

Impact of COVID-19 on Education in Himachal Pradesh A Brief Analysis

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Abstract:- This research paper aims to analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. It provides a comprehensive overview of the changes and challenges faced by students, teachers, and educational institutions during the pandemic. The paper also examines the response of the government and educational stakeholders and discusses the potential long-term effects on the education system in Himachal Pradesh.

Keywords: Covid -19 , Mitigation, Online Education , Pandemic , Programmes.

Introduction: When Himachal Pradesh attained status of full Statehood, the literacy rate of the Pradesh was only 31.96% . As per 2011 census, it stands at 82.53 % . Male/Female literacy rate differs somewhat in the State: as against 89.53 % literacy rate for males, it is 75.93% for females. Highest Priority is being given to education in Himachal Pradesh. Up to December 2020, there are 932 Government High Schools, 1,869 Government Senior Secondary Schools and 139 Government Degree Colleges including 7 Sanskrit Colleges , 1 SCERT, 1 B.Ed. College and 1 Fine Art College, running in the State . In 2019 to 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound

impact on the education sector globally, leading to the closure of schools and universities to curb the spread of the virus. This disruption in educational activities has caused significant challenges for students, teachers, and educational institutions in Himachal Pradesh. This paper aims to provide insights into the impact of the pandemic on education in the state and its potential long-term consequences.

Objective of Study: (1). To analysis the impact of Covid -19 Pandemic on state Education System.
(2). To analysis the Himachal Government Response and Mitigation Measures towards Education system during Covid -19 Pandemic period.

Methodology: Data and information presented in the study are collected from various reports and articles published by national and international agencies on impact of COVID-19 pandemic. Information is also collected from various authentic websites Himachal Government Reports and media sources. Some journals are also referred relating to impact of COVID-19 on educational system are referred.

Impact of COVID-19 on Education in Himachal Pradesh:

Negative Impact on Education : Himachal Pradesh has also not remained untouched with this global pandemic. First of all, two cases namely Sarla Devi (63 years Old women) and Divesh Kumar (32 Years old man) had been identified as COVID -19 positive in district Kangra on 20 March 2020.

Himachal Education system has suffered a lot due to the outbreak of COVID-19. It has created many negative impact on education and some of them are as pointed below -:

1. Disrupted Academic Calendar:The closure of educational institutions disrupted the academic calendar, leading to the postponement of exams and delays in completing syllabi. Students faced challenges in adjusting to remote learning and the loss of face to-face interactions with teachers and peers.

2. Unequal Access to Online Learning:The shift to online education highlighted the digital divide in Himachal Pradesh, with many students lacking access to computers smartphones, or stable internet connections. This created disparities in learning opportunities and hindered the educational progress of marginalized communities.

3. Psychological and Emotional Impact: The pandemic and associated disruptions have had severe psychological and emotional effects on students and teachers. Isolation, stress, and uncertainty have led to increased mental health issues, which have adversely affected the overall well-being of individuals in the educational community.

4. Economic Implications: COVID-19 has also resulted in financial challenges for educational institutions and families. Private schools faced difficulties in fee collection, while many families struggled with reduced incomes and job losses, affecting their ability to afford education-related expenses.

5. Parents' Role: In urban area some educated parents are able to guide but some may not have the adequate level of education needed to teach children in the house.

6. Create Difference: This online teaching - learning method creates a big gap between rich vr poor and urban vr rural students.

Positive Impact on Education Syatem: Though the outbreak of COVID-19 has created many negative impact on education, educational institutions of Himachal Pradesh have accepted the challenge and trying their best to provide seamless support services to the students during the pandemic. Himachal education system got opportunity for transformation from traditional system to new era. The following points may be considered as the positive impact.

1. Develop the use of soft copy of learning material: In lockdown situation, students were not able to collect the hard copy of study materials hence most of the students used soft copy materials for reference .

2. Improvement in collaborative work: There is a new opportunity where collaborative teaching and learning can take on new forms.

3. Enhanced digital literacy: The pandemic has created a massive rise in teleconferencing, virtual meeting, webinars and e- conferencing opportunities.

4. Better time management: Students are able to manage their time more efficiently in online education during pandemics .

5. Rise in online meetings: The pandemic has created a massive rise in teleconferencing, virtual meetings, webinars and e- conferencing opportunities.

Government Response and Mitigation Measures

Due to Covid-19, the schools were closed for 10 months and the department has decided to provide online education to the students at their home so that their studies could not be suffered. For this Department of Higher Education, Himachal Pradesh has started programmes "Har Ghar Pathshala" wherein online free study materials are being provided to 2,84,885 students of different classes studying in Government Schools and also started the class on Doordarshan Shimla under " Himachal Doordarshan Gyanshala Program" on daily basis. The study material and notes are being made available to the students at their home through different sources. E-sambad mobile App has also been launched to resume the Sumit (limited) Sambad between parents and teachers during the year 2020-2021.The Himachal Pradesh government undertook several initiatives to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on education as under -:

NISHTHA - In Service Training at Elementary Level : Department of school Education and a National Mission to improve Learning outcomes at the Elementary Level through an Integrated Teachers Training Programme called NISHTHA. In 2019-20 MHRD had approved 40'381 teachers and state has trained 33,064 teachers. Remaining 8,982 Teachers will be trained online during 2020-21. NCERT has developed 18 training module under NISHTHA for Elementary Teachers.

Har Ghar Pathshala : The programme has been launched as " Har Ghar Pathshala" as an online mode of education. During COVID -19 Har Ghar Pathshala started as a home based teacher facilitated self study programme during lockdown period announced by the Government of

Himachal Pradesh, to engage students in meaningful learning activities for two hours on daily basis, for class 1st to 12th with the following objectives.

- To ensure students learning is not hampered due to closure of schools in pandemic.
- Boosting emotional well being, immunity and fitness of students.
- To ensure an inclusive learning environment for children with special needs.
- Teachers constructively use this time to do online self - paced training through "Teacher App" .

e-PTM : The e- PTM drive has been extremely successful, as over 7.05 lakh Students were reached over the course of 4 days by 48,000 teachers, with participation from 98% blocks in Himachal. On an aggregate, around 80% of the parents reported that they were finding the study material being prepared by the State, as part of Har Ghar Pathshala program, useful.

Pre - Primary Programme : Government of Himachal Pradesh has started Pre Primary classes in 3391 Primary Schools across the state in financial year 2018-19 in first phase. The programme was launched by Hon'ble Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh Sh. Jai Ram Thakur in the presence of Hon'ble Education Minister Sh. Suresh Bhardwaj and other dignitaries on 8th October, 2018 from Bagsiad, District Mandi Himachal Pradesh. The number of schools under pre-primary intervention has increased to 3,840 in 2020-2021. Due to COVID-19 breakdown, formal admissions could not be done in the early month of 2020, therefore Samagra Shiksha, Himachal Pradesh initiated online registration campaign for Nursery and KG classes from 25th July 2020 .

Teachers Training Programme : The teachers training programmes are used to equip in - service teachers with the latest technology/ teaching methods . Due to Covid-19 Pandemic, the state Council of Educational Research and Training Solan and Government College of Education Dharamshala Himachal Pradesh had organised online Training Programme in the month of October and November, 2020. 186 college and school Principals have been trained during the year 2020-2021.

Long-term Implications and Recommendations:

1. Hybrid Learning Approach: The pandemic has highlighted the importance of a hybrid learning approach that combines online and offline teaching methodologies. This approach can address accessibility issues and enhance the quality of education in Himachal Pradesh.

2. Infrastructure Development: Increasing investments in digital infrastructure, including internet connectivity and the provision of computers, is crucial to bridge the digital divide and ensure equitable access to education.

3. Strengthening Mental Health Support: Educational institutions must prioritize the mental health and well-being of students and teachers. Providing access to counseling services and emotional support should be integrated into the education system.

4. Policy Changes: Education policies should be revised to include contingency plans for future crises, ensuring seamless continuation of education during emergencies.

Conclusion: The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the education sector in Himachal Pradesh, leading to the closure of schools and colleges and the disruption of learning for students. The government has responded to this crisis by implementing various measures to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on education.

The government has taken steps to ensure the continuity of education through online classes and the use of digital platforms. Efforts have been made to provide access to online learning materials to students who do not have access to digital devices or the internet. Additionally, the government has collaborated with various organizations to launch educational television channels and radio programs to reach students in remote areas.

To address the learning loss caused by the pandemic, the government has planned to conduct remedial classes and bridge courses. The focus is on providing extra support to students who have struggled with online learning or have fallen behind in their studies. The government has also announced schemes to provide financial assistance and scholarships to students affected by the pandemic.

Furthermore, the government has prioritized the health and safety of students and teachers by implementing strict guidelines for the reopening of educational institutions. Measures such as social distancing, sanitization, and the mandatory use of masks have been put in place to minimize the risk of Covid-19 transmission.

However, despite these efforts, there are still challenges that need to be addressed. The digital divide remains a significant issue in Himachal Pradesh, with many students lacking access to digital devices and the internet. This hampers their ability to participate in online classes and access educational materials. The government must work towards bridging this gap and ensuring that every student has equal access to education.

In conclusion, the impact of Covid-19 on education in Himachal Pradesh has been significant, but the government has responded proactively to mitigate these effects. The measures taken to facilitate online learning, provide support to students, and ensure the health and safety of all are commendable. Moving forward, it is crucial for the government to continue working towards equitable access to education and addressing the challenges posed by the digital divide.

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