



Education and Learning during COVID-19



Source: India Today

The COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the biggest disruptions to education, the world has ever known affecting more than 90 percent of the world's student population. Many countries turned to online-based distance education to ensure that conventional learning never stops. However, some 826 million students (50 percent) kept out of classrooms by the pandemic

do not have access to a computer at home, (recent study by the **UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS, 2020)** and the **Teacher Task Force, 2020**). Around 706 million students lack internet access and 56 million live in areas not covered by mobile networks.

Education at the cost of Life



Source: Firstpost

A Class 10th student in Kerala's Malappuram district set herself on fire, reportedly out of a sense of helplessness as she realised that she would not be able to attend online classes. Her family had not been able to afford the repair of their television set or the purchase of a smart phone, either of which would allow her to access online lessons. The family was financially very strained and the girl was worried that she would be unable to study further. For the last two months of lockdown, the family had lost employment. The classes weren't available on the phone they have.

There have been similar concerns about the limited access to smartphones, computers and reliable internet connections mainly by tribal students in various parts of the country during the lockdown period and further as well, if online classes further continue.

Can there be Online Classes for all students in India?



Source: The Hindu

In India, 320 million students have been affected by COVID-19 led school closures and the government quickly recommended shifting to "online teaching" ignoring India's immense digital divide with already embedded gender and class divides. The **2017-18 National Sample Survey** reported that only 23.8 percent of Indian households had internet access. While in rural households, only 14.9 percent had internet access, 42 percent of urban households have such access. Males are the primary users of mobile internet (36 percent), whereas only 16 percent of women have access to such facility. Young people's access to mobile internet is even lesser. A recent news report stated only 12.5 percent of students had access to smartphones. Another recent study on Karnataka School Development Monitoring Committee (SDMC) found many districts have poor access to smart phones (PAC, 2020). Furthermore, most teachers are ill-equipped for online teaching. The distinction between home and institutional access to the internet is important during the current crisis. Holding online classes for students who have gone home during the crisis is a big challenge. This is because the structure of schooling and learning, including teaching and assessment methodologies, is most affected by these closures.

Only a handful of private schools can adopt online teaching methods. Their low-income private and government school counterparts, on the other hand, have completely shut down for not having access to e-learning solutions. It is a grave situation that the students who missed the opportunities for learning have no longer access to even a healthy meal during this time and are subjected to economic and social stress. The pandemic has significantly disrupted the higher education sector as well, which is a critical determinant of a country's economic future. A large number of Indian students—second only to China have enrolled in universities abroad, especially in countries worst affected by the pandemic - the US, UK, Australia and China. Many such students have now been barred from leaving these countries under the formal lockdown process. If such a situation persists, in the long run, a decline in the demand for international higher education will be likely reduced.

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