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Issues and challenges of online education in rural areas of Saharanpur District

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Abstract
Education sector is passing through a very tough and uncertain phase due to Covid 19 and the situation is more complicated in rural areas owning to the crunch of resources. Keeping this in mind, an attempt was made to throw light on various issues and challenges of online education faced by rural children mostly of lower socio-economic status. A sample of 62 students of 2 villages of district Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh was randomly selected and with the help of an open ended questionnaire, their views were collected and analysed. Study divulged that majority of the children of rural areas (77.42%) mentioned network uncertainty as a major obstacle in online education followed by low internet speed (72.58%). Some suggestive measures like free smart phones, need of proper student-teacher interaction, and internet accessibility in villages were also reported by the students and their parents.

Keywords: Online education, issues, rural children, suggestions

1. Introduction

Covid-19 or corona took the whole world in its grip by surprise and everything came to a standstill in the form of lockdown. All the sectors including education were badly hit and people found it hard to cope up with this unprecedented situation. Totally unprepared for such a disaster, need of the hour was to maintain social distance whereas our education system, primary and secondary level had never witnessed online education, barring some exception. Worst affected were the children living in rural belts, having little or no access to learning through internet. According to the World Bank Collection of Development Indicators 2019, India's 65.53% population lives in rural areas. According to the key indicators of Household Social Consumption on Education in India's report, published in Outlook in The New Scroll, based on the 2017-18 National Sample Survey, less than 15 percent of rural Indian households have access to internet as opposed to 42 percent in urban households and the poorest households cannot afford a computer or even a smartphone. Although online education, using various modes, offer big opportunities to reach out to students in remote locations, yet it has its own limitations and challenges too. The biggest challenges that students face are lack of proper time management skills, easily being distracted, the temptation for procrastinating, lack of a proper instructor and quality education. In addition, Samantarary (2020) revealed the challenges in the form of student-teacher ratios, insufficient infrastructure and lack of quality training amongst teachers including private schools. However, it is true that every challenge opens up a new opportunity. In this context, the present investigation was undertaken to study the issues of online education perceived by the children of rural areas and suggestive measures to overcome the. barriers towards E-learning.

2. Methodology

The study was conducted in two blocks *viz.*, Nagal and Deoband of Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh. Lakhnor and Diwalheri, the two villages (one village from each block) were selected randomly for the present investigation. A sample of 62 students (31 respondents from each village) from class 8th to 10th (34, 26 and 02 students of each class respectively) of 2 CBSE schools was randomly preferred. Data was collected (3rd to 7th August, 2020) by an open ended questionnaire so that every student can share his/her faced issues about online education and suggestions too in detail. Suggestions were taken from respondents as well as their parents/guardian.

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3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Socio-Economic Status of the Respondents

The data in Table 1 revealed that majority of respondents (54.83%) had agriculture as their major occupation and 41.9 percent had annual income below ₹50,000/- belonging to lower income group. Their parental education was not so good, majority (51.6%) having only primary education and most of the respondents had 2 to 3 siblings (32.3%) but having only one smartphone (48.39%)

Table 1: Socio-Economic Status of the Respondents

(N=62)

S. No.		Particular	Frequency	Percentage
1	Family Occupation	Agriculture	34	54.83
		Service	06	9.7
		Business	14	22.58
		Others	08	12.9
2	Family Income (Per Annum)	Upto Rs. 50,000	26	41.9
		50,000 to 1 Lac	16	25.8
		1 Lac to 2 Lac	16	25.8
		2 Lac to 4 Lac	2	3.22
		4 Lac and above	2	3.22
3	Family Education	Primary	32	51.6
		Intermediate	19	30.65
		Graduate	10	16.13
		Above	1	1.61
4	Siblings	One	20	32.3
		Two	20	32.3
		Three	16	25.8
		None	06	9.7
5	Availability of Smart Phone	One	30	48.39
		Two	21	33.87
		Three	03	4.84
		None	08	12.9
6	Computer/Laptop	One	1	1.61
		Two	Nil	Nil

3.2 Various Issues of Online Education

Issues of online education are based on the opinion survey of the respondents. Thus, the generalization of the results are the feedback of E-learning felt, faced and openly stated by the children of rural areas. Table 2 reveals the issues of online education as perceived by the respondents. The majority of the students of rural community (77.42%) mentioned network uncertainty as a major hindrance in online education followed by low internet speed (72.58%) and lack of clarity in voice (70.97%). Similar finding were reported by Lall (2020). Pain in eyes and head after continuous watching mobile phone (58.06%) can't be ignored as this issue is directly concerned with children's health. Few of the respondents (12.9%) didn't have access to not a single E-gadgets which is a major constraints for them towards their learning process. Such households are very poor and couldn't afford even a decent smart phone, which is a direct hindrance in the dream of U.N. 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to transform our world towards quality education for all (Goal 4).

Some suggestions of children and their parents for improving online education are presented in Table 3. Most of the respondents (79.03%) suggested that government should provide free smartphones and laptop for economic weaker section. Free internet facility for rural areas, considerable reduction in school fee (as schools are not open and only online education is going on) and higher interaction between teachers and students need to be considered.

Table 2: Issues of Online Education As reported by Respondents

(N=62)

S. No.	Issues	Frequency*	Percentage	Rank
1	Pain in eyes and head after continuous working on mobile phone	36	58.06	IV
2	Consume lot of data	15	24.19	VII
3	Voice is not clear and audible	44	70.97	III
4	Cannot understand anything	10	16.13	IX
5	Low internet speed, so cannot watch class daily	45	72.58	II
6	Smartphone problem (No smartphone or other gadget)	08	12.9	X
7	Interaction is not upto the mark	24	38.71	VI
8	Cannot see the blackboard/Lack of clarity on blackboard	14	22.58	VIII
9	Evaluation is not done properly	03	4.84	XI
10	Network Uncertainty	48	77.42	I
11	Blurred videos	32	51.61	V

* Multiple responses were allowed from the respondents

Table 3: Suggestions for Improving Online Education as Reported by the Respondents & Their Parents

(N=62)

S. No.	Suggestions	Frequency*	Percentage	Rank
1	Interaction should be proper between students and teachers	33	53.23	IV
2	Should provide free wifi for rural areas	36	58.06	III
3	Free smartphone, laptop etc. should be provided for backword class & those who can't afford	49	79.03	I
4	Sound quality should be better	28	45.16	VI
5	Video quality should be clear	29	46.77	V
6	Chapter should be described in detail	27	43.55	VII
7	Class should be regular	20	32.3	IX
8	Need of improvement of camera quality	21	33.87	VIII
9	School fee should be significantly reduced owning to online classes	45	72.58	II

*Multiple responses were allowed from the respondents.

4. conclusion

As children are the budding future of any nation, it is a great responsibility of the current generation to nurture them in every aspect including providing them good food, atmosphere and quality education so that they can realize their dreams and become a good citizen of the country. Rural India where facilities and infrastructure are not up to the mark requires special attention and the focus should be on holistic development of the growing minds. Thus it is concluded from this study that majority in rural areas are economically not sound, so policy should be framed for their Upliftment for online education as in future, dependency on online education will increase, so we need to build a robust infrastructure.

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