

Ethics in Education challenged during COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The coronavirus of 2019 (COVID-19), heavily impacted the world owing to its high transmissibility spreading to 114 countries, infecting 118,000 people within 3 months (WHO, 2020b). According to the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), COVID-19 is a pandemic that has affected the world's education system (UNESCO, 2020b). However, the lack of infrastructural advancements in networking technology as well as access to computers, smartphones and high-speed internet has created a barrier in e-learning in developing countries. The restructure in the educational methods of academic institutions has been aimed at recovering lost learning and preparing students for their return to school when they reopen. Due to the on-campus educational methods being heavily impacted by the coronavirus, developing countries need to focus and develop their e-learning methods, use of broadcast media and online classinfrastructures.

Keywords: *Coronavirus, Developing Country, Distance Learning, Education System, Impact of COVID-19.*

A. Introduction

As of June, 2021, the coronavirus pandemic has affected 222 countries and territories across the world, with 181,258,315 overall cases, 165,831,896 recoveries and 3,926,945 deaths ("Worldometer", 2021). Education, a pillar of development for all nations, has suffered due to the shutdown of traditional campus learning due to the pandemic, which has forced restructuring of the curriculum (Owusu-Fordjour et al, 2015).

With 87% of the student population in the world, approximately 1.5 billion students from 195 countries, being affected by school-closures during the pandemic (UNESCO, 2020b), distance learning facilities have been launched by the UNESCO to reach out to the most at-risk students. Besides affecting the economy and our daily lives, COVID-19 has also mentally and physically affected our health (Niranjan, 2020), disrupting cultural celebrations and festivities, stressing the population through the closures of religious and entertainment venues, hotels and

restaurants (Evans, 2020). The economic shock due to the lockdowns, has caused the economies in developing countries to decline due to the closure of the transportation and educational systems (Haleem et al, 2020). Distance learning tools consist of educational platforms and applications, resources aimed at assisting students, parents and teachers, e-learning management systems, self-directed learning courses and massive open online courses (UNESCO, 2020a). Distance learning in developing countries however, has been hindered by the lack of high-speed internet facilities, data science systems, online study materials and digital literacy (Mustafa, 2020). Even though some developing countries utilize online platforms, radio and television to impart education, the access to these media is heavily lacking in the poorest of the families. These countries have therefore tried to supplement these resources with textbooks, study-guides, radios, televisions and other equipment to enhance at-home learning (Mustafa, 2020).

B. Objective of the Study

This study aims at analyzing COVID-19's impact on education, students, parents and teachers, the challenges to e-learning, and explore solutions to facilitate the access to education during the pandemic, as well as study the opportunities in the education sector during the post-pandemic era. Most countries implemented temporary closure of child-cares and nurseries, schools and institutions of higher education to tackle the spread of the pandemic (TUAC Secretariat Briefing, 2020).

C. Literature Review

Students

The pandemic has amplified social inequalities in education sector, since the wards of advantaged parents have easier access to digital infrastructure, greater digital literacy, as well as access to schools with better e-learning platforms and resources, compared to the wards from disadvantaged families attending institutions with less developed Information and Communication Technology (ICT) systems and resources (Di Pietro et al, 2020). Since COVID, advantaged students adopting e-learning has increased, while disadvantaged students and the ones living in rural areas have struggled due to the ailing digital infrastructure. Combined with the differences in resource and development in public and private schooling, students are facing inequality in accessing digital technology and resources and struggling with increased anxiety, depression and stress. The disruption in on-campus education and poor implementation of distance learning resulting in unequal access to education has reduced the time spent by students in learning, thereby demotivating them and increasing stress (Di Pietro et al, 2020).

Teachers and Parents

Despite distance learning offering a solution to the education sector's problems, disparity in the access to the internet and computers is a major issue (Zhang, 2020). The teachers and staff need to be familiarized with e-learning technology and face hindrances in the form of lack of

technology and infrastructure as well as non-payment or reduced payment of pre-determined salaries by the educational institutions.

D. Methodology

Various data highlighting the socioeconomic, physical and psychological impact of COVID-19 were collected from the relevant sources including news articles and official data published by the public as well as private organizations, for the purpose of conducting basic research.

The gathered information was analyzed in accordance to pre-existing research in different fields such as economy, consumer psychology and behavior, etc.

Some of the probable roadblocks introduced by COVID-19 were identified and some possible recommendations have been provided, while highlighting the urgent need of qualitative and quantitative research for a deeper analysis in the areas where limitations experienced during this research and finding solutions for a better quality of life under the New Normal.

E. Scope and Limitations

The focus of this research is on recognizing some of the primary factors influencing life in the New Normal and the adverse effects of COVID-19 on some sections and aspects of society. Recent research and data will be used to gain an overview of certain problems affecting people's lives such as health and education. The study will try to identify some of the issues in an organized manner.

The findings and recommendations of this research does not extend to include an in-depth analysis of the problems introduced by COVID-19 or an advanced understanding of the sources of, or solutions to, the probable problems identified. Owing to the limited scope of this research, the findings and recommendations should not be regarded as exhaustive guidelines but a simple overview of some of the problems raised by COVID-19.

F. Findings and Implications

Unequal Access to Education Resources and Technology

Most countries have opted to curb the virus' spread by encouraging parents and schools to facilitate education through distance learning (UNESCO, 2020a). Even though the government directive to utilize radio and televisions for learning at home works for academics in urban areas, those in rural areas have suffered due to their inaccessibility. For example, at the end of 2020, India had around 210 million households with access to television out of approximately 300 million (Business Standard, 2021), while 111 million households are estimated to have radio ownership (The Pangean, 2020). Coupled with the high number of members per household and the limited access to electrical power, students in rural areas have struggled to access these means of distance learning. Urban schools have been uploading study materials and books, as well as broadcasting live classes through various applications, emails, social media and Google Classroom. In contrast, public school faculty and students have limited to

noaccess to the internet or the other aforementioned facilities (Tzifopoulos, 2020). Students from less-privileged households may have greater need for guidance regarding learning processes and accessing the internet, applications and devices (Tzifopoulos, 2020). COVID-related closure of educational institutions could amplify the already existent inequalities in the quality of education available to the students in different socioeconomic classes, as well as urban and rural areas (Owusu-Fordjour et al, 2015).

Mental and Physical Health

COVID related school closure forces students in rural areas to supplement their families' income through full-time herding and farming, aggravating the already high dropout rates of students from disadvantaged families, estimated at 50% pre-COVID. The ones affected the worst are often the girls, as indicated by a survey of 733 government school students in Bihar, where 23% of the girls had household access to smartphones, compared to 36% among the boys, with these smartphones being mostly owned by male adults, often being less accessible to the girls than the boys (Karyala P. & Kamat S., 2020). As of 2019, 63% of Indian women had access to phones compared to the 79% of their male counterparts, while only 21% women had internet access compared to the 42% of males (*GSM Association*, 2020). Home confinement due to the lockdown also put the children, especially the girls, under increased threat of mental, physical and sexual abuse. In 2020, 53% of Indian children reported to have experienced different forms of abuse, with 93% of abusers being relatives or known individuals (Poddar S. & Mukherjee U., 2020). 11 million additional girls from low-income backgrounds are also under the risk of child marriage due to COVID (UNICEF, 2021), with Maharashtra recording a 78.3% surge in child marriages (Sonwalkar, 2020). The uncertainty looming large during the lockdown, has caused stress, fear and anxiety (Sahu, 2020), which also affects the students. Owing to differences in their ability to acquaint themselves with the changes in educational media, different students interact differently with the e-learning tools (Haleem et al, 2020).

G. Conclusion

COVID-19 is a pandemic that has forced educational institutions in both developed and developing countries to face closure and adopt distance learning as a means of continuing the impartment of education. However, owing to the differences in access to resources among the different socioeconomic classes as well as residents in rural and urban areas, students have been facing an inequality in their access to education due to varying levels of digital literacy and access to ICT infrastructures, radio, television and computers. Poor families with lower digital literacy are at a disadvantage because of their inability to access the resources facilitating distance education, as well as their children being forced into labour to support the family income affected due to COVID through farming and herding. Girl students from such disadvantaged families are at an increased risk of sexual abuse and exploitation and early marriages. Such students have also been affected in terms of sustenance they received in the form of free meals.

H. Recommendations

Governments need to implement scaled educational infrastructure, network connectivity, zero-rating of educational websites, build digital learning and teaching libraries, integrate free e-learning resources, establish uniformity in the usage of mobiles and applications, televisions and radios and develop ICT facilities. Educational institutions need to work with educators and policy-makers to modify the education sector for greater equality and quality. They also need to strategize methods to bridge the gap created in the form of portions not taught, as well as ensure the return of the children on the reopening of the schools. Since the face-to-face on-campus mode of teaching has been affected in developing countries, they need to supplement their education with scaled online lessons and educational infrastructures.

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