

Chapter 2

A Study of the Impact of COVID-19 on Education and Teachers' Resilience

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated teachers' perception of the impact of COVID-19 on education. Their perceptions were analyzed in three aspects: barrier to access, opportunities, and learning outcomes. This study employed a descriptive design with a mixed approach. A self-developed survey questionnaire was used to elicit the responses of 119 school teachers from eight schools in Tamil Nadu, India. This study's findings revealed that the pandemic had impacted adversely the access, opportunities, and outcomes of education. The independent variables like age, years of experience, and subject taught did not influence perceptions of teachers. The findings show no correlation among perception of barrier to access, opportunities, and outcomes. Though more than half of the teachers didn't agree on the effectiveness of online education, they could show the right attitude toward using technology to teach online. The current crisis, COVID-19, highlighted the role of the internet and technology in education.

INTRODUCTION

Today, the world is taking a fresh start by leaving behind the tragedy of COVID-19 and moving forward to the era of technology and trade. When looking behind, we see that the increased urbanization, growing population and ample business and social activities between the countries and geographical areas had played a very important role in the spread of COVID-19 disease (Owen Jarus, 2020). Right

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now, no matter the world has progressed so much but still some anomalies in human civilization exist. Fortunately, as time is progressing, this COVID-19 pandemic has started becoming a part of the history books (Walsh, 2020).

Severe acute respiratory syndrome, also known as COVID-19, is a contagious respiratory disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which was first identified in a seafood market in Wuhan in late December 2019 (Huang, 2020). The disease is airborne and mainly spreads through physical proximity with infected people. Broadly speaking, there are two modes of transmission— direct and indirect. The direct mode involves droplet and air transmission, while indirect transmission may occur via contaminated surfaces (Karia, 2020). Due to its highly contagious nature, the COVID-19 virus swept the globe in the matter of weeks. Between December 2019 and October 2020, more than 45 million cases of COVID-19 were reported, including over a million deaths. (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2020). By March 2020, the epidemic was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization. It prompted countries around the world to adopt a sequence of emergency response systems (Zhang et al., 2020). Authorities worldwide issued stay-at-home orders, imposing prolonged periods of lockdown. In many parts of the world, this meant a temporary shutdown of educational institutions. These nationwide closures impacted millions of students and their families, particularly those from underprivileged communities (UNESCO, 2020). Some of the educational institutions that faced closure progressively re-opened and started operating under online learning models in order to continue the academic progress of students, while simultaneously observing measures to reduce the impact of the current health crisis. Educational institutions have been compelled to make an immediate transition to remote methods of learning that rely heavily on technology. The immediate transition to online learning has not made it possible for many to be adequately prepared for the challenges ahead (Hodges et al., 2020). This migration to remote learning had to be implemented as quickly as possible, and for many learning institutions, it happened several months into the academic year, leaving both staff and students with little time to plan, adjust and adapt.

In response to COVID-19, a lot of countries were faced with pressure to contain the spread of this highly contagious disease. To many educational institutions, this meant either partial or complete closure. Others transitioned to technology-based distance learning. A systematic review was conducted by Viner et al. (2020) examines existing knowledge to identify the effects of school closures and other social distancing measures during outbreaks on infection rates and virus transmission. It suggested that school closures played a relatively small role in the control of disease transmission, and that the insignificant benefits such closures bring to transmission reduction could be easily outweighed by their profound negative economic and social consequences (Viner et al., 2020). There is no strong evidence to support the effectiveness of full closure in controlling the pandemic. If anything, there are significant economic downfalls to such a response, not to mention the academic delay incurred by students. That is why a lot of academic institutions opted for the less drastic measure of transitioning to online distance education (ODE).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, India's poor educational records have been exacerbated, with schools being closed since March 2020. Schools in India have been closed for the largest number of weeks, the longest duration that schools have been closed worldwide. (UNESCO), As a result of this, 1.5 million schools were shut and 247 million primary and secondary students have been out of school since the lockdown of March 2020 (UNICEF). Since most primary school students have not gone to school in more than a year, schools have been trying to replace in-person classes with online learning. Teachers and schools have been trying various ways to reach out to their students, using television, radio, WhatsApp groups, group tutoring, Zoom and Skype.

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