a TV channel will also be launched alongside radio podcasts for the students upto Class 12<sup>th</sup> and visually impaired students.

- **Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA)**

(<https://pmevidya.education.gov.in/diksha.html>) – Launched on September 5, 2017 by MHRD is a storehouse of the multiple e-contents as well as the e-books jointly created by various national and international organisations for the larger benefits of the students.

- **Swayam Portal**

(<https://pmevidya.education.gov.in/swayam-portal.html>) – Initiated with the motto of three fundamental principles of NEP, i.e., access, equity and

quality aims to bridge the gap between the marginalised and financially well-off students by providing lucid teaching resources to the disadvantaged who somehow devoid of accessing digital technologies. Due to Covid and lockdowns, ePGPathshala content, working under the aegis of MOOCs is quite popular across universities.

- **Swayam Prabha TV Channels**

(<https://www.swayamprabha.gov.in/index.php/about>) is a group of television channels dedicated to telecast quality educational programmes, that too 24x7.

- **e-Gyankosh** (<https://egyankosh.ac.in/>)- National Digital Repository helps to store, disseminate the digital contents developed by Open and Distance Learning Institutions in the country.

- **e-Adhyayan (e-books) and e-Pathya (Offline Access)** platform provides learning accessories in the form of e-books and offline materials for the post-graduate courses (Kasar et al., 2021).

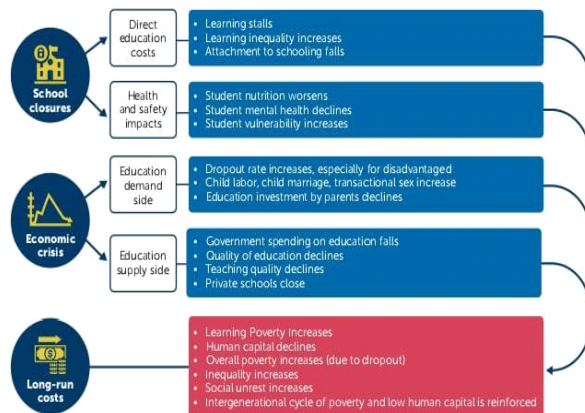
- **FOSEEE** (<https://fossee.in/>) Free/Libre and Open Source Software for Education helps to promote open source software for learning, research and professional outlook.

- **Samagra Siksha Scheme**

(<https://samagra.education.gov.in/>) It aims to build a holistic approach for the school education, particularly, from Pre-Nursery to 12<sup>th</sup> Standard. Its main elements include inclusiveness, skill development, digital education, sports and physical education, vocational education, enhancing quality of education, capacity building of teachers and school heads. All these aim at increasing the effectiveness and enhance equitable learning outcomes as such.

**Scholarship for weaker sections:** Under this scheme, College and University students belonging to deprived sections are provided scholarships for their further studies. As of Nov 2021-22, over 1.5 lakh students have been benefitted, with an exception of J&K who have been accorded with Special Scholarship Scheme.

**Challenges and the Road Ahead:** Despite the vigorous efforts by the Government in diluting the adverse effect of the pandemic, Challenges persist. Students across the globe are suffering from social, economic and mental health traumas, particularly in HEIs. Virtual mode of learning cannot be substitute for the face-to-face learning (Fatima et al., 2021).



**Figure.** Shocks to Education sector amidst pandemic.

**Source:** (Bank 2020)

### Conclusion

Covid-19 has led to the emergence of many new trends and perspectives in the education sector. At one hand, outbreak of Covid-19 is creating benefits, on the other, it seriously pose challenges. Consequent lockdowns have adversely affected the learning assessment across the country. Therefore, it is highly conducive that not only the government but also the researchers, curriculum designers as well as the stakeholders must join hands towards redefining learning strategies and techniques so that the benefits could be procured equitably, keeping in view the cost-effectiveness of education across the nation as well. Infact, this is highly conducive, not just to ensure only accessibility or to reduce inequalities but also to regenerate lucrative educational skills, which almost seems to be latent in lieu of the pandemic. Thus, there is a dire need for inclusively looking education from all angles so that the demographic dividends do not turn into demographic disaster and challenges pertinent from Covid-19 on education turn out into opportunities.

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