

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 the 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 the last three years, due to emergence of Covid-19 and lockdown as its preventive measure, formal education was not in continuation for that time period. The objective of the paper is to compare the impact of school closure during lockdown on education and psycho-social behaviour among school students of two adjacent blocks of North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, India. Hence, the comparative parameters are school closure-related impacts faced by students during the pandemic situation. Cross-sectional data were collected from 80 no of children enrolled in government schools and their parents randomly. The data has been analyzed to evaluate the impact of school closures on learners. The result revealed that an alternative option came as a learning medium that is the online mode of education. These online classes required gadgets like mobile phone, laptop and proper internet connection. The majority of the students' parents are daily wage earners. During the lockdown, they got unemployed. So many of them couldn't afford a new smartphone and recharge amount for internet packages. The majority of students from rural areas were unable to do online classes due to economic constraints and inaccessibility of internet and many schools could not arrange online classes due to higher poverty rate of the location and lack of infrastructure. It caused a significant impact on the learners' education by creating a huge difference between the learners of the same age. Most of the students of both blocks lost their sincerity towards education. Behavioural changes occurred among students during this school closure. Most of the parents complained that during online classes their wards got addicted to online games and other unnecessary online activities. They lost their concentration in studies, got irritable by nature, enjoy loneliness, talk less etc. The changes among learners of Barrakpore II were greater than the learners of Barasat I. It can be recommended from this study that if there will any situation arrives to shut down the schools again or to development of a blended mode of education, a related educational policy, infrastructure with affordable and accessible measures should be considered to continue the education system for every section of students.

Keywords: COVID-19, Lockdown; School closure; Education system; School children; Online mode of education; 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 SARS-CoV-

2. Afterwards WHO named the disease as 'COVID – 19 or Corona Virus Disease 2019. Later on 11th March 2020, the Director-General of the World Health Organization anticipated that the outbreak could be characterized as a pandemic because of an exponential spike in the number of cases all over the world (WHO, 2020).

To control the pandemic situation, the WHO suggested a 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 the education system. Thus, all schools had to close and classes were taken online mode as the Indian authority endeavored in an intended endeavour to increase digital learning. Due to COVID-19 schools had to discontinue face-to-face learning. As a result, several students have to continue online classes at that time. Also, they spent too much time with other online activities. Sometimes through this online platform, they are exposed to potentially harmful content which makes them the victim of cyberbullying (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021).

On 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 for 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. In developing countries, the formal education system has been adversely affected during the pandemic. Students from less advantageous backgrounds faced challenges because of parents' lower digital skills and lower educational levels with poor learning. In rural areas, majority of students are pushed to support their families by doing domestic activities like cattle Herding and farming (Tadesse & Muluye, 2020). So, many learners get detained from digital learning due to the unavailability of online connectivity or technologies and lack of facilities. A study shows in India around 71 million children aged between 5 to 11 years depend on family member's devices to access digital media. Good internet availability, undisrupted power supply and digital infrastructures are some major controlling factors for online education. Hence poor internet connection and high data expenses create an impaired situation in rural areas for online education (Suneja & Bagai, 2021).

Physical school closure and the adoption of distance education may negatively affect students. During the pandemic, students spent less time in learning, and suffered from stress symptoms like anxiety and depression. Parents in some families are also faced stress because of pandemic-related financial and job crises. So they are not probably in a situation to support emotional well-being and motivate their children (Di Pietro et al., 2020).

A school is the foundation of a future generation. It would help to bring interest in learning, gaining knowledge, building social behaviours and cohesiveness. Beside home, schools are the only important institution of being socialized (**Robson, 2013**). Students from privileged backgrounds can afford and access alternative learning opportunities but students from lower socio-economic classes faced multiple constraints to pursue basic education. It was not possible for every school to arrange online mode of education due to the 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. **In India, crisis during covid-19 enormously affect the education sector by throwing challenges. There is a need to ensure quality education and equal access for all students that could be a way to mitigate educational inequalities (Sharma & Singh, 2021).**

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 many students lose interest in education, failed to concentrate on their studies, and lost focus power, and now many of them are victims of depression.

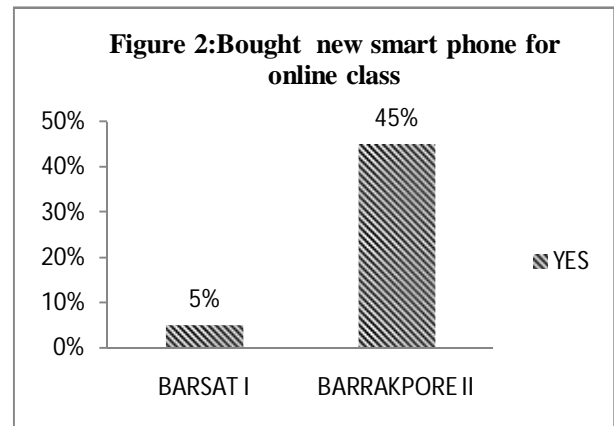
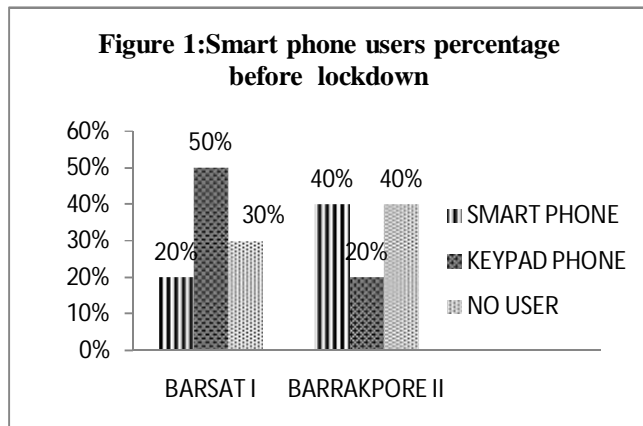
The aim of the present study is to compare the impact of school closure during lockdown on educational status and psycho-social behaviour among school students between two adjacent blocks of North 24 Parganas of West Bengal.

Methodology

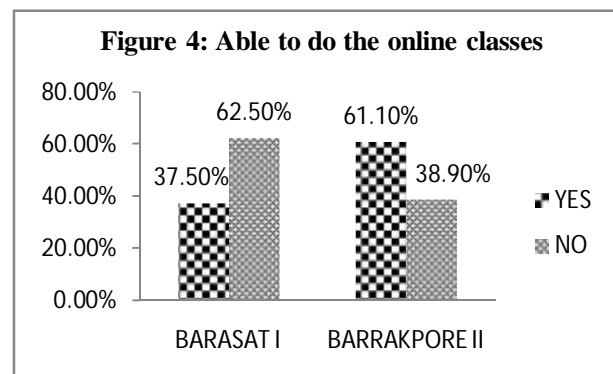
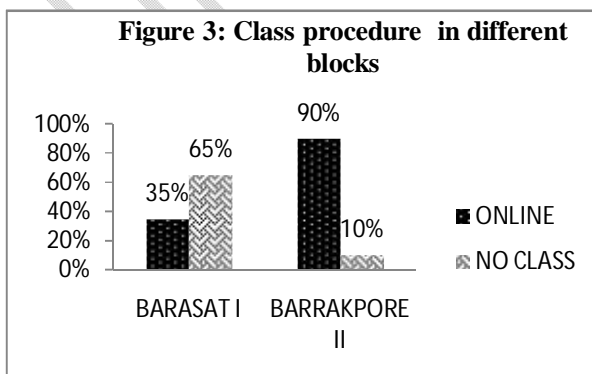
The study compares the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the educational status and psycho-social behaviour of students between two blocks of North 24 Parganas district. A cross-sectional study design has been opted to get field data. A mixed method of multistage sampling has been followed. **Two** blocks 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 were already enrolled in government-aided schools of class 1-9 grade and **their parents** were selected **randomly as sample from the list of enrolled students in this area. Two pre-tested structured interview schedules**, one for parents and another for students, **have been used for data collection**. The respondents, who were willing to participate in the study, **were interviewed by the researcher after taking consent proper way**. After data collection, it has been tabulated and analyzed as per the objective of the study.

Result

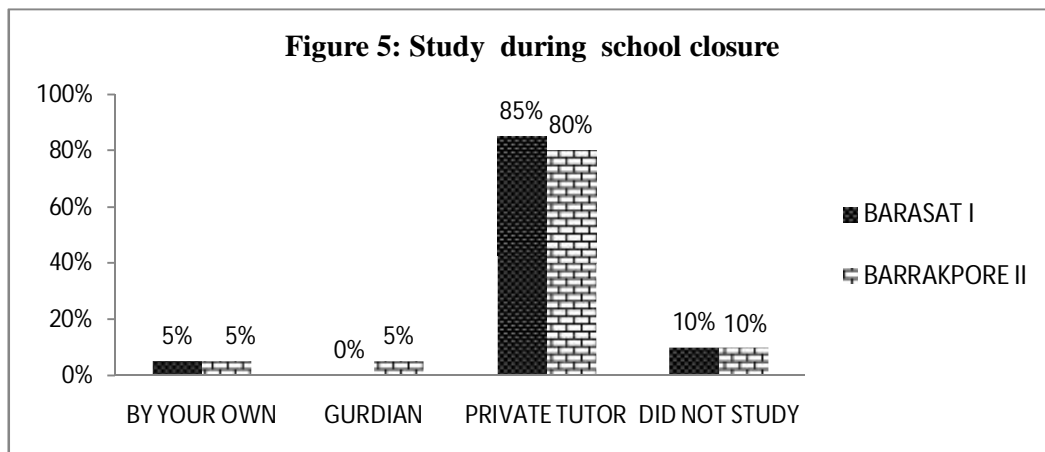
According to the **figure 1**, total number of smartphone users was high in Barrakpore II block than Barasat I. Only 20% of respondents used smartphones before the pandemic in Barasat I whereas in Barrakpore II block 40% of respondents used smartphones. **Figure 2** shows 45% of respondents in Barrakpore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



During the COVID pandemic period, due to the lockdown, schools decided to take online classes to continue the academic process. It is observed from **figure 3** that the 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 Barrackpore 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 academic knowledge from different sources during school closure. Most of them relied on private tuition (80% and more) in both blocks (**Figure 5**).10% of students from both blocks during the pandemic were not able to do their study due to various challenges.



According to Table 1 respondents of both blocks had various approaches towards the mode of learning during the 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 the offline mode of classes was preferred more by the students rather than the offline mode of examination.

Table 1: Students' approach towards mode of education

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. The 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 behavioural 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 preferred to stay lonely or did not like to communicate with others.

Table 2: Effects of School closure during lockdown on mental & social behaviour of school students		
VARIABLES	BARASAT I	BARRAKPORE II
Affected mental peace	50%	35%
Behavioural changes for staying lonely during the pandemic	45%	60%
Effect on students' sincerity	80%	95%
Addiction to 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 the 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 the 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 education. But there were lots of challenges to providing education in online mode like unavailability of smartphones or computers, lack of internet facilities etc. Economic constraints were one of the major factors that the respondent either had no smartphone 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 who were below poverty line got significantly low numbers than other children who are from a rich family. The present study reported that network issue in the rural side was another major problem to attain online classes. They also claimed that there was only a mobile phone in their home which was not available most of the time. **Muthuprasad et al.(2021)** found that the online education procedure is interesting for the learners but here they faced challenges with the broadband connection in rural areas and also primary income of most of the families is based on agriculture, labour or other small businesses. In the case of Barrakpore II and Barasat I Block, majority of the families' basic income was depending on daily wage-based labour work. During lockdown they got unemployed. Most of them couldn't afford a phone or couldn't afford to recharge net packages. Majorities of students from rural areas were unable to do online classes due to economic constraints 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 the same ages.

The present study revealed that smartphone user before the lockdown was less for both blocks. It also found that 45% of the student of Barrakpore II Block bought new smartphones for online classes, which is very low (5%) in Barasat- I Block as the socio-economic condition of the respondents was very poor there. **Georgiadou et al (2021)** explained in their paper that how online teaching is become 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. **Research revealed that after the pandemic, students were not willing to continue virtual school. Many students faced difficulties due to long screen time which is not safe for their well-being, they were also unable to connect with their peers (Singh & Ishrat, 2021).** Phone addiction among students was greater in Barrakpore II block than in Barasat I. Most of the learner's parents complained that during online classes **they were** addicted to playing games on mobile phones 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 less 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. The finding of this study about school closure and the mental health of students is similar to the result of study done by **Hawrilenko et al. (2021)** results. Researchers mentioned in their paper that the two years academic gaps make many students permanently 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 to youth and their education. School is a place where the youth not only go for their studies but also helps to develop the psychosocial behaviours of the students. But the sudden arrival of the 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 behavioural changes among their children. The major changes observed among school students are feeling lonely, losing sincerity towards education, getting easily irritated, being addicted to their phones etc.

During the 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 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 schools, 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 schools between the two different blocks in the study area. But the majority of the students from both blocks prefer the offline mode of education. There was a positive approach among the students of both blocks about the reopening of the school. Researchers 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 education is a basic right for human, this pandemic uncovered some different scenarios. These are some possible recommendations towards the problem, if there will any situation arrive to shut down the schools again, alternative, affordable and accessible measures should be considered. Government should take some policies where every student from every section of the household could enrol themselves on 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 developing countries due to lots of barriers like the unaffordability of smart gadgets, unavailability of internet access and lack of infrastructural facilities and awareness. The environment of the school is also important for the student to improve their social and mental health.

Limitation

This research faced some issues. First, the sample size was small which may hinder generalization in the context of a large population. Another major limitation is time constraints. Furthermore, respondents, in some situations, were unable to cooperate properly during the interview.

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