

Education beyond COVID-19 –The World Academic Coalition

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ABSTRACT

The recent outbreak of the contagious Coronavirus infection that is considered to be the greatest health threat after the Spanish flu pandemic in 1918 impacted the lives of people belonging to all sectors of society. Besides affecting the economy of all the countries it created a major disruption to the mental health of the general public irrespective of the part of the earth they belong to. The rate of spread of the infection was high and in many scenarios remained asymptomatic. This peculiar nature of this disease mandated the governments across the globe to ban the free functioning of public places. Schools, Colleges, Universities, Restaurants, etc. were ordered to remain closed. This was adopted by the governments as a measure to control the spread of the disease. The education sector also underwent a massive hit as a result of this pandemic. The world economic forum reported that more than 1.2 billion children belonging to 186 countries around the globe are not attending regular schools as the schools remain closed to control the spread rate of the disease. As per the statement of the World Health Organization (WHO), it is believed that this pandemic caused devastation to the lives of nearly 28,584,158 people across the world. The students, teachers, and parents suffered psychologically as they have not experienced a situation of this sort earlier. The decline in job opportunities as a consequence of the economic slowdown created panic in the minds of young graduates. The drastic shift from teaching in-person to leveraging the technological advancements to conduct classes contributed in many ways to affect the mental health of students, parents, and teachers. This was a challenge for the policymakers as well. This article is devoted to exploring the different psychological disturbances experienced by students, teachers, parents, and others as a consequence of this COVID-19 pandemic on the education system. A discussion of a few of the literature already in existence in this context is carried out and suggestions to tackle this novel crisis are present. Keeping ourselves mentally strong and calm is needed to increase our productivity. This article stresses the importance of that too. Also, case studies of the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the educational ecosystem of India and Ethiopia are presented.

Keywords

COVID-19, Pandemic, Digital Divide, Digital Learning, Anxiety, Panic.

Introduction

Corona Virus Disease of 2019 (COVID-19) is a severe Infectious acute respiratory syndrome that is believed to have its origin in Wuhan, China in December 2019 exhibited an unprecedented spread rate and is declared to be a global health emergency by the World Health Organization. This global health threat ruined the smooth functioning of all sectors of the economy. This contagious virus is given the common name of COVID-19. The other two viruses that were evidenced in the 21st century include Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2002 and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in 2012[1]. It is evident from history that

the COVID-19 pandemic is the most severe global health threat the world witnessed after the Spanish flu pandemic (H1N1 influenza, 1918).

The education sector is not the one that experienced less impact as an upshot of this pandemic. As a measure to control the infection rate through close contacts, many governments across the globe imposed lockdown. This led to the complete closure of various educational institutions in many parts of the world. It is estimated that around 825 million learners were affected as a result of the lack of normal functioning of schools, colleges, and universities. This situation created panic among the students, teachers, and the parents to such an extent that all of the above said categories of the community suffered mental illness in varying degrees. Despite the mental health factors, it served to impact society in many ways. The anxiety of food insecurity, loss of homes, the unpreparedness to the digital learning methods, problems related to child care are a few factors that are to be mentioned.[2]

Figure 1. Illustrates the devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the lives of learners of all ages

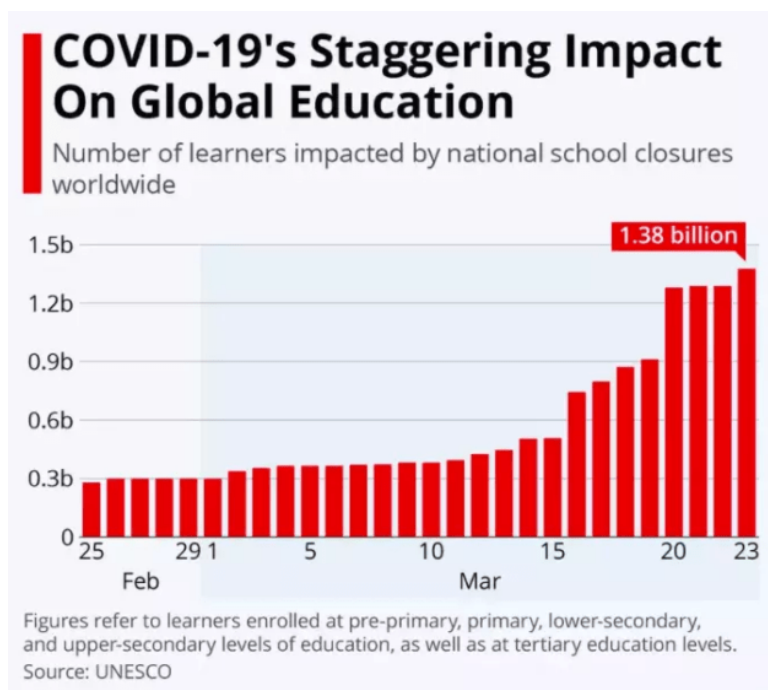


Figure 1. COVID-19 and its impact on education [3].

In many countries, the board exams, admissions to nursery schools, and the different entrance exams were delayed. The drastic shift to the online teaching-learning methods created a lot of confusion in the assessment process. Parents were unable to balance the educational needs of their children as they are already loaded with household chores and workloads in their working environment.

The absence of digital infrastructure to augment online learning and the prevalence of the digital divide added fuel to the education of the students. In many households with more than one child, it was difficult for the parents to provide their children with individual gadgets to cater to

the educational needs of their children. As a result of this pandemic in many sectors, people were working with the reduction in their regular pays, and this created anxiety among parents that they were not economically strong to invest in the education of their children. The fall in the employment rate as a consequence of the ongoing economic recession many undergraduate students restrained from enrolling in post-graduation programs and this could result in a reduction of the think tanks of the country in future [4].

Before the outbreak of this grave viral infection, attending schools was perceived to be the top policy to enhance one's skills. It was believed to increase the ability to adapt to society from early age. With these traditional thought processes, the parents lost their sound mood as the school closures would disrupt the behavior of their wards in many ways. The outbreak of this COVID-19 has impacted the revenues of a few nations. Many students from India and China opt for Universities in Australia, UK, New Zealand, Canada, and the USA. As a result of the travel restrictions and the fear of infection that is prevalent among the student community, many students abandoned their cross-border study plans and this resulted in these governments incurring a financial loss. In an effort to compensate for the closure of schools and colleges, many countries shifted to online teaching methods. This affected the mentality of the students, teachers, and parents especially in countries like India and other developing countries where only a lesser number of households had access to the Internet. This in turn made many students to lack attention in their studies. This is a new challenge for many. The unpreparedness of a handful of teachers to the digital teaching methodologies was a concern for the parents and the students. They doubted if the learning outcomes will not be met to the fullest potential. The universities and colleges are facing the challenge of retaining the students who got admission to various programs. The academic anxiety of the students makes them think that learning online will not be very effective and they tend to relinquish their admissions. [5]

Literature Review

In this section, let us have a look at the views given by other researchers and review writers with reference to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the psychology of different sectors of the population with regard to education.

The article written by Dr.P.K.Jena [6] elaborates on the catastrophe caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic on the education system of India. The author has presented the article by collecting the data from various national and international reports. The article highlights the devastation caused by the grave infectious disease to education with a particular focus on the experiences of teachers and students to adapt to the digital learning techniques. The author also addresses the level of stress undergone by the graduating students who had aspirations to study abroad and on their dreams to enter a job to support their family. The additional responsibility of the parents to assist their wards in their education disturbed the parents mentally. This aspect is also discussed by the author. Also, a mention of the different initiatives taken by the government with a motive not to affect the educational system is present in this article.

S.Pandita, Hari&S.Chib [7] studied the variations that were observed in the behavior and psychology of university students as a result of lockdown measures taken by the governments in different countries. The Stimulus Organism Response (SOR) model was chosen by the author to establish the theoretical foundation of their study. The authors also took into consideration the

data gathered via conducting Personal interviews and focus groups. Qualitative analysis was performed using Atlas. ti 7 software. Prevalence of Academic anxiety, fear, irrational fear of dirt, panic buying, e-learning are some of the psychological symptoms that were found to be present in the minds of the students.

Cathy and Farah [3] have talked about the changes that the education industry witnessed as an outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic. They have presented about the merits and demerits of online education. The authors have also conversed on the various digital learning platforms. They have highlighted the issue that in regions with unreliable Internet technology many students were unable to join the e-learning or the digital learning methods. This was observed in many countries and among the varying income levels of the people. In a nutshell, the students belonging to the underprivileged and lower-income groups were the worst hit and were deprived of education in this pandemic situation. This, in turn, made students and parents lose their sound minds.

Bhawna [5] throws her argument on the psychological and social disturbances created by the disastrous Corona virus pandemic on the education of the students belonging to many categories. By category, they mean nursery kids, school students, college and university students, students who were preparing for competitive exams, young graduates with aspirations to enter a job, and many more. It is said that the schools, Colleges and coaching institutes facilitate the up-gradation of skills. This was hampered by the pandemic outbreak. The assessment methodology in online teaching is a great deal of botheration for the teachers and they were subjected to increased levels of stress. The authors talked about the effect of the pandemic on the mental stability of the researchers.

Zamira& Linda [8] in their paper explored the anxieties that were prevalent among students, parents, and tutors. People were subjected to such a state due to social isolation and the online learning system. The digital divide added fuel to the scenario and many who had insufficient facilities namely poor Internet Connectivity and people who earned less that they were unable to buy gadgets to provide their wards for digital learning suffered huge mental illness. The qualitative study pattern was embraced by the researchers for their study. This was done by conducting interviews with parents and teachers.

Objectives of This Study

The devastation caused by the novel Corona virus Pandemic is considered by many to be deadlier than a nuclear attack. It affected the routine activities of folks across the globe in many ways. The lockdown measures and the quarantine procedures which the general public has never witnessed in at least the recent 50 years played a crucial role in causing turbulence to the general psychology of the people. The education sector is equally affected as a consequence of this global health threat. This article aims to highlight the mental disturbances of the students, parents, and teachers concerning education. A separate section is present in this article in which a discussion of various ways to adapt ourselves to the present scenario to learn our academic syllabus is presented. This will enable people to stay positive and maintain good mental health.

COVID-19 and Educational sector-A summary

Equipped with adequate facts that the educational ecosystem underwent significant disruption as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is time to study a little more about the

effectiveness of the digital learning methodologies for students belonging to different age sections. Apart from the several societal consequences witnessed as a result of school closures like nutritional deficiency and gender inequality the sudden shift from traditional in-person learning to digital learning impacted the stable moods of students, parents, and mentors. Spending more time watching the classes through computers and other smart devices is reported to have adverse effects on the behavior of young children.

Evidence of inadequate infrastructure to support online learning in countries like India is an area of concern. Many industries remained closed during the lockdown times of the Corona Virus Pandemic. This resulted in a reduction in the pay offered to their employees. Many people who were dependent on daily wages lost their livelihood and it was difficult for them to meet their basic needs. In such a crisis purchasing gadgets to supplement the online educational practices of their wards was unimaginable and ultimately the students and parents were subjected to emotional instability [3].

Major sources responsible for the psychological breakdown of people concerning education.

As has been presented, No one could deny the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic affected the education system to a larger extent. Students, parents, and teachers were subjected to disturbances in their mental health as a consequence of this deadly disease, and the unprecedented measures of lockdown and closing of all educational institutions. The solution was to switch drastically to online teaching techniques. Many teachers especially those who had inadequate/no training in using digital teaching techniques suffered emotional disturbances. The students paid less attention when learning online and were distracted as they lost the feeling of being present in the schools/colleges.

Little or no Internet Connectivity in many households particularly in developing countries affected the online education methods offered by schools and other higher educational institutes. People belonging to weaker sections of the economy found it difficult to purchase electronic gadgets to cater to the educational needs of their wards and this created anxiety among the children and the parents. These are some of the factors among the many that could be attributed to causing a worry in minds of the people as a consequence of this Corona virus pandemic concerning education.

COVID-19 and education of students with special needs.

One living with a disability is expected to be placed in the largest minority population. This is particularly true in countries with a low economic standard where lack of infrastructure is still evident. There is an estimate given jointly by the World Health Organization and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that children in the age groups of 0 to 14 years suffer disability in some aspects and it is reported that the variation in disability is 93 to 150 million. The 2015 Global Education Monitoring Report Team in their report put forth the analysis that a minimum of 1 in five students require special need in their education. This may include physical disability, learning disorders, hyperactive behavior, autism, vision impairment, and many more. In many countries the in-person teaching by the way of attending schools the teachers was able to effectively train students with such special needs. In some other scenarios, the parents sorted to partner with coaching institutes and private teachers to

coach their wards. But the onset of this Corona virus pandemic mandated social isolation and the parents of students with such special needs were subjected to a higher percentage of mental disruption.

Unavailability of the needed technology to cater to coach such students in many countries was one of the reasons for the parents, teachers, and students to bother. Additionally, the parents and caretakers of special needs children like those suffering from autism and other disabilities and who belong to the economically backward community were dependent on the free coaching given by the governments. But this pandemic hampered the lives of such children, parents and caretakers. The recent report shows the symptoms of anxiety, fear, and complaining attitude [9].The WHO reports show that around eighty percent of the people with disabilities belong to developing nations.

Figure 2 gives a clear picture of the disability status of the world population.



Figure 2. Disability and poverty [10]

Figure 3 is a depiction of the top 10 most prevalent disabilities among children in the age group of 0 and 14.

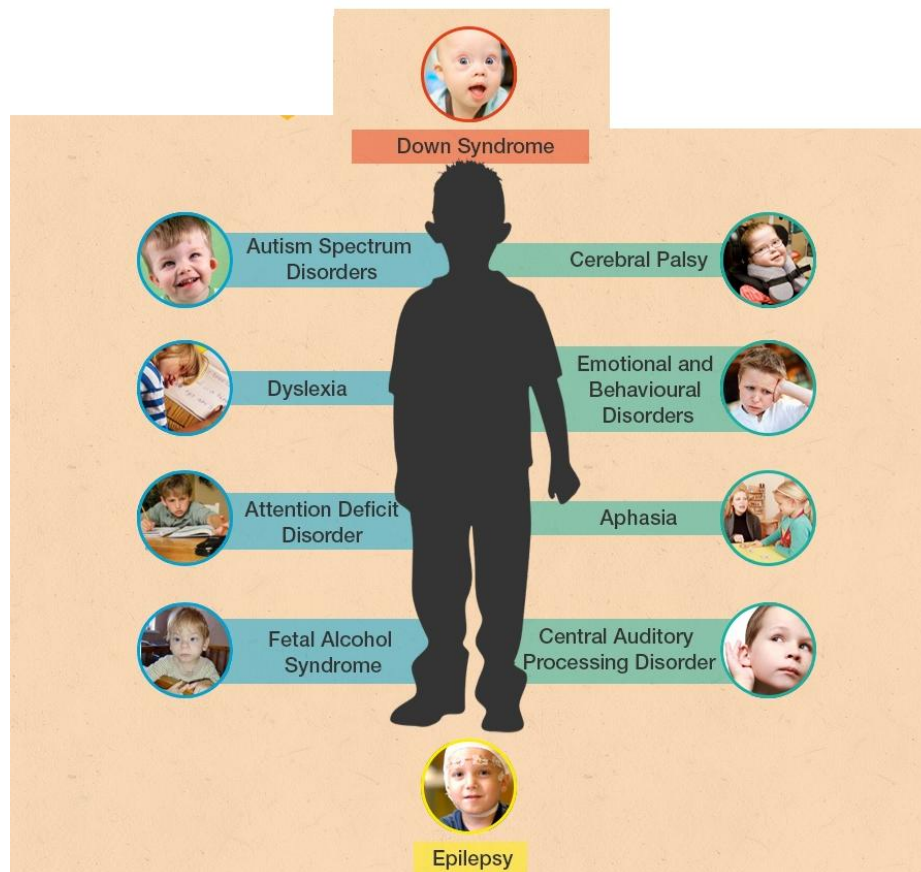


Figure 3. Top 10 most prevalent disabilities in children. [11]

Emotional disturbances observed among Teachers.

The most serious global health threat that was not evidenced in recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic had a variety of implications on the mental health of the teachers as well. The need to shift to online teaching methods made the teachers suffer from mental instability especially in many of the developing nations where the usual way of teaching is not predominantly online-based. One of the reasons that could be attributed to the stress experienced by the teachers is inadequate training on virtual tutoring.

Lack of physical activity, increase in workload, and reduction in pay of the teachers by many educational institutional managements are some of the other factors that could be cited as reasons for the teachers to lose their emotions. Teachers spent less time for their families due to the increase in workload and this greatly affected the sound mind of the teaching community across the globe. Teachers who teach for kids in primary schools were unable to have control over the students when teaching online as these young kids often get distracted and pay less attention to the teacher's content. Assessing the performance of the students was also a challenge for teachers. This proved to be a challenge for teachers who teach adolescents and university students. With the above-said facts, it is no wonder that the teachers who teach for all communities showed signs of psychological disturbances.

The figure below is presented to illustrate the level of stress experienced by teachers across the globe.

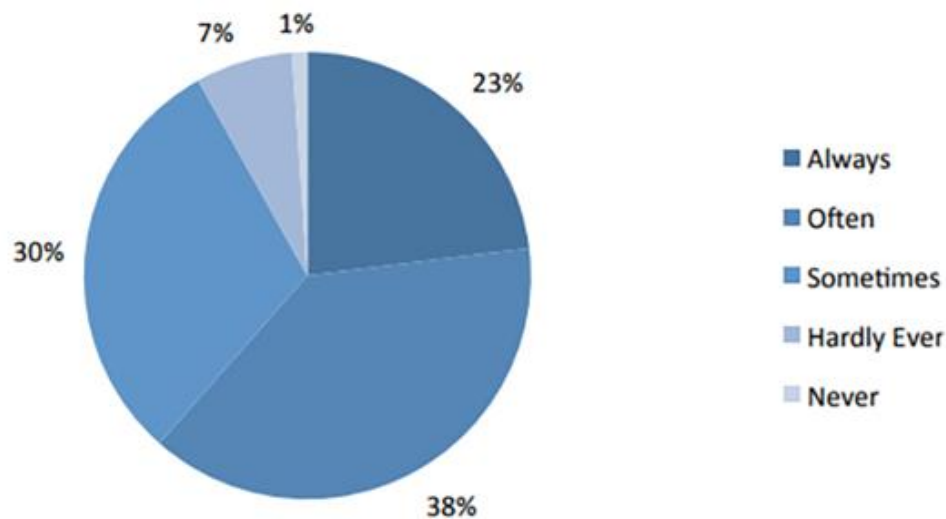


Figure 4. The stress level of the teachers [13]

The burden on the Parents due to online teaching.

It was a period of great challenge for the parents when schools and other higher education institutions remained closed as a measure to control the spread of the deadly COVID-19 infectious disease. The difficulties experienced by many parents were mainly due to the online learning methods adopted by the institutions. Every parent believes that education must be given higher priority concerning human wellbeing. Many students needed the guidance of their parents when learning online and this was a worry for the parents. Parents are made to allocate extra time to guide their children in addition to their regular duties and this increased the stress level experienced by the parents. The situation was worse in scenarios where both the parents are working. Many parents lacked the needed skills to guide their children and this is also considered to greatly impact the emotional control of the parents. The level of anxiety experienced by the parents belonging to the marginalized sector of the community could not be expressed by words. This was evident in countries like India where a major portion of the parent community lack literacy. In many households particularly in remote areas in India and other developing countries both the parents have to resort to work to meet both ends meet. This is particularly evidenced in the community that is dependent on daily wages. In such cases going to school supported the children nutritionally also. The disruption of these amenities created panic, anxiety, and fear among the parents [13].

A large number of teenagers got hooked to pornography. There are reports that approve some adolescents creating accounts on the different dating applications that are available. As these adolescents were attending their classes online they resorted to faking their ages to create accounts and were found to be chatting with strangers. They also exchanged incongruous photographs. It is not possible for the parents or the caretakers to be vigilant always, after all,

they are humans and this is a major source of botheration for the parents of the adolescents and undoubtedly the parents lost their mental stability [14].

Many studies reveal the prevalence of presumption among parents that possibilities are high among their children to resist going to school once the schools re-open. There is a prevalence of fear and anxiety among the parent community that their children would resist establishing rapport with their teachers and peers. Increased screen-time in pre-school is associated with worsening the level of attention of the children. Studies show that the probability of children developing difficulties to pay attention to studies and other activities is closely related to the amount of time they spent watching videos over electronic gadgets. The increased screen time which the children have to spend during the pandemic due to the practice of digital learning made the parents worry about the health of the children. They had psychological turbulence in the form of fear that their children may develop some behavioral abnormalities in the near future [15].

The following figure depicts the amount of time the students spent watching online classes as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

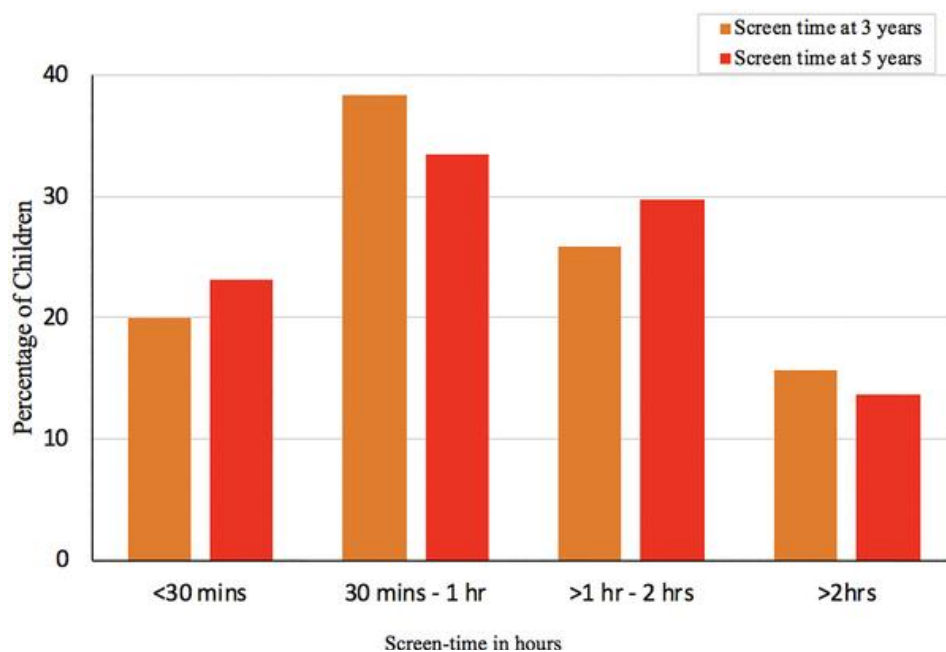


Figure 5. Amount of screen time reported by parents at three and five years [15]

Impact of COVID-19 on the education of the Youth.

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown measures resulted in delaying the dates of many of the competitive examinations and other examinations conducted for recruitment to jobs. This created anxiety and panic among the learners. People who fall under this category entered into depression and worried disproportionately about their future. Employment opportunities are another area that should not be left untouched. The students who finished their graduations had fears of job offer withdrawals by the corporate companies. The unemployment rate is estimated to have risen from 8.4 percent to twenty-three percent from mid-March, 2020 to early April 2020

[16]. Many people who were working abroad were forced to return to their native lands and this added to the anxiety of the young graduates as they may have to face a job shortage.

Many students abandoned their plans to study abroad due to travel restrictions and fear of infection. Some studies show that a majority of the students who wanted to enroll in various internship programs to enhance their skills also showed negligence and they lost their cool mood as they believed that this pandemic played a spoilsport to the process of upgrading their skills. Also, many people who had aspirations to undertake different business ventures were impacted by this pandemic. The economic recession that is prevalent in this crisis scenario lowered their confidence level and this is a loss for the development of the nation.

Coronavirus pandemic and the education of the marginalized community.

Social inequality has worsened *equal education* to all in many ways as a result of the adoption of online learning in this pandemic period. This created a plethora of mental health challenges for students belonging to the marginalized section of society. In many of the developing countries, the lack of infrastructure to facilitate online learning created a digital divide, and many students preferred to discontinue their studies. During the time of lockdown majority of the poor households had no source of income to meet their basic needs and purchasing electronic gadgets to support the education of their wards remained a dream. This affected the education of the students belonging to such category and they ultimately decided to bid adieu to studies and support their family by going as child laborers. Gender inequality also played a crucial role to contribute to the increase in school dropouts among female students [17].

The graph below is a representation of the number of adults expressed in percentage experiencing psychological distress with regard to their incurred income levels in relation to federal poverty level on the basis of race and ethnicity [18].

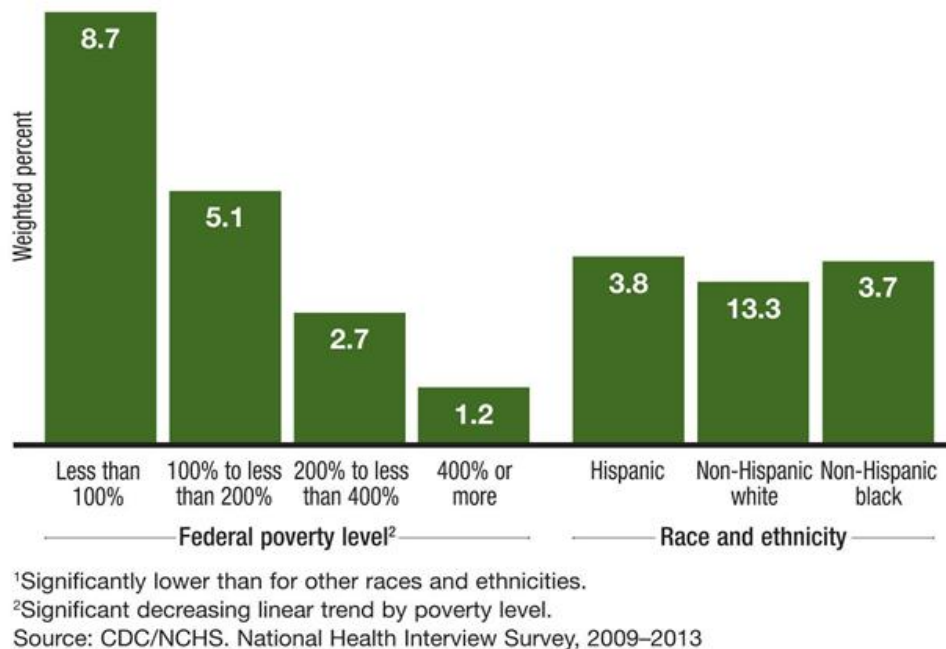


Figure 6. Psychological stress and incurred income levels [18]

Case studies

In this section let us look into case studies of the impact of the COVID-19 on the educational sectors of India and Ethiopia.

COVID-19 and its impact on the education of Indian students

An enormous number of lives of students belonging to different states, classes, castes, genders, and the regions are affected as a result of the closure of schools and other higher education institutions in India. Also, the rapid shift to online teaching methods was a major source of worry for many students in India. Nearly 1.5 million schools remained closed due to this unexpected global health threat.

The table below gives an idea of the difficulties faced by the Indians due to the Pandemic with regard to education due to the prevalence of the digital divide across the nation [19].

Table 1. India and the digital divide

Region of India	Year of Survey	Percentage of households with access to the Internet
Overall	2019	24
Rural areas	2019	4

Many students who were enrolled into colleges for their higher studies after their final year of schooling in 2020 are compelled to follow only digital learning methodologies which they were never used to. The digital divide as illustrated in the above table had a serious consequence on the effectiveness of this online teaching offered by many colleges. In many parts of the country, teachers were unable to provide online teaching to the fullest potential due to Internet Connectivity Problems in rural and remote areas and also due to the unavailability of Internet Connectivity in many households. The COVID-19 pandemic made devastation to the education of India where there are present a number of other factors that affect the education structure namely school dropouts, inadequate resources, gender disparity, and lack of infrastructure to name a few [6].

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education is likely to incur a loss in the income of the country in the future. An estimate by World Bank says that India will be affected by a monetary loss of around 32.3 lakh crore rupees in the future. Many children from the underprivileged sections of the Indian population are not able to buy gadgets to adapt to the digital education methodology and this fact plays a crucial role in preventing the students to continue their studies. This is an aspect of concern for the government and the parents. Many teachers were not trained to follow the online teaching procedure and this should not be neglected when the issue of education is talked about in this COVID-19 period. The Government should take the necessary steps to increase its spending on education in order to overcome the digital divide experienced by the students. Due to this pandemic crisis, we were able to witness many institutions resorting to reducing their faculty recruitment. This paved way for compromising the

quality of teaching. It is observed that nearly 50 percent of students who had aspirations to study abroad abandoned their plans and this is a great loss to the education of the youth as a consequence of the pandemic. The following chart depicts the previous statement.

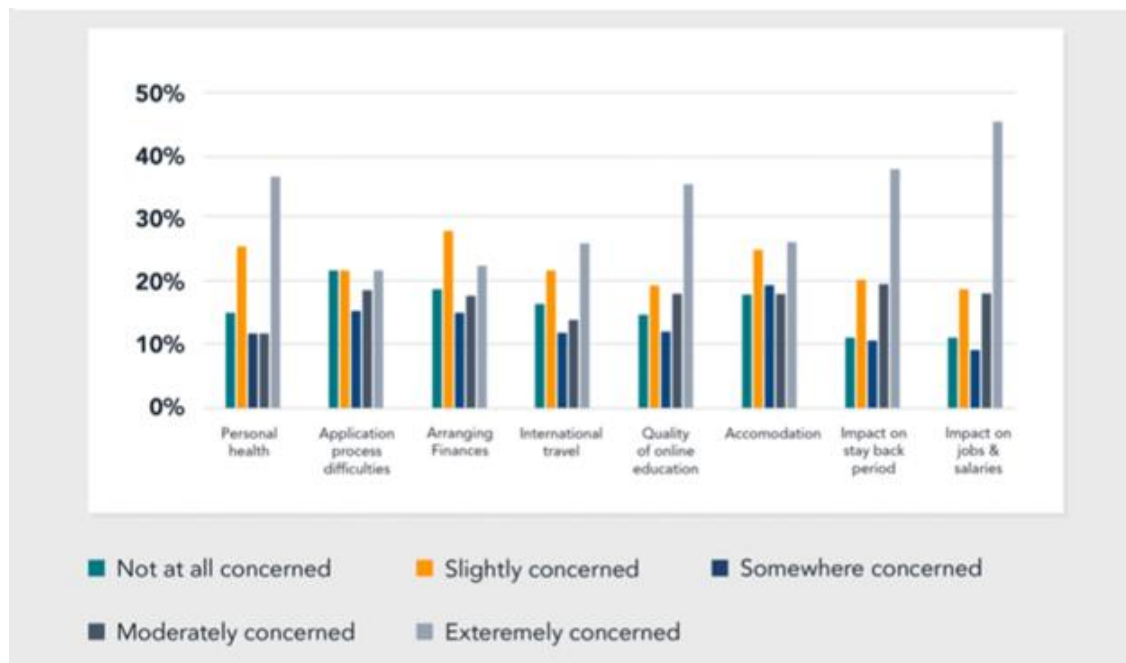


Figure 7. Illustration of the minds of the 2020 Indian aspirants to cancel their study abroad plans[20]

The 2017-18 National sample survey reported that although twenty-four percent of the Indian dwellings were equipped with Internet facility only a mere 8% of the dwellings had access to both a computer and Internet connectivity. This created increased levels of students to educational stress. They felt that it was difficult for them to submit their assignments and they sorted them to compare with their peers who belong to higher income groups. Reports of children and adolescents trying to end their lives as a result of their mental instability to handle the academic stress are available.

COVID-19 and its impact on the education of students in Ethiopia [21]

The education system of Ethiopia was ruined by the COVID-19 pandemic. The first Coronavirus case in Ethiopia was from a Japanese person who came to Ethiopia on March 13, 2020. The number of cases started to increase since then. As a measure to contain the virus spread the Ethiopian government ordered the shutdown of schools and other higher education institutes. The education sector of Ethiopia was the worst hit due to inadequate infrastructure. Ethiopia is the most populous nation among the sub-Saharan African Countries next to Nigeria. The total population of Ethiopia is estimated to stand at 110 million as per the 2020 survey. The number of students enrolled in schools is also the highest in Ethiopia. After the announcement of school closures, no alternative measures were adopted to cater to the educational demands of the Ethiopian learners. Mentors, students, supervisors, and others who are part of the education system remain idle and this created anxiety among the learners. An interruption in education will have

dire consequences on the future of the nation.

In the first two weeks, higher education institutions functioned by communicating through email. Later the universities were also closed and students had to leave for their homes. More than eighty percent of the university students were from rural areas, and access to the Internet was not possible and the education of these students was affected. The rural households were deprived of facilities like electricity, laptops, computers, smart phones, and the Internet. Hence the online learning was not possible with such an infrastructure. This caused the students to worry at greater levels and they feared that they would not fit in to this competitive world. The Ethiopian government delayed the national examinations indefinitely. This disruption in the learning process paved way for the parents to develop psychological disturbances. The government announced to follow the academic programs through radio. Many households did not have radio and this hampered the education to greater levels. The students had no support from the teachers. The parents who did not have adequate skills remained helpless to guide their children to learn their lessons. More than eighty percent of the people in Ethiopia live in rural areas. Lack of electricity, radio, and Internet in rural areas destroyed the education of the students.

The warning given to the states by many International agencies to figure out alternate ways to provide education via online teaching is a sigh of relief for the learners of Ethiopia. The learners belonging to the urban areas had access to the Internet and their educational needs were fulfilled to a substantial volume when compared with the rural dwellers. This resulted in exploiting the rural students to involve in various agricultural activities and many entered to work as daily laborers. It is time for the government, policymakers, educators, and others to take necessary measures to provide education to the public in a crisis like this. This will help the students and the parents to remain positive about their future and they will not develop any mental health disorders.

Solutions to stay away from academic anxiety

In this section, we will discuss some of the ways which when followed wisely can alleviate the emotional instability of the people in a catastrophic situation of the sort of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The global health crisis COVID-19 pandemic impacted the various sectors of the economy in many ways. The education sector is not an area that suffered the least. The rapid transition from the age-old practices of in-person learning by the way of attending schools to the online teaching-learning methodologies impacted the psychology of the learners, parents, and mentors. However one must understand that change is inevitable and we must equip ourselves to suit the new normal [4].

Parents can participate in various motivational webinars that will make them think positively and they can impart the ideas suggested in the webinars to make themselves emotionally stable. This will be helpful for them to balance their work and pay attention to the educational assistance of their wards. The adolescents and the youth can join several social groups via the available online platforms and can reduce their academic stress levels. It is the responsibility of everyone to stop complaining about the current difficulty and look at avenues to instill a sense of positivity in themselves. It is also the responsibility of the teachers to upgrade their skills if they lack adequate technologies for online teaching. The governments and legislators should take measures to draft policies to cater to the educational needs of the learners

belonging to the marginalized sections of the population. Devising new methodologies to cater to the educational demands of people with special needs is equally essential to cope with the new normal.

Conclusion

COVID-19 pandemic played a crucial role in affecting the livelihood of people belonging to all walks of life. The education sector is undoubtedly the worst hit due to this deadly disease-driven emergency. There is a strong belief by the populace that good education is vital for one's development both financially and intellectually. The discussions that were carried out in this article clearly demonstrated the mental ill-health of the people as regards educational disturbances that were the result of the pandemic. Many felt that their time was wasted and they developed signs of pessimism and low self-esteem. The online learning methodologies were not realized to be exploited to their fullest potential especially in the developing nations due to the presence of the digital divide that is in existence in the present scenario. One positive aspect of this pandemic outbreak is that disseminating the knowledge across borders and across societies gained the center stage. In such a scenario every individual must be optimistic about the future and they should inculcate a positive thought process in themselves so as to adapt to the new normal. The general masses should extend their cooperation to the governments to tune their mental make-up to the new learning practices rather than developing an attitude to keep complaining of the things they do not have. One should have their eyes open to look at the positive aspects of the new learning methodologies and develop a sense of positivity in themselves that they are not deprived of the educational needs. Last but not least it is in the hands of everyone to adapt to the new normal and stay mentally stable.

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