

# Negative Effects of Digital Platforms on Inclusive Education

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**ABSTRACT:** In this article the researcher attempts to analyze the impact of digital platforms on Inclusive Education. Inclusive Education is carried out in a common learning environment; that is an educational setting where students from different backgrounds and with different abilities learn together in an inclusive environment. But currently the entire education system is deeply affected by the lockdown in the COVID-19 epidemic situation. The technology based online education system released this situation in the field of education. But the study reveals that there is no doubt about digital mode has many advantages but it does not provide equal access to education for all students. Digital platforms are creating a social distance among the students especially between the private and public school system. The study concluded by an observation that in the present pandemic situation there is no alternative of online education but it is contrary to the concept of inclusive education.

**Keywords:** Lockdown, Inclusive Education, Digital education.

## I. INTRODUCTION:

The novel corona virus disease (covid-19) first appeared in Wuhan city of China at the end of last year (2019). Rapid worldwide spreading of Covid-19 prompted the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare it as 'Pandemic' on 11<sup>th</sup> march 2020. The worldwide spread of novel corona virus disease is severely affecting human life. Most of the governments around the world have initiated several strategies to control the spread of this highly contagious disease such as lockdown, social/physical distancing, avoiding face to face teaching-learning, restrictions of immigration etc.

Like other countries, our honorable Prime Minister announced country wide lockdown with social distancing, restriction over the majority of commercial activities and mass gathering including educational & public institutions as on 25<sup>th</sup> march 2020. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 lead to an significant impact on education. Around 600 million school going learners affected across the world due to the closing down of educational

institutions. UNESCO(2020) has reported that around 320 million learners are affected in India. The whole educational system was collapsed for this pandemic situation. In such a situation, the digital platforms become very relevant and effective in the entire field of education.

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the digital revolution in the education system was organized through online lecture, teleconferencing, digital open books, online examination and interaction of virtual environments etc. But a large part of the whole education system of a developing country like India remains outside this revolution. As a result, the broad concepts of Inclusive Education are greatly affected by the online education system.

**Inclusive Education:** we all know that Inclusive Education means all students attend and are welcomed by their neighborhood schools in age-appropriate, regular classes and supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the schools. Inclusive education is about how we develop and design our schools, classrooms, programs and activities so that all students learn and participate together. Inclusive education is about ensuring access to quality education for all students by effectively meeting their diverse needs in a way that is responsive, accepting, respectful and supportive. Students participate in the education program in a common learning environment with support to diminish and remove barriers and obstacles that may lead to exclusion.<sup>1</sup> In a single word, the main feature of inclusive education is to include all children in education system. But the present pandemic situation has become a major barrier to the success of inclusive education.

**Digital Platforms:** Digital learning is any type of learning that is accompanied by technology or by instructional practice that makes effective use of technology.<sup>2</sup> A digital platform is a set of computer applications that facilitate the education, development and distribution of courses through the internet. For educational institutions, it represents an advance because through this

platform can manage a means of distance education that benefits both institutions and students.<sup>3</sup> Digital platform may be includes online lecture, adaptive learning, blended learning, classroom technologies, e-textbooks, learning analytics, learning objects, mobile learning(e.g. Mobile Phones, Laptops, Computers, iPads.), personalized learning, online learning (or e-learning), technology-enhanced teaching and learning, teleconferencing, digital open books, online examination and interaction of virtual environments etc.

**Negative Effects of Digital Platforms on Inclusive Education:** At present scenario, the whole education sector is facing unprecedented challenges. The fear of Covid-19 outbreak has shut down schools and universities in India. It is still difficult to predict when schools, colleges and universities will reopen. There are few options other than to shift to digital platforms from the traditional face to face mode of classroom learning. Considering the current situation, most of the educators think that online education is the only option to meet the conventional mode of teaching. There is no doubt that online education has so many benefits. Maybe in the future, digital platform will take the place of the conventional face-to-face mode of teaching. Although digital education has many advantages, it does not provide equal opportunity to education for all. In the current pandemic situation there is no alternative of online education but it contrary to the concept of inclusive education.

Inclusive education is carried out in a common learning environment; that is, an educational setting where students from different backgrounds and with different abilities learn together in an inclusive environment.<sup>1</sup> A common learning environment is not a place where students with intellectual disabilities or other special needs learn in isolation from their peers. But at present situation is disproportionately affecting those within marginalized communities in India and across the globe. Thus, in a developing country like India, this online education does not reach all the students equally especially where 70% of the people in India live in villages and a large part of them are poor.<sup>4</sup> A small section of our society who are economically strong, who have all kinds of digital devices like Mobile Phones, Laptops, Computers, iPads etc., who have access to everything from electric to internet, only they are enjoying all the benefits of this digital mode of learning. But our large section of the society is still economically weak, who do not have digital devices, do not have parental support. Parents of such children have to struggle to provide them with

smart phone or laptop, which are beyond their reach even in normal time. As a result, they are far away from digital platform. Virtual learning has its benefits for the privileged but the unprivileged children get further marginalized.

Digital Platforms has indirectly created a kind of inequality in our education system which is directly affected the concept of inclusive education. The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed how rooted structural imbalances are between rural and urban, male and female, rich and poor, even in the digital world.<sup>5</sup> We all know that there are three components are very essential for online education, these are- electricity, internet connection, digital devices. Just as it is true that about 99.9% of households in India have electricity connection, it is also true that 16% of India's households received one to eight hours of electricity daily, 33% received 9-12 hours, and only 47% received more than 12% hours a day.<sup>6</sup> According to the 2017-'18 National Sample Survey report on education, only 24% of Indian households have an internet facility. While 66% of India's population lives in villages, only a little over 15% of rural households have access to internet services. For urban households, the proportion is 42%.<sup>7</sup> Computers or smart phone is very essential for online classes. While 24% Indians own a Smartphone, only 11% of households possess any type of computer, which could include desktop computers, laptops, notebooks, or tablets.<sup>8</sup> Among the poorest 20% households, only 2.7% have access to a computer and 8.9% to internet facilities. In case of the top 20% households, the proportions are 27.6% and 50.5%. Thus if the governments continue to study online without the necessary support, the existing inequalities in the virtual world will further widen the educational inequality among students.<sup>5</sup> All of these data indicate that the alternative mode of learning via virtual platform is not an option for economically weaker section.

The online mode of the teaching-learning process is often discriminatory to poor & marginalized students. The online education system has aggravated deep-set class and social differences, especially between private and public system. Most of the private institutions were well-equipped and digital platforms have been used there for a long time period. As a result, all these organizations easily adopted the online mode of learning during the lockdown period. But most of our government schools have no plans or infrastructure for online education. For that most of the teachers and students of our government schools are not accustomed to this online education system. Yet, 65% of all school-going children in 20

states, about 113 million, continue to get their education from government schools, according to District Information System for Education (DISE) and education ministry data.<sup>9</sup> Where as at the primary and secondary level only 29% of students receiving private education in the 6 to 14 age group.<sup>10</sup> Thus most of the students are being deprived of online education. This difference is contrary to the concept of inclusive education because we all know that inclusive education is about ensuring access to quality education for all students by effectively meeting their diverse needs in a way that is responsive, accepting, respectful and supportive.

In the current situation, many students, especially those whose families have lost income as a result of a lockdown-related job loss, will not be able to afford the online education. Due to the pandemic situation job and income loss along with economic insecurity among families are likely to also increase child labor, sexual exploitation, teen pregnancies etc. If the lockdown continues for much longer, there is a chance that India's drop-out rate, which is already among the world highest, might be increase further. Due to the socio-economic backwardness, a large section of our society is either staying outside of this digital platform or being deprived of access to online education. Despite initiatives from the Central and state governments, there has not been enough expenditure on improving the digital infrastructure for remote learning. In fact, in 2020-'21, the Ministry of Human Resource Development budget for digital e-learning was reduced to Rs 469 crore from Rs 604 crore in 2019-'20.<sup>5</sup>

## II. CONCLUSION:

Therefore, to make education inclusive in the phase of covid-19 crisis, a process centric engagement has to be evolved to address the issues of the learning requirement of marginalized children living in a stratified society with rampant inequalities. Blended learning can be an important approach in this case. The government should announce an immediate relief package for the education of marginalized children at the school level. A specific inclusion policy to meet their educational needs must be the priority. The government should be creating a constructive plan on how to make online education more accessible for those students who came from marginalized section of the society. There is no doubt that if we try to take online education as the only way to move forward then inequity in education will

increase. I think this inequity in education sector will deeply effect on inclusive education in India.

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