

Original Research Article

IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON EDUCATION AND PSYCHO-SOCIAL BEHAVIOR AMONG SCHOOL STUDENTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN TWO ADJACENT BLOCKS IN NORTH 24 PARGANA DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL, INDIA

ABSTRACT

A country is developed only when its citizens are educated. The role of education in development of a nation can never be denied. Institutional education is imperative as it helps the child to become a good citizen through holistic development. During last two years, due to emergence of Covid-19 and lockdown as its preventive measure, formal education was not in continuation for that time. Through this paper, the objective of the paper is to do a comparative analysis between two adjacent Blocks of North 24 Parganas, West Bengal, India. Hence, the comparative parameter is during lockdown school closer related impacts faced by students. The data was collected from 80 no of children and their parents enrolled in govt. school. The result revealed that an alternative option came as a learning medium which is an online class. These classes required gadgets like mobile phone, laptop and proper internet connection. The data has been analysed to evaluate the impact of school closures in learners. Majority of the students' parents are daily wage earners. During the lockdown they got unemployed. So many of them couldn't afford a phone and recharge amount for internet packages. Majorities of the student from rural areas were unable to do online classes due to economic constraints and many schools could not arrange online classes due to higher poverty rate of the location and inaccessible network. It caused a large impact on the learners' education by creating a huge difference between the learners of same ages. Most of the students of both blocks lost their sincerity towards education. Behavioral changes occurred among students during this school closure. Most of the learner's parents complained that during online class they got addicted to online games and other unnecessary online activities. The changes among learners of Barrakpore II were greater than the learners of Barasat I. They lost their concentration in studies, got irritable by nature, enjoy loneliness, talk fewer etc.

Keywords: COVID-19, Online education; Education; School closure; Lockdown:Psycho-social behaviour.

Introduction

In December 2019 suddenly there was a suspicious spread of pneumonia-like disease in Wuhan city of Hubei Province of China due to unknown reason and an ample number of death cases started getting reported. The virus was identified as '2019 – nCoV' and it was named as SARS-CoV-2. Afterwards WHO named the disease 'COVID – 19 or Corona Virus Disease 2019. Later on 11th March 2020, the Director-General of World Health Organization anticipated that outbreak could be characterized as a pandemic because of an exponential spike in the number of cases all over the world (WHO, 2020)

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To control the pandemic situation, WHO suggested lockdown and gave multiple health advisories to the community. Though the uncontrollable spread of the virus was managed by the lockdown but it left a major impact on society, world economy, transport system, food supply chain, and businesses as well as to the education system. Thus, all schools had to close and classes were taken by online mode as the Indian authority endowed in an intended endeavor to increase digital learning. But in the other hand in India where the poverty rate is 6% or 86.8 million of the total population according to the World Poverty Clock, it was not possible by every parent to afford new technology for their children to attain online classes especially when multiple people were forced to leave their occupations or earning sources due to the circumstances. So many learners get detained from digital learning due to the unavailability of online connectivity or technologies and gadgets.

In West Bengal, many students enrolled in Government schools only for the mid-day meal scheme. Food is driven forces to enroll their name in public school. According to **Sharma & Joshi (2021)** the enrolment of children in public school has increased from 33.4 million at its launch in 1995–96 to 118 million in 2019–20. But during that pandemic phase, the needy children did not get the daily lunch which was generally provided by the school. But the government took initiatives to give them dry foods like rice, soybean, chickpeas, potatoes etc. every month.

A school is the foundation of a future generation. It would help to bring interest in learning, gaining knowledge, building social behaviors and cohesiveness. Beside home, schools are the only important institution of being socialized (**Robson, 2013**). Students from the privileged backgrounds can afford and access alternative learning opportunities but the students from lower socio economic class faced multiple constraints to pursue basic education. It was not possible for every school to arrange online mode of education due to lack of proper infrastructure and facilities. According to **Sharma & Joshi (2021)** social inequalities between public and private school students had been observed during the pandemic situation.

As of April 8, 2020, schools have been closed in 188 countries, according to **UNESCO (2022)**. Over 90% of students (1.5 billion) worldwide are now out of education. The schooling system is important for young people, especially those who are aged from 6 to 13 years, as it helps to anchor their life in every aspect (**Lee, 2020**). So there are many students who lose interest in education, failed to concentrate on their studies, and lost focus power, and now many of them are victims of depression.

The aim of the present study is to compare the impact of school closure during lockdown on education and psycho social behaviour among school students between two adjacent blocks of North 24 Parganas of West Bengal.

Methodology

The study compares the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on educational status and psycho-social behavior of students between two blocks of North 24 Parganas district. It is based on the primary data. Two blocks were selected purposively from two different sub divisions considering the semi urban nature of the demographic profile and one gram panchayat from each block was selected randomly for the study. Two villages from each of these gram panchayats were also selected randomly. 80 children who already enrolled in government aided schools of class 1-9 and 80 parents were selected randomly as sample. Two structures schedules, one for parents and another for students, were developed for data collection. The respondents, who were willing to participate in the study, were selected for personal interviewed by the researcher. After data collection, it has been tabulated and analyzed as per the objective of the study.

Result

According to the **figure 1** total number of smart phone users was high in Barrakpore II block than Barasat I. Only 20% of respondents used smartphone before pandemic in Barasat I whereas in Barrakpore II block 40% of respondents used smartphones. **Figure 2** shows 45% of respondents in Barrakpore II Block bought new smartphones for online classes. In case of Barasat I Block only 5% of respondents bought new smartphones.

Figure 1: Smart phone users percentage before lockdown

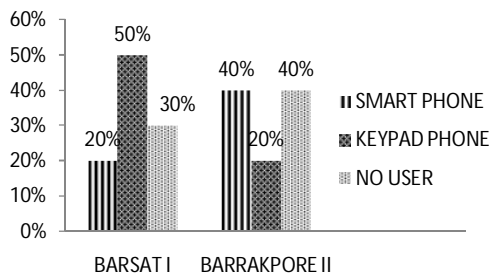
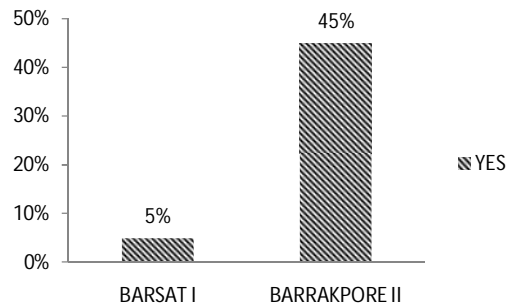
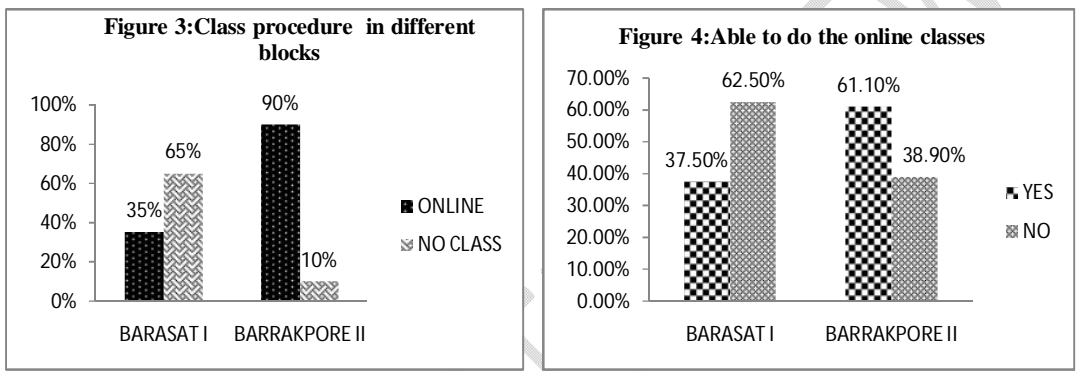


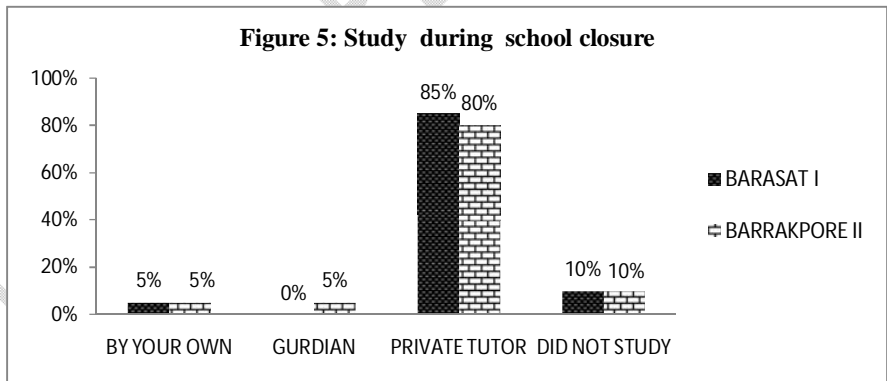
Figure 2: Bought new smart phone for online class



During COVID pandemic period, due to lockdown, schools had decided to take online classes to continue the academic process. It is observed from **figure 3** that majority of online classes (90%) were taken in Barrakpore II Block as compared to Barasat I (35%). **Figure 4** shows that in Barasat I Block 62.5% of learners could not access online classes due to lack of accessible electronic devices and higher rate of poverty whereas in Barrakpore II Block 61.1% of students were able to attend online classes. There is a visible difference observed between these two blocks. The percentage of online class attainment was lower in Barasat I Block than in Barrakpore II but it was not a negligible number. Many of them claimed that they had only one mobile phone in their house which was unavailable to them most of the time.



Students acquired the academic knowledge from different sources during school closure. Most of



them were relied on private tuition (80% and more) in both the blocks (**Figure 5**). 10% of students from both blocks during pandemic were not able to do their study due to various challenges.

According to the Table 1 respondents of both the blocks had various approaches towards the mode of learning during pandemic. Only 15% of students prefer online learning mode and majority of the students (85%) preferred to back to their old traditional method of schooling in future. It has been observed that in Barasat I Block 100% of students wanted to continue their future studies in school. Most of the students from both blocks did not prefer online classes from home. On the other hand there was mixed reaction about the mode of examination. 45% from Barrakpore II and 35%

from Barasat I prefer the online mode of examination. It has been observed that offline mode of classes were preferred more by the students rather than the offline mode of examination.

APPROACH	MEDIUM TYPE	BARASAT I	BARRAKPORE II
Preferable medium	Online	0%	15%
	Offline	100%	85%
future exam mode	Online	35%	45%
	Offline	65%	55%
Preference of online classes at home instead of going to school	Yes	5%	10%
	No	95%	90%

Table: 2 defines that during the lockdown, 80% of learners from Barasat I Block and 95% from Barrakpore II Block lost their sincerity toward education. They got addicted to mobile phones. Majority of the respondent's parents (90%) of Barrakpore II claimed that during online classes, they used to play games on their mobile phones instead of doing classes whereas it was lower in Barasat I. Most of the parents from both blocks complained about their children's behavioral changes during the 2 years lockdown period. Apart from these, it has been observed by parents that the mental health of their child has been affected by school closure for a long time. Most of the students lost their sincerity, got irritable by nature, enjoy loneliness, talk less because of restricted movement, change of daily routine and unavailability of school companions. In Barasat I, 35% of respondents' parents and 50% of respondents' parents in Barrakpore II claimed that the mentality of their children has changed. Students were preferred to stay lonely or did not like to communicate with others.

VARIABLES	BARASAT I	BARRAKPORE II
Affected mental peace	50%	35%
Behavioral changes for stay lonely during pandemic	45%	60%
Effect in students' sincerity	80%	95%
Addiction in mobile/ phone	45%	90%

Discussion

The whole world has been disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a huge impact of this pandemic on education system of developing countries. To control the spread of corona virus sudden lockdown had been taken place. The researcher observed that COVID 19 pandemic had a wide effect on education system. School closure during lockdown leads to many difficulties for students, teachers and parents (Upoalkpajor, 2020).

Distance learning by online teaching mode was one of the solutions to continue the education. But there were lots of challenges to provide education by online mode like unavailability of smart phones or computer, lack of internet facility etc. Economic constraints were one of the major factors that the respondent either had no smart phone or was unable to buy a new phone. **Misty & Laura (2011)** have stated in their research paper that poverty has significant effects on child's development. It can reflect on education also. They revealed that the students those who were below poverty line got significantly low number than other children who are from a rich family. The present study reported that network issue in rural side was another major problem to attain online classes. They also claimed that there was only mobile phone in their home which was not available most of the time. **Muthuprasad et al.(2021)** found that online education procedure is interesting for the learners but here they faced challenges on the broadband connection in rural areas and also primary income of most of the family is based on agriculture, labor or other small businesses. In case of Barrakpore II and Barasat I Block, majority of the families' basic income was depending on daily wage-based labor work. During lockdown they got unemployed. Most of them couldn't afford a phone or couldn't afford to recharge net packages. Majorities of the student from rural areas were unable to do online classes due to economic constraint and also many schools could not arrange online classes due to higher poverty rate of the location and inaccessible network. It caused a huge impact on the learners' education. In that case it also created a huge difference between the learners of same ages.

The present study revealed that smartphone user before lockdown was less for both blocks. It also found that 45% of the student of Barrakpore II block bought new smart phone for online classes, which is very low (5%) in Barasat- I Block socio economic condition of the respondents was very poor in there. **Georgiadou et al (2021)** explained in their paper that how online teaching is became everything nowadays; it was a challenge for all teachers and learners also. It was tough to adopt a new teaching method overnight.

Most of the students in both blocks lost their sincerity toward education. Behavioural changes occurred among students during the school closure. Phone addiction among students was greater in Barrakpore II block than Barasat I. Most of the learner's parents complained that during online classes their ward addicted to play game in mobile phone instead of doing classes. The changes among learners of Barrakpore II were greater than the learners of Barasat I. They lost their sincerity, got irritable by nature, enjoy loneliness, talk fewer etc. Another study also revealed that substantial growth of children in terms of anxiety, depression and behavioural challenges was affected during the lockdown period (**Waddell et al., 2020**). Social inactivity directly affected the mental health of the children. Finding of this study about school closure and mental health of

students is similar to the result of the study done by **Hawrilenko et al. (2021)** results. Researcher mentioned in their paper that the two years academic gaps make many students permanent drop out and it is more common in poor sections in India (**Alvi & Gupta, 2020**).

Conclusion and recommendation

Education is one of the important key elements for the development of a country. Only education can build a better society and a better nation. For the development of a country, focus should be given on youth and their education. School is a place where the youth not only go for their studies but it also helps to develop the psychosocial behaviors of the students. But the sudden arrival of pandemic disturbed the whole education system. All the Schools were forced to close for near about 2 years. During this pandemic period, many parents noticed massive behavioral changes among their children. The major changes observed among school students are feeling lonely, lose sincerity towards education, got easily irritated, addicted to their phones etc.

In lockdown period, Government took initiatives to increase the digital learning method. Most of the private schools and government schools started the e-Learning mode of education. But in the developing countries like India, digital learning was a big challenge for many. **Sarkar et al. (2022)** observed a huge gap between private and govt. School. The accessibility of online education is higher in private school, situated majorly in urban areas than the government school in rural areas. A massive segregation has been observed towards the student's education in Government school between the two different blocks in study area. But majority of the students from both blocks prefer offline mode of education. There was a positive approach among the students of both blocks about reopening of the school. Researcher revealed that school has indirect effects on children's attitudes toward learning, their self-esteem, and their task orientation. The traditional method of teaching can make students responsible and also can improve their mental and mental health (**Sylva, 1994**).

So, it can be concluded from this study that although the education is the basic right for human, but this pandemic uncovered some different scenario. These are some possible recommendations towards the problem, if there will any situation arrive to shut down the schools again, the alternative, affordable and accessible measure should be considered. Government should take some policies where every student from every section of household could enroll themselves to the academic process as the learners need to continue their education during school closure. Till date digital learning cannot replace the old traditional method of learning in the developing countries due to lots of barriers like unaffordability of smart gadgets, unavailability of the internet access,

lack of infrastructural facilities and awareness. The environment of the school is also important for the student to improve their social and mental health.

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