



EVALUATION OF ONLINE LEARNING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS OF GANJAM DISTRICT DURING COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION

The learning crisis has existed in India's education system; however, its measurement via student assessments has become extremely pertinent against the backdrop of NEP 2020 implementation and COVID-19-related learning losses. The use of Information Technology (IT) to assist interaction and learning in classrooms has increased (Martin, Il and F. w. Kellermanns, 2004). Digital tools have a positive impact on the teaching and learning process by creating opportunities to create, share, and collaborate with students. The connections between students and teachers in traditional classroom settings have become quite constrained. That is why we are embracing technology to improve learning outcomes. With the growth of technology, the education sector is undergoing reformation like never before.

Corona virus, originally reported from Wuhan city in China in late 2019, spread widely and quickly around the world, leading to the closure of educational institutions. This abrupt closure of educational institutions as a protective measure against the corona infection and the shifting of education from in class learning to remote learning posed significant challenges to students, parents and teachers. Because the shift was not gradual, it happened overnight to resist the severity of the Corona infection (Dhawan, 2020). Early studies reveal clear challenges for students in general, and for educationally disadvantaged students in particular in terms of learning continuity and school engagement (Devitt et al. 2020; Green 2020). Previous research provides a good insight that school closure increases the chances of inequality of opportunities for those who belong to educationally backward families (Calarco,

2020). Initially, much of the discussion focused on the ‘digital divide,’ which suggests that low student engagement for some students is caused by lack of access to devices and the internet (Devitt et al. 2020; Darmody, Smyth, and Russell 2020). Students who had access to internet-enabled classes were found to have higher levels of engagement. Additionally, exposure to a wider variety of academic and socio-emotional learning opportunities is associated with higher levels of engagement. Additionally, students were more inclined to participate online if their families maintained social ties with the families of other students. (Domina et al, 2021). Physical absence from school environments, besides posing learning challenges, would have consequences for the physical and mental well-being of children (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2020).

The study cited above shows that hardly any study has been conducted on online learning during COVID 19 in elementary schools of Ganjam district of Odisha. So the paper study may be stated that

“Evaluation of Online Learning in Elementary Schools of Ganjam District during Covid-19”

Objectives of study: The objectives of the study have been stated below:

1. To find out the Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Challenges of Online Learning during Corona Virus pandemic.
2. To explore the use of educational technology in teaching learning process.

Methodology of Study: Descriptive Survey Method was adopted for the person study.

1. Population and Sample: In this study the government elementary school Headmasters, teachers and students of Ganjam, Odisha were considered as the population. For the present study 20 Headmasters, 40 teachers and 100 students of government elementary schools of Khallikote Block of Ganjam district under the Department of School & Mass Education of Odisha were selected on the basis of random sampling technique. Khallikote Block has total 189 elementary schools; out of this 91 schools have Class-VIII. Total elementary teachers were 687 and total Class-VIII students were 2623. First of all, the elementary schools were selected and then the teachers from each school were selected by use of random sampling technique. Further, the subjects who returned the incomplete tools were not considered for the study.

Tool of the Study: The following tools were developed and used by the investigators for collection of data.

1. Questionnaire for Headmasters.
2. Questionnaire for Teachers.
3. Questionnaire for focus group discussion for students.

Data Analysis: Since the data were collected in the form of recording, Thematic Analysis Technique was found most appropriate to be used with this data set. Therefore Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework was used to do the analysis of collected data pertaining to the current study. The steps involve: Becoming familiar with the data, Generating initial codes, Searching for themes, Reviewing themes, Defining themes and Write-up. It is essential to mention here that this thematic analysis is a recursive process; the movement is back and forth as required throughout the phases.

Analysis of Data & Interpretation of Results: The objective-wise analysis of data and interpretation of results have been presented as follows:

I. Analysis and Interpretation of results related to the Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Challenges of Online Learning during Corona Virus pandemic.

The first objective was to find out the strength, weakness, opportunity and challenges of Online Learning during Corona Virus pandemic.

(i) **Online Learning: Strength:** Considering the alternative of no school closure, the virtual classroom has been an important tool to sustain educational objectives. In online teaching, teachers need serious preparation to use online tools and platforms. The rise of the Corona Virus lockdown has compelled education systems worldwide to find alternatives to the traditional classroom environment. Considering the alternative to traditional face-to-face classrooms, virtual schooling becomes an important technique to sustain skills development during school closures. This is not only new to the students but also to the staff members. The online teaching method increases the tech knowledge among the teachers, students and headmasters. That teachers strongly feel that the compulsion of online classes increases their tech knowledge followed by that they understand and use the innovative teaching aids in their teaching paradigm. More overdue to online class the professional competency of the teachers with headmasters also increased. Online education during the Corona crisis ensured engagement at least partially and has comparatively contributed to re-engaging children with studies.

(ii) **Online Learning: Weakness:** Although online mode helps in engaging children back with studies, it is not free from limitations. The prolonged school closure and repetitive

shifting to online mode disturbed the whole process. The way children learn and get engaged with learning in offline mode can never be expected in an online teaching learning environment. No matter how much effort a teacher puts in to make the connection strong and make sure the material/content is learned by children, children only do what they want to. He/She fails to ensure their maximum participation and positive involvement which results in partial student engagement. Rajesh Maharana, a primary school teacher said, “Student engagement has definitely dropped due to the prevalent circumstances as we see a partial interest among children towards learning. He further added, it is hard to ensure their complete positive participation in an online class (because of physical distance) that directly affects their performance and hence can never replace physical school”. It can only be an option during an emergency and can never be a substitute. Almost two third of teachers had the same opinion. They believe online learning has affected the health and mental wellbeing of their children (psychological pressure, boredom). Giving the reason that prolonged school closure and continuous exposure to the online world is distracting them from the right track.

(iii) **Parent negligence vs. low engagement:** Some uneducated parents (who have either never gone to school or have studied up to 5th class) completely deny the significance of education in general and online mode in particular. While interviewing them it was felt they do not value education due to their narrow perception about it. Their perception that education lacks a utility factor, especially provided in government schools, is not job oriented and indirectly affects their children’s engagement and performance. Because no attempt is being made to make classes accessible to children. While interviewing one parent of such a category regarding the online mode this is what he said “We do not understand this online education system. This is not going to help our kids. What are they going to get in such classes where they actually get the opportunity to play with the device rather than use it for learning purposes” said Sarat Bala, a parent. Therefore no attempt is being made to make online classes accessible to children by the parents which eventually results in their disengagement.

(iv) **Boredom vs. Entertainment:** Besides learning about teacher and parent experiences, some students were also asked about the current teaching-learning environment. Although their description is generally considered less important, the researcher believes they possess a transparent nature and say only what they feel; therefore their view was also given space. The children presented a feeling of boredom to the researcher and wished for the resumption of a face-to-face teaching-learning environment. In contrast, government school children are enjoying being at home.

“I really feel bad not because education is provided online but because face-to-face interaction is missing. In school we were happily learning every lesson and were progressing together along with other classmates, the teacher used to teach us different teaching strategies like activity and demonstration methods. It was really wonderful. Online teaching-learning is boring and we do not enjoy the process. We want to go to school to get the same learning environment” Subham Satapathy, class VIII, a student.

“I am happy being outside the school and I do not want to go to school now. I play with my friend all day at home and nobody is there to restrict us but in school, we are kept in the class for hours and are taught the lessons” Deepak Sabar, class VIII a government school student.

It can be established from the above presented description that firstly this online education could not reach the total student population. Secondly, it caused (prolonged school closure and online mode together) boredom among children who have access to it.

(v) **Online Learning: an opportunity:** Online education, introduced with a constructive approach to prevent disengagement and ensure engagement (ensure online classes are covering the syllabus) during Covid-19 crisis, although, creating chaos initially, helped in engaging back children with learning activities. It made classes possible during the times of pandemic for a large number of students. The deteriorating condition of the education sector faced before and after the immediate suspension of offline teaching-learning process as a result of the Corona pandemic outbreak has been improved to some extent with the commencement of online mode. One-third of parents appreciated the initiative saying that it prevented learning loss, made classes accessible during the Covid-19 crisis and helped children get an education without getting infected by the Corona infection. Because the time it was introduced everything was paralyzed and no moment was seen anywhere in the world. In such a chaotic situation it seemed the desired initiative, serving the purpose of educating students during the Covid-19 crisis.

Arjun Sabar, a teacher while talking to him said “With the suspension of offline schooling, student engagement started to decrease at a speedy pace. Since covid-19 put everyone’s life at risk so health was the first priority and nobody was paying attention towards education of children which added to the deteriorating condition of student engagement initially. But with the commencement of online classes it started improving. In such a situation it seemed the desired initiative, serving the purpose of educating students during covid-19 crisis. Also teachers working in government schools appreciated this immediate move.

A Headmaster namely Prakash Chandra Mishra said “Shift to online mode during the Covid-19 crisis was the only option to prevent learning loss one could think of. If it would not have been done the situation would be worse, it at least prevented complete disengagement”. This means that it has somehow helped the students to remain in touch with their studies. Comparing the situation education has faced in the valley during the crisis in 2019; virtual mode at least did not let children completely disengage from studies.

(vi) **Online Learning: Challenge:** The sudden transition to online learning created chaos and disturbance among the people as nobody had thought of such a drastic change before. To embrace this change was really a challenging task for a large number of people. It posed challenges in terms of demanding knowledge about ICT and running technological devices for uneducated parents, children and some teachers as well. “Initially it was so challenging because the shifting to virtual mode was so sudden. We faced challenges in terms of low or weak student response. As we are talking about primary children who are difficult to handle even in offline classes. To ensure their presence in the online class during the initial phase was very much challenging. However, with consistent efforts they started to learn the process. They became familiar and started showing the signs of engagement. But at the same time, they learned things they were not supposed to learn such as playing online games and accessing YouTube” Said a primary school teacher. Teachers got a weak response from students which has been causing difficulty to ensure positive student engagement in an online class. Indiscipline and improper conduct from students in online class was the biggest challenge teachers faced in the initial phase. As of now, the situation is not that critical but the teachers are still not able to ensure maximum student participation and are completely unable to ensure students do their home assignments honestly and on time. Besides this, making the devices available to children in poor households was the biggest challenge. The uneducated parents, especially those working in fields all day to make the two ends meet failed to assist their kids in any way due to poverty, illiteracy and unawareness-of how to run an online class. Monitoring the activities of children while using the phone appeared another challenge for parents because the process is all internet-connected, chances are inappropriate or sensitive or irrelevant content is accessed that can put parents in trouble. In addition to this, making them join the class and sustain attention was another big responsibility. “The biggest challenge during the whole period was to motivate children to take online classes and ensure they are joining the class on time and ensure their involvement. Since online education runs through an internet connection, most of the time it was snapped for days, posing challenges to bring children back to learning after a break” said Sulochana Padhi, a Headmaster.

(vii) Learning problems & Student Engagement: Online learning is completely based on virtual interaction, one needs to be mature enough to make the right use of it. Considering the immaturity and flexible nature of primary-level children it could not make a satisfactory contribution. The reasons may involve their flexible nature, physical distance, inappropriate teaching strategy, less concerned parents and many more. “In online education, an appropriate teaching strategy is difficult to adopt. Primary children learn more by play way method, they are group lovers, they like to learn along with the group rather learning individually, which is not possible to provide in an online class” revealed a primary school teacher, she further added they need help from elders, in case they are not available, or parents are uneducated, engagement and results are unsatisfactory”. In addition to this, in an online learning environment usually, one-way traffic is working, children are supposed to listen to the lecture which is completely a theoretical part. In such a situation, they lose motivation and interest which further makes the intended outcome hard to achieve and eventually results in the failure of the intended purpose of the class. Mostly the students from uneducated and poor households were seen to be facing severe consequences because they lack family guidance. “We are afraid that our children will refuse to enter schools again. Their involvement is terribly low; they have forgotten what they had learned earlier in school. The corona pandemic has caused great damage to children’s education interests. Online classes are of no use in our case neither do we have those devices nor do we have knowledge of how to handle them and run an online class. We are unable to support them anyway” said Chandan Gouda a teacher. Thus, online classes fail to serve the purpose in their case.

(viii) Digital addiction: Digital addiction was the most serious concern revealed by both parents and teachers. Since the learning happens either through smartphone or computer, it makes children learn to operate the devices themselves. Being all day free at home, they feel boredom and to get over this feeling the children try to find enjoyment in accessing online material and playing video games online. This is a clear indication that phone addiction among children may prove adverse in consequent stages of their future as it is causing distraction, also exposing them to things which are inappropriate for their tender age.

II. Analysis and Interpretation of results related to the use of Educational Technology in Teaching Learning process.

The second objective was to find out the use of educational technology in teaching learning process.

The children from government schools especially from poor households and uneducated families could not take any advantage of virtual platforms which apparently

increases the risk of their complete disengagement. They are the vulnerable group to the severe negative effects of school closures and online mode. The majority of children studying in government schools completely were left unattended during the entire online learning period. Since, distance learning completely relies on the use of technology, especially the use of the internet, social media, smartphones, and laptops confused the illiterate or less knowledgeable parents which they revealed was a great challenge.

The success of online education mode is determined by a lot of factors. Unlike access to the Internet and devices, the difference in the skill of teachers and lack of ICT skills, less concerned parents, unfavorable family environment, flexible nature of children, poverty, were identified as the stumbling blocks to the success of remote learning initiatives in this particular village. Since online mode demands expertise in ICT skills-operating devices such as laptops, smartphones, computers and accessing the internet created a lot of disturbance, the biggest reason seemed unpreparedness of teachers and parents to embrace the change.

III. Discussion of Results: A study is a useless endeavour if it has no practical value or contribution. It is necessary to enquire if the findings are helpful in expanding theoretical knowledge or knowledge of the pertinent issue under consideration. (Yardley, 2000; Silverman, 1993). The present study has a multitude of insights. The first and foremost finding clearly showed a significant negative relationship between the prevailing situation, (created by the corona pandemic) and student engagement. No doubt the data in the present investigation clearly highlighted that virtual learning prevented the complete disengagement of children to these classes but still a significant drop can be seen in the engagement of primary students. The causes are many as discussed in the previous section. The children from government schools especially from poor households and uneducated families could not take any advantage of virtual platforms which apparently increases the risk of their complete disengagement. They are the vulnerable group to the severe negative effects of school closures and online mode. The majority of children studying in government schools completely were left unattended during the entire online learning period.

The challenges it posed to parents, teachers and students are significant. All three groups felt difficulty in adapting to abrupt changes brought about by the corona pandemic, particularly by the online mode of education. A higher level of adaptability is significantly related to increased positive student engagement (Martin et al., 2013). The challenges faced by the teachers were essentially in terms of weak response most appropriately weak participation and lack of discipline in the online class. Similarly, parents face problems in terms of motivating children to take online classes and making them do their work without

delay. Besides this difficulty, uneducated parents faced different other serious challenges due to the lack of academic proficiency or ICT skills. Since, distance learning completely relies on the use of technology, especially the use of the internet, social media, smartphones, and laptops confused the illiterate or less knowledgeable parents which they revealed was a great challenge.

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Parental support plays a significant role in children's good or bad performance. Help from elders or adults is necessary not only for positive academic outcomes but for overall development. The teachers identified the lack of parent support, parent guidance and lack of interest as key barriers to student engagement. Student engagement can be enhanced by a mutual teacher-parent endeavour. The teaching in online learning needs to be supportive in terms of assisting children in attending classes and doing assignments. Also, a good teacher-student relationship can do a great help in ensuring engagement of children in online class. Student engagement in virtual learning is likely to increase when the connection between teacher and student is meaningful. Also, the use of innovative teaching learning strategies by the teacher and encouraging the development of student key skills enhances engagement (Bray, A. et al, 2021).

Given the substantial amount of evidence, covid-19 pandemic has had a significant negative impact on education. It can be established that student engagement throughout the school closure period could not rise to a satisfactory level. There might be other implicit underlying contextual factors behind i.e., the period of school closure before the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, which resulted from the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35a. Thus, the loss of interest or partial engagement that is visible is somehow related to the past crisis. However, online education during the Corona crisis ensured engagement at least partially and has comparatively contributed to re-engaging children with studies. At the time it was implemented, as mentioned in the previous section everything seemed paralyzed, no movement of people was seen anywhere in the world. In such a stagnant environment, it was thought the only option to avoid any serious damage to education. At this point of time, the issue was not whether online teaching and learning methods can provide high-quality

education, but rather how academic institutions can provide solutions by embracing online learning on a large scale (Carey, 2020).

Though online education served the purpose of making education accessible to students during the covid- 19 crisis and prevented complete disengagement, it is not free from flaws as discussed earlier. Perets, E. A et al, (2020) stated, the immediate transition to virtual learning influenced student engagement negatively. Online teaching less engaged students after this transition happened. Since online mode demands expertise in ICT skills-operating devices such as laptops, smartphones, computers and accessing the internet created a lot of disturbance, the biggest reason seemed unpreparedness of teachers and parents to embrace the change. The move posed challenges not only to students but to teachers also. Most teachers who have never taken relevant training or taught online are less likely to provide effective online education (Chiu, 2017; Ingvarson et al., 2005).

The findings of the present study that overall student engagement declined during the closure of educational institutions are consistent with the research of Doyle, 2020. The current investigation highlighted the role of parental support in children's education as a must. This finding is consistent with previous research that higher parental involvement predicts higher engagement (Smyth, 2017, Bray et al, 2021).

IV. MAJOR FINDINGS: The following major findings have been emerged from the present investigation.

1. Teachers, Headmasters got a new competency of teaching.
2. Teachers got a weak response from students which has been causing difficulty to ensure positive student engagement in an online class.
3. The biggest challenge during the whole period was to motivate children to take online classes and ensure they are joining the class on time and ensure their involvement.
4. The children presented a feeling of boredom to the researcher and wished for the resumption of a face-to-face teaching-learning environment.
5. This is a clear indication that phone addiction among children may prove adverse in consequent stages of their future as it is causing distraction, also exposing them to things which are inappropriate for their tender age.
6. The majority of children studying in government schools completely were left unattended during the entire online learning period.

V. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS: On the basis of the results of this investigation, the following recommendation is made.

Since online mode demands expertise in ICT skills-operating devices such as laptops, smartphones, computers and accessing the internet created a lot of disturbance, the biggest reason seemed unpreparedness of teachers and parents to embrace the change. They should properly skilled for further.

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