Constraints of Online Education: A Study among Tribal Higher Education Students of Tiruchirappalli District, Tamil Nadu

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World's most serious health issue, the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic affects billions of people worldwide and has a drastic effect on their lives. There was a sudden need for Bharatiya Higher Education to switch its entire work model to an online format and transfer the majority of classes. Throughout the academic year, most students in higher education attended lectures and classes online. The effectiveness of online teaching was widely discussed, particularly the cognitive ability of students and how they adapted to a new way of teaching This study aims to unravel the constraints of online education confronted by Tribal youth of Tiruchirappalli district, Tamil Nadu. After the outbreak of covid 19 education institutions promoted online education and it became a 'new normal. Tribal higher education students come from deprived conditions and face learning difficulties in normal classrooms due to various factors. The upended classrooms make their learning more problematic. The present quantitative study aims to find out the (i) Socio-demographic profile of the respondents (ii) find out the constraints of online education (iii) find out the issues and challenges faced by the respondents during online education (iv) provide suitable suggestions (based on the findings) to various stakeholders of the respondents. For the collection of data self-prepared interview schedule was used. The present qualitative study is conducted by thematic case study research design. The data is gathered from the tribal students who pursuing their higher education in the Tiruchirappalli district of Tamil Nadu.

Introduction

The 25 March 2020 lockdown in India led to the permanent closure of educational institutions all around the nation. The government and educational institutions acted swiftly, switching from offline to online modes of instruction. Online education is a method of instruction in which professors and students engage in teaching-learning activities using computers or smartphones while connecting online and avoiding physical educational institutions. The dangerous COVID-19 (Coronavirus disease 2019) has been spreading since March 2020, affecting people's daily routines all around the world. Almost every industry is impacted by this disease. One of the most disturbing sectors was the educational sector.

Although virtual learning and online education are valued on a global scale, they are still in their early stage in India. All higher education institutions are currently in the initial stages of using such contemporary technologies.

Giving everyone access to education as a fundamental need is frequently more difficult, particularly when it comes to online learning. Because they lack the "digital capital" to access online educational resources, the most vulnerable communities in the world now have unequal access to internet

technologies. As a result, ensuring that all children, especially those from tribal communities, have access to quality education has become a crucial issue for the "new normal" world.

Additionally, it's critical to provide education for all post-pandemic societies in which online learning can be preferable to on-site learning. Therefore, it is imperative for India to ensure that all underprivileged students, especially tribal students, receive all technical support with effective monitoring because national prosperity cannot be achieved without ensuring proper education for this large population. Without taking good care of society's marginalized groups, education for all cannot be guaranteed, and in this pandemic condition, it is crucial to consider how online distance learning should be implemented properly everywhere.

Though some study has been done on distant e-learning, a combination of distance education and e-learning that is illustrated by the use of the internet and web technology in the delivery of education and in such a way that online communication builds the bridge between the temporal or spatial restrictions, as a result of the realization of the importance of virtual education, particularly in the COVID-19 epidemic, some research has been done internationally. However, developing and undeveloped nations cannot guarantee that everyone has access to such online education; in fact, in many nations, minority groups and ethnic groups are denied such modern capabilities.

Review of Literature

According to **UNESCO (2006),** the majority of developing nations consider online learning as a reflective technique of teaching; as a result, there is a need for a significant number of qualified teachers who are experienced in managing this method of learning. Online education is made available through a variety of devices, including TV, computers, and mobile phones. It is also referred to by a variety of names and titles, including e-learning and online learning.

(Coman et al., 2020) found that E-learning also referred to as online education, is not a new idea in the realm of education. It was put in place before the Covid-19 epidemic. The term "online teaching" or "E-learning" can refer to a number of different things, but it can also simply refer to a method of delivering distance education using digital information and computer technologies, such as the internet, CDs, mobile phones, or even television. In other words, technology is employed to meet people's need to learn and develop.

(Alam,2020) Online learning has undoubtedly been one of the most effective strategies to teach and learn throughout the coronavirus epidemic to address the academic issue. In Bangladesh, it has primarily been based on tertiary education. It offers several benefits, such as ensuring that students stay on the proper path of learning even in difficult situations, enabling them to finish their course on time, giving them the confidence to take online assessments, and fostering strong relationships between students and teachers. On the contrary, the challenges of online classes are battling the proper adaption to virtual classrooms, faulty signals with a high internet cost, a lack of digital knowledge, and keeping in touch with people.

(Brooks et al., 2020) In addition to increasing worry and fear, the epidemic has also resulted in increased boredom and frustration. Lack of face-to-face interactions with peers, teachers, and friends,

as well as a lack of privacy at home and a financial loss for the family, can be perilous in this situation and have long-lasting repercussions on children and adolescents.

Seven fundamental factors, according to **(Huang et al. 2020)**, are crucial for optimising online learning, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. These include creating and maintaining internet infrastructure to prevent outages, utilizing user-friendly tools to help students understand information, providing dependable and diverse electronic resources, creating online communities for students to lessen feelings of isolation, utilizing effective teaching strategies like debates and experiential learning, providing information about policies adopted by universities and governments, and encouraging collaboration between students. These elements are essential for making certain that children can continue to learn well throughout these difficult times.

Research Method

Using a thematic case study research design, the current qualitative study was conducted. This method puts focus on finding, analysing, and interpreting patterns in qualitative data. This analysis allows the researcher to look at qualitative data in a particular way. It is frequently used to refer to a collection of texts, such as an interview or a collection of transcripts. The data is extensively scrutinized by the researcher to find reoccurring concepts, issues, or modes of expression.

Objectives

i)   To find out the Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents
ii) To ascertain the constraints of online education
iii) To understand the issues and challenges faced by the respondents during online education,
iv) To provide suitable suggestions (based on the findings)

Sampling and Data Collection

The sample for the study was chosen using the convenience sampling technique. Data was collection carried out from 30 tribal higher education students from the Malayali tribal community of Pachamalalai, Tiruchi. The interview schedule was the main strategy employed as a means of data collection. With indigenous students and their parents, a semi-structured, casual, open-ended interview was done. To get feedback from teachers, a survey was created and distributed via a Google form. The conclusions were supported by documents including reports, newspaper articles, and documentaries.

Data Analysis Technique

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method for analyzing qualitative data that entails finding, examining, and reporting recurring patterns. This approach is used to describe facts, but when choosing codes and developing themes, it also involves interpretation. Thematic analysis is unique in that it may be used for a wide range of research questions, designs, and sample sizes and can be employed within a wide range of theoretical and epistemological frameworks. Thematic analysis has been categorized by some academics as lying under the purview of ethnography (Aronson 1995).

Result and Discussion

Lack of essential facilities

Expect 2 of the families of tribals student had smartphones in their houses. However, 8 of the smartphones had outdated versions of Android and faced issues while attending online classes. Pachamalai is situated on the outskirts of Trichy and surrounded by hills, so they frequently faced network issues. They used to travel from their home to find a good network coverage area. All the students expressed data drain as a major concern, they need 300 MB to 400 MB of data to attend class because of that they are not able to attend one class completely or attend the class throughout the day. A newspaper article Stated that I was first recharging for Rs 249 and got 2 GB per day but I could only attend two classes with that." The student upgraded to a Rs 401 pack which provides 3GB per day but even that was not enough (Indian Express 2020). A scholarship management service called "Vidyasaarathi" conducted a poll in which 10,000 students between the ages of 12 and 28 from 400 Indian cities were questioned. According to the report, 57% of students said that having a bad internet connection was their main problem, while 31% had trouble focusing and 12% had trouble clarifying doubts during online learning.

Online Learning Dilemma.

Tribal students felt online learning was lonely and isolating, in the regular mode of education students were able to clarify their doubts instantly from the teachers or from fellow students. Tribal students also missed the social interaction they would normally receive in a traditional classroom setting. The majority of the tribal have no access to the technology and resources needed for online learning, such as a reliable computer, internet connection, and quiet study space. Online learning often requires a lot of self-discipline and time management skills, which can be challenging for tribal students because tribals are living in a more socialized world. Some of the students attended the class while they were in farming and cow rearing. Only because of appearing on the screen, we cannot ensure the involvement and participation of students. According to a survey by Vidyasaarathi sponsored by NSDL e-Governance, 57% of students said that having a bad internet connection was their primary problem, followed by 31% who said they had trouble concentrating and 12% who said they had trouble getting their questions answered when learning online. According to the survey, despite issues like smartphone screen size and unstable internet connection, 60% of students spend 1-4 hours per day on online learning, 31% spend 4-8 hours, and 8% spend 8-12 hours. This indicates an increasing acceptability of online learning among students and teachers.

Social economic problems

Socioeconomic problems have a significant impact on the ability of tribal students to access and succeed in higher education. Tribal higher education often faces significant economic challenges, including poverty and limited access to resources such as books, computers, and internet connectivity. These challenges can make it difficult for higher education students to access the resources they need to succeed in higher education. Many tribal higher education students come from low-income families and may struggle to afford the high cost of tuition, textbooks, and other college expenses. This can make it difficult for them to pursue higher education and may force them to take on a significant

amount of debt. The majority of tribal higher education students are low-income daily wage workers who are classified as being in the lowest social class. Their financial situation got considerably worse as a result of COVID-19 lockdowns. In order to help their families during the terrible times, tribal students were forced to work low-paying jobs. Due to this, they lose focus on their studies, which is a major contributing factor to their failure.

Parent's lackadaisical attitude toward higher education

'If we pay money, my son would get a job even after post-graduation.' Almost 80-85% of tribal parents made this statement. As a supplement to their family income, they send their children to remunerative employment income. Their poor economic condition prevents them from seeing the long-term benefits of educating their children. Due to this, tribal parents have a half-hearted attitude toward higher education. However other than economical problems they felt that the government intervention is mundane. After completing higher education only a few of them were placed in government jobs. Tribal parents always have a fascination with government jobs and they think government jobs are the ultimate. But the majority of them believed that it is unreachable to tribal students.

Suggestions.

- Improve internet connectivity. This can be done by establishing more internet access points, expanding broadband infrastructure, and providing affordable internet services to rural areas.
- Provide adequate support: Online learners in tribal areas may require additional support to succeed in their studies. This could include providing academic, technological, and emotional support services, as well as mentoring and tutoring programs.
- Mobile learning centers: Establish mobile learning centers in remote tribal areas to provide access to online education. These centers can be equipped with computers, internet connectivity, and other resources needed for online learning.
- Ensure access to technology: To participate in online education, Indigenous learners in tribal areas need access to technology such as computers, tablets, and smartphones. Efforts should be made to provide affordable access to these technologies to ensure that learners are not left behind

Conclusion

Online education during the times of COVID-19 in India has shown the potential to provide access to quality education for Indigenous communities across the country. With the help of modern technology and internet connectivity, online learning platforms can bridge the gap between remote tribal areas and mainstream educational institutions, providing new opportunities for Indigenous youth and adults to gain knowledge, skills, and academic qualifications.

However, several challenges need to be addressed to ensure the success of online education among tribals in India. These include issues such as limited internet access in some rural areas, lack of adequate funding, and the need to ensure that online programs are culturally relevant and responsive to the needs and aspirations of Indigenous learners.

Overall, the development of online education among tribals in India is a positive step towards promoting educational equity and social justice for Indigenous communities. By providing access to higher education, online learning platforms can help Indigenous students build a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities.

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