

COVID HAS FORCED EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENT TO INTRODUCE E-LEARNING TOOLS, BUT THE CHASM BETWEEN HAVES AND HAVE-NOTS IS A CONCERN

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Issues Related to Poverty, Inclusion, Employment & Sustainable Development

Written by Tanu Shukla and Virendra Singh Nirban

The [COVID-19 pandemic](#) has interrupted all facets of our daily lives. It has impacted all levels of the educational system as well, forcing the inclusion of technology tools in education. However, this has triggered uncertainty across marginalised groups.

The introduction of information and communication technologies (ICT) produces varied outcomes depending on three As — accessibility, affordability, and acceptance. Accessibility refers to the set of activities that empowers the user to use technology, while affordability is the level at which the consumer can endure the cost of the ICT service. Acceptance, on the other hand, pertains to technology innovation, and is influenced by behavioural and social factors.

Our education system is facing difficulties in meeting the digital divide between haves and have-nots. The rich are becoming richer with knowledge acquisition while the poor are becoming poorer because the three As continue to elude them. It is time we contemplate on equity and equality parameters, which are central to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The time has also come to try out innovative models in creating learning opportunities for everyone, and to end the digital divide.

In accordance with the universal right to free basic education, the United Nations committed to achieving the target of universal basic education by the year 2000. However, the inequality of learning opportunities have come in the way of developing countries meeting this objective.

The Indian education system is weighed down by lower levels of learning outcomes, low enrolment and high dropout rates. This situation may worsen since dropout rates are likely to increase due to the widening gap in access to education. While other basic needs such as food, water, and shelter are taken care of, education has been left unaddressed. This has long-term repercussions, especially for the most vulnerable sections of society.

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) aims to provide a reliable annual status of basic learning levels. It found that hardly 27.2 per cent of children in Class 3 had the ability to write. The student learning surveys by the NGO Pratham have demonstrated that only one out of eight children in Class 4 knew simple division. Similarly, only one out of five children of the same grade knew basic reading while only half the children in Class 6 could do multiplications. With regard to conceptual understanding, the percentages are worse. Research suggests that the gap in foundational learning tends to escalate every year along with progress to the next class.

The pandemic has added new challenges. Quite a few private schools have embraced online teaching methods — private and government schools that lacked accessibility and availability to ICT have fallen behind. Policymakers have been forced by this disruption to work out solutions to bridge the digital divide and make e-learning socially inclusive.

Learning demands a conducive environment. Lack of access to electricity and internet is impacting remote learning. Only 24 per cent of the households in the country have internet

facility, according to a report of National Sample Survey Education. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Human Resource Development has reduced the expenditure on refining the digital infrastructure from Rs 604 crore in 2019-20 to Rs 469 crore in 2020-21.

Target 9C of the UNESCO's SDGs talks of universal access to information and communications technology. Technology — particularly ICT — has always been a catalytic agents for progress. But modern ICT provisioning has flagged issues related to inclusion.

The pandemic has forced the educational system into implementing “technology-based innovative interventions”. In the light of constitutional needs, this is the time to make ICT as a mainstream practice. Stakeholders must use it as an opportunity rather than offer it as an alternative arrangement for those who can access and afford education. It would go a long way in ensuring the safeguarding of education as a fundamental and compulsory right of an individual.

(The authors are with the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani-Pilani Campus)

The Indian Express is now on Telegram. Click [here to join our channel \(@indianexpress\)](#) and stay updated with the latest headlines

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

CrackIAS