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The impact of COVID-19 crisis on education in rural area: A case study of Dehradun district of Uttarakhand

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Abstract

This study set out to investigate the impact of Covid-19 crisis on education in rural settings. The primary objective of this study is to address what are the challenges of shifting education from offline to online in a rural setting. This descriptive case study draws on a sample of students and parents belonging to Uttarakhand, particularly who belonged to the lower socio-economic strata. It also includes teachers imparting education. Selection of the respondents or stakeholders was done through a convenient sampling method. Further male and female students are selected through proportionate sampling. The study explored the advantages and disadvantages of online education in rural settings. Data is collected by using the interview schedule and researchers conducted discussions on the same. The data collected by administering the tools as well as reference documents were analysed and interpretations were presented in qualitative form. Based on the data collection, cases were identified which highlight some of the key challenges which the stakeholders are facing especially with regard to online education during Covid-19. These are lack of phone or presence of single phone in the family which makes it difficult to set pace with studies, financial issues due to job losses and salary cuts, lack of digital education, lack of effective interactions with teachers and classmates, lack of performance in academics, health issues, increased distractions, lack of self-motivation and early marriage cases. In addition, the cost of treatment of Covid-19

is another big factor for families being pushed toward poverty.

Key Words: *Covid-19, socio-economic, rural setting, digital media, effective interaction, stakeholders, illiteracy etc.*

Introduction

International and national crises often highlight inequalities in almost all sectors that disproportionately affect individuals especially from marginalized backgrounds. The Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting changes in society due to social cum physical distancing measures has showcased inequities in access to decent work and experiences of discrimination resulting in many of the vulnerable populations in India and the world at large experiencing a much harsher impact on personal growth and self-development factors. Times of crisis often reinforce and exacerbate disparities because resources are limited and people are fearful. This pattern is visible during Covid-19, which has triggered increasing problems in access to education, teaching pattern and overall productivity especially in rural settings. It is also evident the crisis has pushed schools and students to pick up e-learning opportunities as the pandemic has blocked the classroom learning methodology. The current Covid-19 crisis has laid bare the digital divide that still exists in our country, especially from the point of view of access to digitally enabled education. It is interesting to see not only urban educational institutes, but the state-run schools in rural areas have also gone digital and resorted to online classes to avert academic losses. Also, not every village and town in India is infrastructurally developed to sustain online education. It is important to notice that many rural schools and colleges are adapting online education during this time. Digital literacy and the digital divide have been serious concerns for India for over a decade. Many teachers and students in rural areas are not able to match up to the technical skills of educationalists and students in cities. As the country takes to online education, the current pandemic is adversely impacting rural students more than those who live in cities. Unfortunately, students in rural India are denied the newest devices and levels of accessibility to online content that urban Indians enjoy daily. Unlike their counterparts in cities, a lower percentage of students in

villages possess desktop or laptop computers. They depend on family members' mobile phones for learning and attending classes, making it an arduous exercise. Furthermore, purchasing data plans for learning could also get a lot of expenses for families who face financial constraints. It could further affect the participation levels of both teachers and students concerning live classes. Moreover, people in rural areas are dealing with intermittent power supply and older electronic devices (if they possess), which are often a hindrance to smooth access to learning.

It is important to note that 68.84% of India's population lives in rural areas while 31.16% of India's population lives in urban areas (Census of India, 2011). Indian society is hierarchical, stratified and deficient in vertical mobility. The social distance between the different classes, and particularly between the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated is large and tends to widen. People profess a number of different religions and the picture becomes even more complicated because of caste, illiteracy, digital divide and poverty which threatens both national and social progress. As education is not rooted in the traditions of the people the uneducated people largely remain outside the growth cycle.

In this backdrop when the whole world is adjusting to the reality of the Covid-19 pandemic by finding alternatives to the disruptions caused thus far, digital educational tools have provided us a new path of learning and to retain normalcy for students and teachers. Shifting education from offline to online platforms seems to be very important to tackle the existing issues due to pandemic. It is believed that access to digital education can overcome the problems of shortage of teachers in rural schools, access to quality of education, techniques in teaching learning process, high drop-out rate and paucity of quality learning material. Data published by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (2020) on national education policy also focuses on online learning as an alternative to regular classroom interaction between teachers and students. While online education seems to be a possible solution for effective dispersal of education and training in rural India, digitalization of education in the semi-urban and rural regions of India remains a challenging feat to achieve

due to levels of accessibility to digital education and many teachers and students in rural areas are not able to match up to the technical skills required to access e-learning platforms. There may be several challenges for shifting education from offline to online mode such as digital literacy and infrastructural support, access to the right device and cost of data for increased usage of content consumption, lack of skills, language concerns as about 85% of Indian population does not speak English, absence of standardized e-learning content in multiple languages, gender inequalities as penetration of digital education among the female population in rural India is even more challenging. Like most other domains, access to the internet and literacy in rural India is primarily available to men. In such a scenario, it becomes even more challenging to enable women to access these resources. The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

1. What are the challenges of shifting education from offline to online in a rural setting?
2. What are the barriers students and teachers face to access online platforms?
3. How the role of parents and teachers changed during the COVID- 19 pandemic?
4. How efficient are the government programs to promote e-learning in rural settings?

Methods

The researcher followed 'Descriptive research design'. The method describes and interprets the data that exist at present. This type of investigation is concerned with conditions and relationships that exist, practices which prevail, beliefs, point of views of attitudes that are held, processes that are going on, effects that are being felt and the trends that are developing in due course of time.

Literature review

When the whole world is adjusting to the reality of the Covid-19 pandemic by finding alternatives to the disruptions caused thus far, digital educational tools have provided us a new path of e-learning and to retain normalcy for students and teachers.

E-learning is the acquisition of knowledge which takes place through electronic technologies and

media (Abernathy, 2019). E-learning is conducted with the help of the internet, where students can access their learning materials at any place and time. Rana and Lal (2014) in an article state that adoption of technology in education has increased significantly. Most educational institutions like to invest in e-learning; therefore, it may be seen that the growth of e-learning is expanding tremendously. Key attributes of e-learning are many-to many (group) communications, any place, text, enhanced by multi-media, computer-conferencing. Learning covers a wide set of applications and processes such as computer-based learning systems, Web-based learning systems, virtual classrooms, and digital collaborative learning group ware packages. E-learning content is mainly delivered via Internet, intranet/extranet, audiotape and videotape; satellite broadcast, interactive TV, DVD and CD-ROM (Longimire, 2001, as cited in Rana & Lal, 2014)

Mehdipour and Zerehkafi (2013) pointed that mobile learning is emerging as one of the solutions to the challenges faced in education. With a variety of tools and resources always available, mobile

Learning provides increased options for the personalization of learning. Mobile learning in classrooms often has students working interdependently, in groups, or individually to solve problems, to work on projects, to meet individual needs and to allow for student voice and choice. With access to so much content anytime and anywhere, there are plenty of opportunities for formal and informal learning both inside and outside the classroom. But there are several social and educational challenges for e-learning such as:

- How to assess learning outside the classroom?
- How to support learning across many contexts?
- How to stay tuned with frequent changes in device models/technologies/ functionality etc.?
- How to track results for proper use of information?
- How to access and use technology in developing countries?
- How to avert risk of distraction?

Fatma (2013) noted that there needs to be a mindset for the adoption of e-learning. In underdeveloped countries like India e-learning can raise the level of education, literacy and economic development. This is especially true for countries where technical education is expensive, opportunities are limited, and economic disparities exist. However, one of the problems with e-learning in India is the lack of course content, especially outside the mainstream focus areas of IT education, English-language content, and tutorial-like courses. The social implications of online learning centre around one primary requirement that students need to feel a part of the class, regardless of where they are located physically or geographically. India needs to adopt the concept of e-learning in order to meet its educational needs.

Yadav and Tiwari (2016) concluded that development of any society depends on its access to information and the same is applicable to rural India too. E-learning can work wonders in this direction and help the socially marginalized community to attain their entitlements. Launch of Digital India Program is a welcome step in this direction. This study pointed out that there are many challenges to promote online education in rural India such as lack of infrastructure and hardware facilities which hamper reliability of e-learning, lack of policies, strategies, schemes, monitoring and control that ensure cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder involvement, lack of awareness about e-learning material usage and services offered, skilled manpower to training illiterate rural areas of India, no computer based courses/skills taught to students in primary schools to enhance their knowledge about ICT.

Beer (2015) in his article highlighted that there are several challenges of promoting online education like learning style, cultural, technical training, technological and time management challenges. There are three requirements needed for effective e-learning which is advancement in technology, quality of instructor and student's capacity to grasp. Technology needs to improve and teachers who are motivated and have an encouraging attitude towards e-learning technology will enable a positive learning outcome (Volery & Lord, 2000).

Gilbert (2015) in his study concluded that an online learning environment allows learning to occur in a setting that is not restricted by place or time. Online learning possesses the ability to disassemble barriers that have been constructed by poverty, location, disability as well as other factors. A research paper points out that there are two communities: first is the course community comprising teachers, peers, counsellors and administrators while the second is the students personal community comprising students, siblings, friends and parents within an academic communities of engagement (ACE) framework. This study reported close association between these two communities which provide effective, behavioural and cognitive support in remote settings during Covid-19 crisis to promote online education (Borup, Jensen, Archambault, Short & Graham, 2020).

The United Nations (2020) report highlights that Covid-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of the education system ever and affected about 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries around the world. Closure of schools have affected 94% of students across the world which increases up to 99% in low-income countries. So, this crisis is retrograding the pre-existing education system by trimming the opportunities for most of the vulnerable children, youth and adults. Due to Covid-19 crisis about 23.8 million additional children may drop out from Schools by the end of 2021.

The National Education Policy (2020) also focuses on online learning as an alternative to regular classroom interaction between teachers and students. Government's digital India initiative includes a massive plan to connect rural areas with high-speed internet networks (Chaturvedi, 2020).

However, there is one question that is of key importance for the educational prospects for a digital generation, and that is; to what extent will we see new divisions in our societies, locally, nationally and globally, about who will become included or excluded (Warschauer, 2004)? The digital divide has mainly been discussed as an issue related to access and gender differences. It is more important today to see this as an issue of competence and literacy, or more generally as building for a digital age.

Learning theories for online education

The external conditions of learning are features outside the learner that influence learning possibilities and are involved in the learning processes. These can roughly be divided into features of the immediate learning situation and learning space and more general cultural and societal conditions. The kind of learning space makes up for differences between everyday learning, school learning, workplace learning, net-based learning, interest-based learning, etc. and for difficulties in applying learning outcomes across the borders of these spaces – the so-called ‘transfer problem’ of learning (Illeris, 2018).

No single theory for learning has developed for instruction in general, the same is applied to online education. A number of theories for online education have developed such as community of inquiry (COI), connectivism and online collaborative learning (OCL).

Community of inquiry (COI)

This model for online learning environments is based on the concept of three different presences, these are cognitive, social, and teaching. It supports the design of online and blended courses as active learning environments or communities dependent on instructors and students sharing ideas and information. COI is a popular model for online and combined courses that are designed in such a way that students and faculty members can interact easily by using discussion boards, wikis, blogs and videoconferencing (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000 as cited in Illiris, 2018).

Connectivism

The main proponent of this theory is George Siemens. Connectivism is a learning model that acknowledges great shifts in the way knowledge and information flows and changes due to huge data communication networks. Cyberspace has shifted learning from internal and individualistic activities to group and community activities. Connectivism is the integration of principles explored by chaos, network, and complexity and self-organization theories while learning is a process that occurs within opaque environments of shifting main elements which is not completely under the control of the individual. Learning focuses on connecting specialized sets of information that enable us to learn more and more and are more crucial than our current state of knowledge and it can reside outside of the people. (Siemens, 2004). Connectivism is a theory that is driven by the dynamic of information flow. Therefore, the students need to understand and recognize the constantly shifting and evolving of information. Students need to understand, and be provided with, experiences in navigating and recognizing oceans of constantly shifting and evolving information. The main principles of connectivism as proposed by Siemens are as follows:

1. Learning lies in multiplicity of opinion and so the knowledge.
2. It is a process of connecting various specialized information sources.
3. Learning may reside outside the human that is in artificial appliances.
4. Capacity to know more is more critical than what is currently known.
5. To facilitate continual learning there is a need to nurture and maintain connections.
6. Ability to identify connections between ideas, fields and concepts is an important skill.
7. Up-to-date knowledge is the objective of all connectivism learning activities.
8. Learning process involves decision making in which choosing what to know and information is seen through shifting reality.

Online collaborative learning (OCL)

This theory is proposed by Linda Harasim which focuses on the Internet and technology to provide learning environments that encourage collaboration and knowledge building. Harasim marks out OCL as a unique theory of learning that mainly focuses on collaborative learning, knowledge building, and use of the Internet as a means to re-shape the formal and informal education system (Harasim, 2012, p. 81). Online Collaborative Learning (OCL) involves three phases of knowledge construction through discussion in a group:

1. First phase is the brainstorming phase in which ideas are generated through different gathered thoughts.
2. In the second phase ideas are compared, analysed and categorized through discussion and arguments. So, this phase is an ideal organising phase.
3. Third phase is intellectual convergence. It is a phase where intellectual synthesis and consensus occurs through an assignment, essay or other joint piece of work by agreeing or disagreeing (Harasim, 2012, p. 82).

Research design

- **Research Design:** As per the need of this study, 'exploratory cum descriptive' research design had been used for this research. The study explored the advantages/disadvantages of online education in rural settings. This study also explored the challenges of e-learning in rural India and to understand the efficiency of government programs to promote online education in rural settings.
- **Population and Sample:** The study universe was constituted of students and parentrural/semi-rural areas of Uttarakhand. Students, parents and teachers belonging to Uttarakhand who belonged to the lower socio-economic strata and teachers imparting education to this section of population formed the universe of the study. Selection of the respondents or stakeholders was done through a convenient sampling method.

- **Source of Data:** Data was gathered from both primary as well as secondary sources in the course of the study. The interview Schedule and Case Study with the students and teachers were the primary sources.
- **Secondary sources:** The published/unpublished materials, documents, internet sources etc. served as secondary sources.

Tools of data collection

The interview schedule and case study methods have been adopted under this study to understand advantages and challenges of online education in rural settings and children coming from the lower socio-economic strata. The investigator developed an interview schedule for collecting information from the various stakeholders such as School Principals, teachers, students and parents. Relevant research questions related to the subject were prepared. The newspapers, articles, journals, social media documents, e-libraries, books etc. were used for the collection of secondary data.

Data collection and analysis

The final collection of data started in the month of January, 2021. The researcher used an interview schedule to collect primary data and conducted discussion on the same. The respondents were made to understand that their answers would be treated with complete confidentiality.

The data collected by administering the tools as well as reference documents were analysed and interpretations were presented in qualitative form. Based on the interview with the various categories of respondents, the researcher could document those and present a strong case in lieu of the topic under discussion.

Respondent 1 (Student): Respondent took a few weeks to arrange a smart-phone to set pace with his online classes and then the monthly data packs came as one of the newly added challenges. His parents work as domestic and cattle help for the family where they are given a small room to live so the family is obliged to work strenuously both in the stable as well as working as domestic

help. In this, the respondent as well as the siblings are also involved in such tasks. Amidst all this, online classes and assignments given by the school often take a backseat.

Respondent 2 (Student): She shared her concerns of not being able to find much motivation in online classes as it is difficult for her to manage classes. Secondly, using phone for study purposes is also a big reason of distraction as earlier the respondent was never given a phone because she was asked to focus on her studies but now, she is bound to have a phone due to which most of her time is spent in using phone which tempts her to use WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and other gaming apps.

Respondent 3 (Student): Respondent came up with the issue of discussions of child marriage in the family. The student is not able to concentrate on her studies as she wants to continue with her studies while the parents want her to get married so that they can save themselves from spending hefty amounts for her marriage after some years. Such discussions are leading to unnecessary stress in the family and strained relations between the student and other family members.

Respondent 4 (Teacher): Respondent being a government school teacher shared some more insights pertaining to online classes. She shared that it is not only students and their families who are facing the brunt of online education during the pandemic but teachers also who are at the receiving end. Out of the many challenges, the teacher shared that many of the staff did not have digital exposure and they hardly found any need as in government schools, managing the basic infrastructure such as tables chairs, classrooms, black boards, etc. to conduct classes is a task and in this scenario where the teachers are forced to take classes via online platforms with the students who do not have even sustainable means of living is a farce. The situation is pathetic in terms of asking the family to arrange a smart phone for their ward, motivating the student to take online classes, helping the student in using smart phones where the teachers themselves are not adept in using such high - end platforms which are on a constant mode of revolution, sending and ensuring that every

student has received the online content and evaluating the content which is received from the students on irregular and illegible form.

Respondent 5 (Principal): She discussed the matter in great detail as School Principals have been the nodal persons to check the logistics for conducting online education in the school. The Principal presented her point with a balanced approach keeping in mind the various challenges along with the need of continuing studies of students via online classes. Since the onset of the pandemic and the lockdown, the world came to a halt and everything seemed to be frozen. Soon the central and state governments realized that this shall stay in the country for some months. March being the months of concluding academic year and with April to begin with fresh admissions and sessions, the state government were given some guidelines to execute classes through online forums. Initially, the entire school authority was blank as to how to go about the process but soon things started falling in place as small steps helped the school to traverse considerable milestones. The journey was/is replete with obstacles but the only motivation for us is that the students' learning should not suffer although it is a highly knowledgeable fact that the school is not able to fully cater to psycho-socio-economic aspects of the families. The school is trying its best in coping with the challenges and sorting out problems which usually arise on an impromptu basis. However, since it has been a year now the school is quite prepared in advance to tackle situations which might come up inadvertently. The school is in constant touch with the State Government and takes up matters which are related to fees, mid - day meals, material support, etc. The SMC and SDMC Councils are also pitched on a need - based basis whose support helps to add an all - round value to the efforts.

Respondent 6 (parents): Respondent ordeal was the longest and probably the scariest. Online education came as a big jolt to them as the announcement of the lockdown was the final nail to the coffin to their existing troubles. Many parents who are dependent upon daily wages or are employed in unorganized sector/s they are not in a condition to even afford two square meals for their families. In such a scenario, availing smart phones, internet data packs, stationery, books and availability of electricity while the student uses a phone is a

challenge. It is easier said than done when one speaks about such issues but it is heart wrenching to experience or imagine the situation even for a moment. Parents having no other choice are bound to allow their children to work as domestic help, learn parlour work, dropout from school, not able to support the child in taking examinations and even hesitant in helping the child to get promoted to Grade 9 especially because as per Uttarakhand state government norms a student is eligible to get dry ration (in place of mid - day meals) till Grade 8. This might look like a funny incident but it is the reality of families hailing from poor backgrounds/rural as it is human tendency to prefer food over other amenities especially when the family's hands are tied. All they are asked to do is to stay at home to prevent themselves as well as others from getting affected by the Covid-19 virus. In this backdrop, the family has started speculating on early marriage of their daughter who is in Grade 8, as it will serve twin purpose - first, it will help the family to save themselves from high cost of marriage which is otherwise observed in marriages in normal times and secondly as the parents are unable to feed their children the marriage of the daughter will cut down some expenses and she can continue her studies from her in-laws house which solely depends upon the willingness and support of the in - laws.

Key findings

Based on the data collection, the researcher could identify the cases which highlight some of the key challenges which the stakeholders are facing especially with regard to online education during Covid – 19 times.

Below is the detailed elaboration of the same for your reference:

- 1. Lack of phone or availability of a single phone in the family** - Online education has pushed the students to have phones or laptops in order to continue their studies. Although the states and schools seem to be quite complacent by conducting online classes, what they are lacking is the need to tap the cases where the student and families are unable to manage a digital infrastructure for maintaining pace with online classes. Many students especially in government schools are facing serious issues related to

lack of phone or presence of a single phone in the family which makes it difficult to set pace with studies.

2. **Financial issues** - The pandemic came with a surge in job losses, salary cuts, lay-offs and taking undue advantage of employees or workers. Moreover, the cost of treatment of COVID-19 is another big factor of families being pushed towards poverty. All these reasons make a strong case for people facing heavy financial losses and are forced to live a life of helplessness, beggary, illiteracy, nutritional deficiencies, etc.
3. **Lack of phone recharge** - Owing to financial burden in the family due to reasons mentioned above the families are not able to get their phone recharges as in such harsh times where people are finding it difficult to manage a square meal for the family there, phone recharge is not finding a place in the family budget. In these cases, the students are missing a major portion of their studies.
4. **Lack of self-motivation** - In today's context of education it is becoming increasingly challenging for the students to stay motivated especially when they are all by themselves. The school curriculum is designed in such a manner where it focuses solely/primarily in disseminating bookish content and not on life skills. In such a scenario, students are finding it very difficult to gather their mental faculties and set pace with their studies.
5. **Lack of performance in academics** - Education is a conscious process which requires concentration, effective performance, ability to reason, study material and a viable source of regular interaction. Unfortunately, all these components are missing in most of the families which is leading to compromise in learning. With more than a year of lockdown and near lockdown situations in India and Dehradun specifically, the students are showing lack of performance in class.
6. **Lack of extra - curricular activities** - Since the lockdown, students have been at home where they are finding it difficult to engage in physical fitness exercises, taking breaks from classes, participating in energizing activities and even honing their skills and knowledge by participating in debates,

competition, sports, dance contests, etc. All this has made them more used to the sedentary lifestyle which mostly focuses on just attending online classes.

7. **Lack of effective interactions with teachers and classmates** - Online classes mostly focus on dissemination of content by teachers without a sound follow up mechanism and scheduling extra hours for doubts, discussions, brainstorming sessions, etc. This had led the students to absorb whatever the teachers teach without coming up with reasonable queries. This is a grave issue as the communication is one way and the students are bottling up their concerns which is even leading to their inability to question things
8. **Irregularity in getting homework** - Many children have been complaining about the irregular dissemination of homework which makes it difficult for the children to stay consistent and focused.
9. **Increased distractions**- As in many families especially in a rural setting, a phone is considered as a key to Pandora's box. In this context, families are forced to use a smartphone, get data packs, install WhatsApp for information dissemination, create multiple groups, and stay online to learn more insights on daily progress. Using phones for study purposes is also a big reason for distraction as earlier the children were never given a phone because they were expected to focus on studies but now, they are bound to have a phone due to which most of the time is spent in playing Games and watching videos on social media.
10. **Lack of digital literacy** - As the Pandemic came with an outburst of technological advancements, the schools as well as the students took considerable time in getting adept with the various means to set comfortable rhythm with studies. The ongoing situation has laid greater emphasis on Digital Literacy where an individual irrespective of background, caste, colour, sex and place of living is to learn the nuances of technology. As "Rome was not built in a day" such massive changes also cannot take place overnight. It takes political will, support, means of livelihood, special as-

sistance and joint efforts to try to enable the people to share a common digital pedestal especially when India is a land full of cultural and economic diversity.

- 11. Health issues** - The pandemic has emerged as one of the most disastrous events in world history where the COVID-19 disease is spreading at a shocking rate. In this scenario, families have been facing greater challenges in maintaining hygiene, increasing immunity levels, identifying symptoms, affording fee of COVID-19 tests, affording treatment to cure the disease, mental and physical isolation of the patients in the family require separate spaces which poses serious issues related to available space, attending online classes, etc.
- 12. Self-employment** - With most of the factors adversely affecting the children, they are bound to seek options to earn a living and support their families. This can be a voluntary or an imposed action based on factors like family condition, family pressure, supporting education of self, managing basic needs and lack of interest in studies.
- 13. Early marriage cases** - The lockdown has come as a boon for families who have a mindset that marrying a girl comes with a heavy price as the lockdown allows marriage to be a low - key affair. Families are taking this as a golden opportunity to get rid of the financial burdens which would be posed when their daughter gets married after some years. Putting it in perspective, the trainee found cases where minor girls are getting married to men who are at times double their age. Also, there are cases where the girls are revolting against such malpractices and are trying to convince their parents to let them continue with their studies.

Conclusion and suggestions

COVID-19 pandemic which has created the largest disruption of education systems ever and forced the shift of education from offline to online platforms has emerged several challenges for us and particularly for rural settings. Governments also have issued some guidelines to execute classes through online

forums but these guidelines are not sufficient to tackle the challenges emerging due promoting e-learning in rural settings. Some of the key challenges which the stakeholders are facing especially with regard to online education during Covid – 19 times are lack of phone or presence of single phone in the family, lack of effective interactions with teachers and classmates, lack of self-motivation among students, lack of performance in academics, Lack of extra - curricular activities, financial issues and health issues, irregularity in getting homework, increased distractions due to various social media platforms and gaming apps, lack of availability of e-learning material in local languages, lack of digital literacy and early marriage cases as lockdown has come as a boon for families who have a mindset that marrying a girl comes with a heavy price as the lockdown allows marriage to be a low - key affair. So, shifting only shifting education to e-learning platforms are not enough and several challenges as mentioned above. In such adverse scenarios various initiatives like E-Basta, should have been taken by the Government to promote digital learning in rural areas under the national mission on education through information and communication technology (NMEICT). E-Basta is an initiative that offers a framework to make schoolbooks accessible in digital form as e-books to be read and used on tablets and laptops. Other such initiatives include SWAYAM, SWAYAM Prabha, National Digital Library (NDL), Spoken Tutorial, Free and Open-Source Software for Education (FOSSEE), Virtual Lab, E-Yantra, MOOCs and the like.

It should be noted that educating the digital generation is not so much about being able to use digital media in and out of school than it is about creating a space for reflection and the building of knowledge that will help all students and teachers to participate as citizens in a digital culture. In this sense we have to re-evaluate our socio-cultural constructions of the school-aged learner, to prevent new marginalizing mechanisms from developing.

Based on the data collection and findings, the researcher has come up with the following suggestions.

1. The e-learning material should be localized as English is still not a main-

stream language in India especially in Government schools.

2. Various initiatives have been taken by the Government to promote digital learning under the national mission on education through information and communication technology (NMEICT).
3. Skill development programs for students and teachers relating to e-learning and technology should be promoted in rural settings.
4. Phone, Laptop and other necessary means should be provided by the government to students of economically weaker class so that they can get the access to digital education.
5. Students need to develop good strategies for how they can use information to learn more; that is to learn how to learn.
6. Financial and health support should be provided to families who are suffering from financial issues due to Covid-19 disruption.

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