

An Overview Of Punjab, Haryana And Himachal Pradesh Government's Interventions In Education Sector During Covid 19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The impact of pandemic COVID-19 is being felt in every sector around the world. The rules of engagements are now changed as countries are imposing blanket lockdowns nationwide. India is no exception. Thus schools and colleges are now forced to keep their shutters down as well. The already crumbling education system is now further forced to disintegrate. The technological divide among the urban and the rural, the rich and the poor is now more apparent as schools have adopted online teaching methods via various online platforms. The access to a smartphone varies across the nation and so does the basic literacy of how to operate them. Lack of internet penetration in India is another dilemma since only 50% of the households have an active internet connection. This has forced the current government to reinvent strategies to provide education via mass channels. DIKSHA platform is one such example. It's an online platform primarily for school education. It offers teachers, parents and students engaging learning material relevant to the prescribed school curriculum but requires an active internet connection. To bridge this gap, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting introduced SWAYAM PRABHA which has 32

DTH TV channels transmitting educational contents on 24/7 basis across the country. These platforms are absolutely free to use. But platforms like these are just a pedestal. Since education is a concurrent subject, states also bear the responsibility of ratifying their educational strategies. Many states are walking down the path of the central government by establishing their own platforms. The government of Nagaland was recently lauded for their education initiative. TV and Radio education was offered through Doordarshan Kendra Kohima and All India Radi

Kohima while in the second phase the programme expanded to digital content distribution through a dedicated Youtube Channel. This paper highlights some measures taken by

Governments of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh in the field of online education. Also challenges faced by these governments are highlighted.

KEYWORDS : *Digital, Online, Pandemic, Government, Education*

1. INTRODUCTION

On 31 December 2019, the Wuhan City Health Committee (2019) reported a cluster of 27 pneumonia cases stemming from an unknown etiology, with a preliminary source linking this to the now closed Wuhan Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market. By 20 January 2020, there were 295 laboratory confirmed cases, with 291 from Wuhan. Since then a substantial growth across the globe was observed. WHO announced COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic on 11 March 2020 as cases crossed 1.5 million worldwide. By September 2020, this figure reached a gigantic 25 million. This deadly and infectious pandemic Covid-19 unstabilized the global economy. This unprecedented crisis has shaken up most sectors. As economies plunge into recession, most sectors saw miniscule interest given to them by their respective governments. One such sector is education. This tragedy has shaken up the education sector, perhaps the most, and likely

resonates across the education sector globally as well. The initial blanket lockdown imposed countrywide forced many schools and colleges to remain closed. At an early stage, it was thought to be a temporary measure. But subsequent lockdowns have now instilled the fear of

losing semesters and disturbing career timelines in the future. Schools, colleges and universities have now discarded an era old practice of in-person teaching. With the advent of online learning, pedagogical changes are now taking place worldwide. This trend is evident in India as well. But Indian educational system is marred by structural issues from the beginning. With just 3% of GDP being spent on education, the technological divide between the rich and the poor is humongous. Online learning is defined as “learning experiences in synchronous or asynchronous environments using different devices (e.g., mobile phones, laptops, etc.) with internet access.

The dilemma here is that smartphone penetration in India is just around 36% meaning a large proportion of individuals lack the basic tool of e-learning. Half of Indian households lack an active internet connection. Private universities and schools are now shifting their pedagogical approach and are using online platforms like *Zoom, Vedantu, Adda247, Unacademy,*

E-pathshala. Similar approaches are being considered by state governments as well. India’s federal structure defines education as a concurrent subject meaning the state has a crucial role to play in defining the whatnots of education. This paper is concerned with online educational policies of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. These states are marked by differences in their political scenarios, topography and finances.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- (McBrien et al., 2009) states rapid developments in technology have made distance education easy. Hence, post lockdown period, many colleges and universities started transitioning from traditional education to digital mediums.
- Kapasia, Nanigopal, et al (2020) states that Covid Pandemic situation in the state of West Bengal on the undergraduate and postgraduate students have been thrown into disorder

by the lockdown situation due to the pandemic. Although education has been shifted to online platforms, there are various changes which need to be implemented in the various areas of government policy makers, institutional authorities and infrastructure limitations. Open source Digital learning and Learning management Systems could be another solution which could be adopted.

- Dhawan, Shivangi (2020), gives us a clear picture of how natural disasters are bound to happen and they have been happening in the past. However, being prepared for such natural disasters and pandemic is the need of the hour both in the educational institutes and students and weigh the pros and cons of technology to use diligently.

- Crawford, J, et al (April, 2020) highlights the responses of various universities across 20 countries worldwide. Where one group of universities just went for following government guidelines for Covid 19 whereas the other main group went to adopt digital education. The education sector needs to unite and provide students better education digitally without compromising on the quality of the curriculum.

- Gupta, A et al (May,2020) explains that the educational institutes under the guidance of the government have followed timely measures regarding Covid pandemic. The government has also suggested digital learning as a means to continue learning among the students. Various letters, notifications, Circulars have been issued by the government from time to time for the educational institutes.

- Jena, Prabat (June,2020) states that many online learning platforms offer multiple programmes on the same subjects with different levels of certifications, methodology and assessment parameters. So, the quality of programmes may differ across different online learning platforms. Therefore, establishment of quality assurance mechanisms and quality benchmarks for online learning programmes must be developed and offered by HEIs in India keeping in view the rapid growth of the online learning platforms.

3. OBJECTIVES

- To understand demography of these states in context of internet and smartphone penetration.
- To understand policy implementation in the field of education during Covid pandemic by these states.
- To understand the challenges in implementation of e-learning.

4. METHODOLOGY

This manuscript adopts a desktop analysis approach. Due consideration has been given as to ascertain the quality of the information source. For effective transparency, a number of newspaper articles, university websites, government bulletin, reports and papers have been collected. Our main focus was to explore three different states having different challenges to deal with.

PUNJAB

- The government of Punjab, similar to other states has temporarily closed schools, universities, and other educational institutions. This closure affects hundreds of thousands of students. The state of Punjab has internet penetration of almost 60% while 59% of the population has access to a smartphone which is much higher than all India average. Although this gives a valuable pedestal to the government to implement its educational policies, the urban-rural divide is a major issue in Punjab. With almost 66% of the

population living in rural areas, the availability of smartphones is a concern. To bridge this gap, the government initiated **Punjab Smart Connect Scheme** under which students were given smartphones free of cost and that too with preloaded educational applications.

- **Punjab Education Board** in collaboration with **Rotary India Literacy Mission** has launched an online platform called **iScuela** with an aim to digitise and digitalise all 19,272 government schools across the state of Punjab. 85000+ hours of active teaching/learning has been done using the platform.

- The Department of education has launched the **Punjab Educare** application which is available via Google Play Store. The Punjab School Education Department has come up with this amazing tool especially for the students and teachers of government schools in Punjab. The application provides all educational material including text books, video lessons, daily assignments. Easy and free access to the systematically arranged study material saves time. It not only improves the efficiency of the teachers but keeps the parents updated with their child's curriculums.

- For the promotion Punjabi language during this pandemic, Punjabi university Patiala under the aegis of Punjab School Education Board has launched the **eLearnPunjabi** portal. It provides a systematic approach through online videos for a nuanced understanding of the language.

HARYANA

- The state of Haryana has lower internet penetration of 49% meaning more than half of the population does not have internet access. While the urban belt has more than an impressive rate of internet users, primarily areas around Gurugram, the rural belt of Haryana is far behind. Smartphone users are also few here. In these troubling times, the state of Haryana has roped in private players like Reliance Jio. The Haryana government has entered into an agreement with **Reliance Jio TV** to facilitate a distance education programme for school students amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the agreement all channels of **EDUSAT** will be available on the Jio platform free of cost.

- To streamline the admission process, the government has launched an online platform for admission to undergraduate courses in government-aided and self-financed colleges. A

whatsapp chatbot **Apka Mitra** to resolve any admission related queries of the students have also been introduced.

- In order to facilitate teachers to understand this new normal, the state has collaborated with various online platforms. One such example is **Chalklit**. ChalkLit is an application for teacher education and training. It provides tools, resources and training to teachers to help them teach better in their classrooms. It also offers a personalized peer to peer social micro learning network where teachers can learn from the best practises and experience of other teachers.

- The state has been actively using **Whatsapp** platform as well. Here, audio-video content is sent on the mobile numbers of parents and the students can see it on their WhatsApp. These lessons will help students to keep their academic learning in continuity.

- Under its "Stay at home, study at home and school at home" campaign, the department of

education and State Council of Education Research and Training (SCERT) launched **Ghar Se Padhao Abhiyan**, an e-learning campaign to connect parents and students with over 50,000 teachers through WhatsApp, SMS and phone calls across the state to start academic activities.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

- The state of Himachal Pradesh boasts a respectable percentage of 55% when it comes to internet penetration despite the topographical challenges. With a reasonable percentage of smartphone availability, the government has launched the **Har Ghar Pathshala** programme to provide home-based teaching facilities to students. Under this initiative, multiple programmes are being used to ensure maximum reach of the students. A three hours slot per day on **Doordarshan Shimla** has been allotted specifically for classes 10 and 12 students.
- The government has roped **All India Radio** to provide teaching modules to students. This ensures maximum coverage in far flung areas as well.
- **Swaran Jayanti Gyanodaya Cluster Shreshtha Vidyalaya Yojana** is now being implemented to bring about qualitative changes in government aided schools. Special focus has been given to upgrade the e-learning infrastructure of these schools. With a budget of 15 crore rupees, the initial plan is to improve existing infrastructure in pre-primary and primary schools.
- To help the students of classes 9 to 12, the Government of Himachal Pradesh has updated teaching study materials on the **Swayam Sidham portal**. This portal was started in 2017 to provide students with online study materials. Now due to pandemic, the scope of this portal has been further enhanced under **Samay 10 se 12 wala, Har Ghar Bane Pathshala campaign**. Resources like lesson indicators, lesson plans, question banks are available for download. Apart from that MCQ tests and e-books are also available for all subjects. The portal is managed by the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) Himachal Pradesh

5. CONCLUSION

With the advent of Covid-19, federal governments across the country are now realising the structural mistakes committed in the field of education since independence. With a miniscule part of the budget devoted towards education, the technological divide is now even more

apparent. States like Kerala and Tamil Nadu are better off since technological enhancements are significant whereas Bihar and Odisha are the flip side of the coin. Smartphone availability is an issue but it varies across the states. Here the Punjab government's **Punjab Smart Connect Scheme** is a commendable effort. TV and radio has been a boon to governments since

availability of a secure internet connection is a dilemma. Governments across the union have to take this pandemic as an opportunity to strengthen their respective educational infrastructure.

The New Education Policy of 2020 has a provision of spending upto 6% of GDP on education. This will truly and only suffice if the states do their part.

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