



Pandemic Impact on School Education of Uttarakhand

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Abstract

The lockdown of schools in Uttarakhand to confront the effects of COVID-19 caused an enormous impact at both societal and educational levels. Schools and families had to react rapidly to a new teaching and learning scenario without the benefit of previous planning or government guidelines. In this context, some schools were better able to adapt to the new circumstances than others. Likewise, the structure and size of families' economic, social and cultural capital produced significant differences in the learning opportunities for children from different backgrounds. This article assesses the impact of the school lockdown on the learning gap between children from different social backgrounds in Uttarakhand. Based on 297 responses to an online survey administered in post lock down period to families with children aged between 6 and 20 years. , the' analysis shows that learning opportunities varied significantly. Middle-class families were able to maintain higher standards of education quality in a critical context, while children from socially disadvantaged families had few learning opportunities both in terms of time and learning experiences (schoolwork and maintenance of after-school activities). Results differed by type of school (public/private) where students were enrolled, family economic, social and cultural capital, and family living conditions. The study also highlight the importance of the role of the school in ensuring learning opportunities for children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and they discuss some policy implications of their findings.

Introduction

Reducing physical contact has been the most common strategy adopted by governments to reduce spread of COVID-19. It has led most countries around the world to close their schools for periods of time. The lockdown of schools in Uttarakhand, one day before the declaration of a complete lock down on 22 March 2020, has had an enormous impact at both societal and educational levels. Schools and families had to rapidly adjust to a new teaching and learning scenario without the benefit of previous planning or guidelines from the Education Department of the state. In this context, some schools were better able to adapt to the new circumstances than others. Likewise, the structure and size of families' *economic*,

*social and cultural capital*² (resources) produced significant differences in the learning opportunities for children from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has no precedent in terms of effects on the economy and social life, schools have previously experienced periods of closure. For example, large-scale outbreaks of other diseases, teacher strikes and natural disasters have already forced schools to stop their activity in the past. Researchers and international organisations have studied the effects of school closures on students' learning and found a measurable loss in the acquisition of basic skills, particularly for the most disadvantaged children. It is highly likely that the current pandemic will have a dramatic long-term impact on students' competencies and increase existing education inequalities. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, in-school learning had already been proven to be more effective than distance learning.

Furthermore, student outcomes resulting from online learning have been shown to be poorer, on average, than outcomes resulting from face-to-face instruction (Heppen et al. [2017](#)). Conditions for effective remote learning (good internet connection, and clear explanations, scaffolding and feedback from teachers) are not easy to accomplish. The combination of a digital gap with teacher inexperience in providing high-quality distance learning makes it difficult to improve students' learning opportunities (Kay et al. [2020](#)). Moreover, there is now a significant risk that vulnerable students have less access to quality teaching than their peers, widening the attainment gap due to the school lockdown (Coe et al. [2020](#); Kay et al. [2020](#)). If it has already been proven that students from low-income families experience more interruptions and disruptions of their instructional time under normal school conditions (Abadzi [2009](#); Alegre and Benito [2012](#)), then poor distance learning can be understood as a new obstacle to effective learning.

The previous studies consistently observed greater academic achievement among students whose parents are actively involved in the educational process. It has also found a clear relationship between engagement in the learning process and parental background in terms of social class and ethnicity (Oreopoulos et al. [2006](#)). Unequal parental capacities to help children with their homework and different uses of family time have been extensively documented (Meyer et al. [2017](#); Mora and Escardíbul [2018](#)). Therefore, family reactions to school lockdown are likely to produce significant differences in the learning opportunities for children from different types of social background (Burgess and Sievertsen [2020](#)).

Dehradun, the capital of Uttarakhand has reported an 11% drop-out rate in the state government schools. Champawat district has reported the highest drop-out rate from class IX-XII with 15.69%. Almora. The second drop-out rate is 14.72% for Udham Singh Nagar followed by Haridwar (14.59%), Uttarkashi (11.35%), Chamoli (11.33%), Pithoragarh (10.01%), Tehri (9.94%), Rudraprayag (8.83%), Nainital (8.79%), Bageshwar (8.41%) and Pauri (7.79%). It is the lowest with 5.38% for Dehradun.

This study reflects the availability of digital equipment's such as desktop, laptop and smartphone, continuity of internet, skills of teachers, willingness of students to learn from digital platform and conditions of supply of electricity, health and other family issues. This study also tried to understand socio economic impact on online classes and outcomes.

Study context, methods and data management

The study was conducted between April and Dec 2020 in selected 3 districts of Uttarakhand. The objective of study to understand the status of digital equipment's and internet network among the students from the 6 to 18 years in Uttarakhand. The study also evaluate the knowledge of preventative measures among the respondents against the COVID19. The

questionnaire was prepared in the google form to get respondents responses through online system.

The respondents were selected from the three districts (Dehradun, Haridwar and Pauri), keeping in mind the rural and urban, private and government schools as well as respondents socioeconomic status. The questionnaire was divided in the four sections such as demographic information, Status of IT facility and Knowledge on COVID 19.

The questionnaire and data were validated by investigators prior to the analysis and incomplete forms were removed from the survey. The Survey data was downloaded in excel sheet and explored in SPPSS-19 for analysis.

Study findings

Demographic information

A total of 297 responses were received, out of which there were 180 boys and 117 were girls (10-24 yrs.). These responders belonged to selected 3 districts of Uttarakhand viz., Dehradun (54%), Tehri (22%), Pauri (12%) and Haridwar (12%). At household level 66% were belonging to APL families while 34% were from BPL families. The 77% of responders were studying in school, 22% were in college while 3% were engaged in part time work. The study indicated that 10% of students were studying in below 8th standard, 23% of in High school, 39% of in intermediate and 38% were graduate and post graduate levels.

Across the state, many students have limited or no internet access and many students may not be able to afford computer, laptop or smart mobile phones in their homes, online teaching-learning may create a digital divide among students. The lockdown has hit the poor students very hard in India as most of them are unable to explore online learning according to various reports. Thus the online teaching-learning method during pandemic COVID-19 may enhance the gap between rich/poor and urban/rural. During the lockdown period majoring of students continuing their studies through online (73%) and rest of students doing their self-study because they were unable to participate in online classes. It is true that more than 2/3 students were engaged in online classes but they face numbers of challenges. The study indicated that 79% used smart phone during online while 21% used computers, laptops and tablets. The study also indicated that more than 95% students who participated in the study did not have any prior exposure for online classes.

Beside of poor network connection, majority of students did not have personal gadget to join the online classes. The study revealed that more than 60% students were doing their work on sharing basis or depends on their parent's gadgets. Many student also joined the online sessions in groups and they did not get opportunity to review or submit their assignments and tasks on regular basis. The quality, contents and delivery of online session varied from school to school. But it became true that private school teachers deliver more better and regular sessions in compare to public schools. Data reported that Majority of students also faced problems during lockdown viz., online class (20%), understanding of subjects(18.2%) fees (15%), and stationary (15%) and others (3%) etc. Majority of subjects (32%) needs support in English subjects, 18 % in science & math each, 9% in English, math & science and 4% in math & English.

Majority of parents were living in fear, stress, anxiety, depression and other mental traumas due to this pandemic. On the other hand one cannot deny that this pandemic outbreak has made us more attentive towards the hygiene and healthy habits. The study reported that this COVID 19 increases worries in 72% of responders. The most alarming situation during

lockdown was about Schools in 65.7%, Health issues of family members in 22.2% and about the uncertainties of COVID19 in 11.1% responders. Also, 76% responders become scared of increased death due to COVID19 as reported by the survey. Only 51.5% responders have access to counselling for COVID19. The livelihood of 37.4% responders were highly affected and 56.4% were moderately affected. The lockdown increases expenses in families of 52.5% responders and 16.2 % of families remain unaffected. 9% of responders forced to change residence or location due to lockdown. Out of 9%, 6% responders changed location due to fear of covid 19, 1% missed the job and 2% due to school closed. 90% of responder's family did not suffer from COVID19, 8% were quarantine and 1% remained in isolation due to change in location. The awareness of Covid 19 were spread in majority of subjects by Television (64.6%) , internet (22.2%), social health care worker (3%), family members (8%) & friends & others (2%).

Large number of responders were fully aware about the symptoms of Covid 19 as reported by responses. The awareness scale varies from 27% to 64% of responders. About 97% of responders were also aware that if someone tries to hide the symptoms of COVID19, then can spread even more.

The best method for prevention of spread as suggested by responders (64.6%) was social distancing. Also 49.5% responders had taken initiative for break the chain infection by stopping or reducing visiting each other and 18% by wearing mask at public places. Furthermore, fifty percent responders disclosed that community adopted one Strategy to reduce the cases of COVID 19 infection by inhibiting the entry of outsiders in the villages which proved effective in fighting COVID19.

Conclusion

The lockdown of schools in Uttarakhand to confront the effects of COVID-19 caused an enormous impact at both societal and educational levels. Schools and families had to react rapidly to a new teaching and learning scenario without the benefit of previous planning or government guidelines. Uttarakhand is not fully equipped to make education reach all corners of the state via digital platforms. The students who aren't privileged like the others will suffer due to the present choice of digital platforms. But schools, colleges, universities have been trying to come up with various solutions to resolve this problem. State should develop creative strategies to ensure that all children must have sustainable access to learning during pandemic COVID-19. The state policies must include various individuals from diverse backgrounds including remote regions, marginalised and minority groups for effective delivery of education. .

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