

EDUCATIONAL DISRUPTION OF TTAADC LEARNERS DURING PANDEMIC

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Abstract:

Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) was set up by the Indian Government through parliamentary procedure and came to effect on 1st April, 1985 as an independent council with the vision of uplifting the tribal areas and the tribal people as a whole. Despite numbers of governmental initiatives significant land area under TTAADC remains backward or under-developed till this date. One major factor to blame is remoteness. Consequently most of the schools under ADC lie in the remote villages of Tripura because of which learners are deprived of easy access to education as compared to their urban peers. During the Covid-19 pandemic their education was adversely affected and disrupted as no effective learning aid could be provided to them due to the circumstances arose. The private and urban schools of the state quickly adapted to the need of the hour transition of online classes. The authority could not make an initiative of online classes for these rural ADC (Autonomous District Council) learners as most of them lacked digital infrastructure like mobile phones and internet. The socio-economic status of the parents being low, the school goers were worst affected. Most of the families fall below poverty line and survive on daily wages which is why learners belonging to such families stay deprived of mobile phones, laptops, desktops to name a few. As the parents are mostly uneducated they could not provide any assistance in learning to their children nor could they motivate them to study at home.

Keywords: TTAADC, Covid-19, Pandemic, Internet, Socio-economy.

Introduction:

The world became handicapped overnight with the deadly respiratory Corona virus which occurred at the end of the year 2019. Consequently lockdown was enforced across the globe. In India lockdown was announced by the Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi from 24th March 2020 nationwide. With the outbreak of corona virus, the anxiety and fear wreaked havoc in the lives of everyone, especially among students due to the shift towards online education system. In our country many schools, colleges and universities immediately veered the efforts to online classes, most of them being private and governmental institutions of urban areas. But scenario was totally different for the schools in rural India. Here the students went detached from their learning as they were devoid of the basic resources or prerequisites for online classes. In Tripura, a state with nearly 85% rural population, the number of the learners to suffer was massive. Further, as TTAADC covers 68% of total state area, predominantly comprising hill ranges inhabited by indigenous people, the learners under the same were worst affected. In fact, the access to basic education technology deferred to reach out to the poor children under TTAADC schools.

We all have experienced the online teaching and learning education either by imparting as a teacher or imbibing as a learner. We are fully aware that it cannot alter the immersive experience what the children receive in school. The all round viz physical, mental, social and moral developments of a child truly takes place only in the environment of school premise, the de facto educational environment.

About TTAADC:

The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council Act 1979 was passed by the Indian Parliament after a series of democratic movements launched by the indigenous people of Tripura, under the provision of the 6th schedule of the Indian constitution. But the act commenced from 18 January 1982 followed by the upgradation under the provision of the 6th schedule to the Indian Constitution with effect from 1 April 1985 by the 49th amendment to the constitution of India.

Eyeing for socio-economic development of the indigenous people met a step forward when an autonomous council was set up constitutionally by the Government of India in 1985. This act was the cine qua non to pacify the indigenous community from insecurity, agitation, democratic revolution against refugee influx from Bangladesh which ended up in a horrific civil war in 1980. The communal scar still remains unforgotten to many who had

witnessed the same. Setting up the autonomous district council was based on the objectives to empower the indigenous people of governing themselves, bringing all faceted developments with the protection and preservation of their own culture, customs, and traditions.

TTAACD Schools:

As per the provision of 6th schedule of the Indian constitution, 1374 government junior basic schools (primary) were taken over by the TTAADC during 1986-2002. In the later years from 2003 to 2008, 444 junior basic schools (primary) were upgraded to senior basic schools (upper primary) which were handed over to the state government as the council is empowered only to look after Primary Schools.

Under the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan 687 additional primary schools were established under ADC in two phases: 2003-2004 and 2008-2009. During the second phase especially in 2009 numbers of primary schools, few English medium and Residential schools were set up and became functional. At present, including English medium and Residential schools, TTAADC has roughly 1633 schools in total, mostly Junior Basic, few Senior Basics and one Higher Secondary school as enlisted.

School Location and Attendance:

We saw a significant disruption to education due to school closures across the globe. As per World Economic Forum, more than 1.2 billion students across 186 countries were schoolless by the end of April, 2020. UNICEF surveyed that in India alone 1.5 million schools faced closure in 2020 which impacted 247 million learners studying in elementary and secondary schools. The same survey has exposed that only one out of four Indian students possesses the access to the internet connectivity and digital gadgets and the ratio varies largely due to urban-rural and gender divide plays a significant role. In this regard TTAADC learners were hit hard.

Majority of the schools under TTAADC are located in the remote areas where the roads are not motorable. Not even carpeted with bricks, Teachers and students face the greater challenge in reaching the school during the Monsoon. Being sparsely and remotely situated, guardians cannot accompany the students to the school premise unlike their urban counterparts. This poses a threat for a minor student being hit and run over by a vehicle in the highways.

Poor attendance of students has been observed in many schools and the scale often plummets down to single student in a class room. Majority of the students under TTAADC belong to BPL (Below Poverty Line) family. Where a family lives on daily wages, provision for good educational environment always remains a far cry. In such environment, asking a helping hand for earning bread rather than attending school is a common practice. This is how a student's life succumbs to the need of a hunger struck family.

Government Initiative:

On 11 January, 2020, a group of people suffering from respiratory sickness in Jaipur, Rajasthan, were confirmed by WHO (World Health Organization) and the news was all over the media countrywide. Although ominous, Covid 19 had showed up in India for the first time. Immediately the race was on to tackle down the pandemic spread. Indian Government took the measures viz. screening at airports, enforcing social distancing, mandating the use of facial mask, launching android app Aarogya Setu aiming contact tracing and containing the spread, putting travel restrictions, closing down schools, offices, different workplaces, public places, ordering curfews and lastly, enforcing the lockdown nationwide.

Covid 19 has taken a massive toll by declining the Economy as well as Human Development Index across the globe. In line with the global trend India registered a drop in HDI for two consecutive years which is a heart aching record in three decades. Other than agriculture all other economic sectors were badly hit and exposed. GDP plummeted to 7.3% low in FY 2020-21. Unemployment surged, economic growth fell to the knees, and so was Education.

Amidst lockdown Ministry of Education initiated several significant digital drives not only to tackle down year loss of students but also to ensure qualitative and equitable education during and post Covid era. During FY 2020-21, a budget of Rs. 5784.05 Crore was allotted under Samagra Shiksha drive for Department of School Education and Literacy.

Among 7 guidelines issued, PRAGYATA (Plan, Review, Arrange, Guide, Yak – talk, Assign, Track and Appreciate) on Digital Education was on top, followed by Learning Enhancement Guidelines for Continuous Learning, Guidelines for Children of Migrant Labourers, Guidelines for School Re-opening on Learning with Social Distancing, Continuous Learning Plan (CLP), NCTE (National Council for Teacher Education) guidelines for TEIs (Teacher Education Institutes) and the Guidelines for Out of School Children issued on 7th January 2021. Then came NISHTHA (National Initiative for School Teachers Holistic Advancement) programme for boosting up teachers' capacity and morality. It was conducted by NCERT (National Council for Educational Research and Training) on DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge SHAring). DIKSHA under PM e-Vidya initiative had significant role play in ensuring quality e-content availability to students and teachers in a single platform – aptly called One Nation One Digital Platform.

Here it is pertinent to mention that all the initiatives and guidelines were to work in sync with NEP (National Education Policy) 2020 which was announced by the Ministry of Education on 29th July, 2020 amidst Covid-19 lockdown. NEP 2020 has set country's ambition to increase GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) – a comparative measurement of education coverage with respect to population, to 100% by 2030. Hence, from top to bottom, from Ministry to teachers, guardians, a mammoth task has been shouldered upon all.

Tripura Government's initiatives have been multi-pronged based on the directives of RTE (Right To Education) Act, 2009 where central, state and local bodies carry out specific responsibilities and aligned with Samagra Shiksha scheme as per NEP 2020 recommendations.

Under Samagra Shiksha, 'NutanDisha' - a comprehensive learning enhancement programme was undertaken by the state Government in the month of February 2019, months before Covid- 19 knocked at our door. This was to ensure quality education for students in extensive scale at Elementary level. 'NutanDisha' had a clear roadmap which would start, at first place, with selecting teachers based on pedagogical merit, academic qualification, communication skills etc. The group of the teachers were to act as Academic Leaders under the monitoring of SCERT (State Council for Educational Research and Training) which was titled as 'Entrustment of Academic Leaders'.

With the outbreak of Covid- 19 and lockdown, the scheme had to adopt unprecedented measurements, taken never before. Emphasis was immediately on digital platform. Cable TV channels, Departmental YouTube Channels, 'VandeTripura' - dedicated departmental channel, SCERT's Digital Textbooks, Workbooks and Neighbourhood classes are to name a few. Many institutions and students used Google Meet and WhatsApp because of user friendliness and easy availability. Though these methods seem to be easily workable, these are far from perfection due to limitations, as every technology possesses. Rather, immense pressure was building up on students and guardians as well in adapting to new system and maintaining the learning flow at the same time.

So as to cope up with psychological pressure Tripura Government launched 'Ektu Khelo, Ektu Padho' on WhatsApp or SMS, mainly tasking students with extracurricular activities instead of studies alone. The programme started on 25th June 2020 and was aimed at students to work as respite from being home locked and depressed.

To save the students from losing a year during lockdown 'Bochor Bachao Abhiyan' was carried out by the Tripura Government where it entailed altering the school calendar, scope for remedial classes and re-examination within 2 months for weaker students. HM (Head Master) or In charges were given the onus for evaluation from Class – I to Class VIII with Class- V and VIII, to be scrutinized strictly to the extent of detention, if needed.

In order to digitalize the Teaching-Learning system through proper reviewing management under NISHTHA the Education department implemented three dimensional approach namely –

- EmpowerU Shiksha Darpan – This android app enabled the authority for tracking the learning levels and assessing the progress of students periodically. Teachers' training, transfer or leave cases, lesson plans, duty charts, feedbacks etc were also managed by this app.
- Sadhana & Prerana – This was a machinery to identify the students who lagged behind most and improvise their learning. Below average students were observed and categorized in two classes as titled above. A student having no knowledge as per the class he/she is in would fall in 'Sadhana' category. 'Prerana' would be labelled to those who do possess little knowledge but stand below average. Under the HM and teachers' close

mentorship the scheme was aimed to uplift students from 'Sadhana' to 'Prerana' to the better category named the 'Class Appropriate'.

- KRP (Key Resource Persons) and Academic Coordinators – Appointed prior to Covid - 19 as per NutanDisha directives they had to brave the pandemic wave ahead. They played the crucial role by providing training to HMs and teachers, monitoring both students and teachers pro rata, reporting to DEOs (District Education Officers) and communicating between offices tirelessly.

Conclusion:

It's not for nothing that the State Government, in line with the Central Government, launched numerous drives and schemes to measure and to address the Covid- 19 situation. But the outcome remains to be partial especially in rural areas. In fact the problem lies away from where meets the eye. A survey conducted by the Education Department exposed the grim scenario in TTAADC areas revealing that more than 65% learners were deprived of the digital platform access.

The concept of Neighbouring Classes was perceived for rural India and was implemented first on 20th August, 2020 in Tripura. To facilitate the classes several directives were set up in accordance with Covid- 19 guidelines. Grouping students from the same locality in less than 5 in numbers and conducting in an open space maintaining social distances and facial masks, limiting weekly class hours below 10 hours at primary level, inculcating the habits of regular sanitizing and washing hands in students were the safety measures taken up by the Education department.

Unfortunately, due to rapid increase in Covid cases during September, 2020 the programme was suspended. Later on SMC (School Management Committee), a local body under the auspices of RTE, was entrusted with the decision making process on reopening the Neighbouring Classes.

PRAGYATA guidelines have classified Indian families in 6 types based on the accessibility of digital infrastructure. Most families under TTAADC fall into the categories at bottom either having no digital device or possessing Radio set or a basic mobile phone with FM, at best. Hence offline modes are the only way pertaining to education in such area. But being non-interactive and not visual in nature, these hardly appeal to the learners. To make the media more catchy and acceptable still poses the biggest challenge to the policymakers.

Although schools are open and running in full swing now with seemingly situation normalised we should not forget that Covid- 19 pandemic was just a beginning. As top scientists warned, new variants of corona virus could easily replace older one as more infectious and threatening.

But at the same time we have experienced enough and the baselines are prepared. Our education system has suffered but came up with new scopes and reachability. Deeper analysis on data and implementation might hold the key in sustaining the next pandemic.

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