Sustainable Primary Education in Andhra Pradesh During COVID-19

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	A B S T R A C T
	Sustainable development describes the simultaneous maintenance of balance between socio-economic development and environmental sustainability without jeopardizing the future generation's potential to serve their own needs. The main aim of this article is to analyse the sustainability attained by government schools in Andhra Pradesh through providing education to elementary pupils during COVID-19. The unexpected outbreak of the deadly virus COVID-19 wreaked havoc on educational systems, harming children's education. In response to the lockdown, all educational institutions had been closed for an extended length of time and remained shuttered even today. According to the information gathered the government of Andhra Pradesh took all necessary safety measures to ensure the accessibility of government elementary schools and to minimize primary school dropouts. They televised the online lessons to every class at periodic intervals on government regional channels for students. Pupils were given worksheets to exercise according to the curriculum aired on television. These worksheets were submitted for review to the concerned faculty by students' parents. The children were given dry rations monthly as part of the "Mid-Day-Meal" program, which offered healthy meals to address the students' food difficulties, food security, and access to schooling during the COVID-19 epidemic. This document serves as a resource for teachers, administrators, and government officials on how to deal with and avoid the trajectories that primary school pupils face in the future when confronted with difficult situations. Furthermore, the whole perspective provides a list of resources, recommendations, and strategies for ensuring the sustainability of the educational system during the pandemic. ©2022

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development issues of government primary education in Andhra Pradesh during the COVID-19 pandemic emphasize the importance of sustainable development. Sustainability guides meeting current needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet their requirements. This pandemic has created an unprecedented situation that affects every human being on the planet. Regardless of how temporary the impact may be in some cases; recent reports indicate that young children around the world are the most affected in every aspect and school dropouts are being increased gradually. As we know, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have 17 SDGs, of which SDG 4.1 and SGD 4.2 ensures that all people have effective learning outcomes and equal access to lifelong learning opportunities by 2030 (UN, 2015). According to UNICEF report, lockdowns and school closures in India had impacted 247 million children enrolled in elementary and secondary education, as well as approximately 28 million children who attend 'Anganwadi' (courtyard shelter) (UNICEF, 2020). Anganwadi is a place where poverty-stricken children were taught about preschool nurturing lessons and were provided nutritious food to prevent malnutrition. When the unprecedented situations started to rise in the form of the COVID-19 virus, the students were restricted to go to Anganwadis and confined to their homes. The Union Ministry of Education announced a Performance Grading Index (PGI) 2019-20 stating that Andhra Pradesh is in 4th place focusing on identifying the policy gaps in education and laying a platform to quality education with a long-term vision, focusing on improving areas of intervention to ensure that the school education system is reliable at the entry-level (Rao, 2021).

Andhra Pradesh officials are taking the necessary steps to ensure universal access to education for all children by following sustainable education schemes. Some of the strategies implemented for elementary education universalization include strengthening existing schools, providing financial assistance to students through various schemes, and establishing educational facilities in small and unserved communities. Incorporating different programs and schemes namely Ammavodi, Vidyadeevena, Vidyakanuka, Nadu-Nedu (Manabadi) and Gorumudda to promote education to every child enrolled in government primary schools. These

sustainable schemes were continued during the COVID-19 pandemic to support the child with good education providing textbooks with worksheets, aired online classes on television, parent-teacher follow-up, nutritional food supply as a monthly dry-ration, and also sanitary kits to reduce the primary school dropouts even in the pandemic situation.

Even though the pandemic is being continued, the government is taking necessary steps to provide uninterrupted education to every child using various online platforms. Since the future seems to be unpredictable during the pandemic, the government is training government teachers to conduct online classes more effectively and working to make progress in meeting the academic competencies of each class. The primary objective of this study is to examine the current situation in government primary schools in terms of sustainability and assist in the development of more sustainable current and post COVID-19 environment focusing on primary education.

Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate the level of sustainability accomplished by government primary schools in improving services during the school year of COVID-19.
2. To understand the functioning of online classes aired on television.
3. To understand the various steps taken by the government of Andhra Pradesh in government primary schools during COVID-19.
4. To understand the challenges faced by the students and teachers in primary schools.
5. To understand various schemes implemented to reduce the school dropouts during a COVID-19 pandemic.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was carried out by conducting a survey in a descriptive approach, consisting of questionnaires shared as a Google form link. Simple random sampling was used to analyze the sustainability attained by government schools in Andhra Pradesh by providing education to elementary pupils during COVID-19. The participants were teachers and cluster resource persons (CRP) working in government primary schools in Andhra Pradesh. They were questioned about the main

difficulties and challenges they faced in their schools, as well as about the academic achievement of their students and the problems they encountered during the COVID-19 crisis. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the interviews were conducted online by sharing a Google Form link (https://forms.gle/UvU7CU3qpUcM2Yx99). The responses from each participant are collected in the form of a questionnaire consisting of both qualitative and quantitative data. The collected data is represented using graphs. These graphs were then analysed and interpreted using EXCEL.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Sustainable measures taken by the government to prevent school dropouts during COVID-19
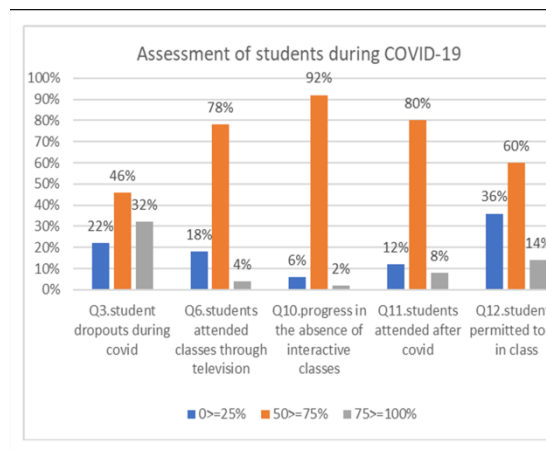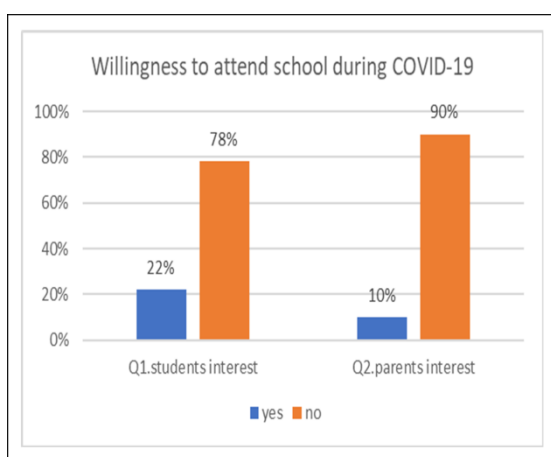

ref. (field survey, 2021) [Figure.1 Willingness to attend school during COVID-19, Figure.2 Assessment of students during COVID-19]

During the pandemic due to the imposition of lockdown, all the schools were closed. Teachers were polled about their student's desire to attend school, and parents' willingness to send their children to school during the pandemic. The results revealed that the majority of pupils do not want to go to school. During the COVID-19 an average of 84 percent of the parents were hesitant to bring their children to school and just 16 percent were interested in going to the government primary schools in Andhra Pradesh Figure.1 ref. (Survey, 2021). About half of the year, they were at the house and hence the student dropouts during COVID-19 increased a lot. The percentage of school dropouts ranged from 50 to 75 percent due to erratic schooling Figure.2 ref. (Survey, 2021). Furthermore, due to a lack of work, the majority of the children were assigned to minor tasks for their livelihood and the maintenance of the family. Therefore, to prevent dropouts the primary school students are provided with a uniform kit, books, and an annual financial academic support of 15,000/- for the concerned child's mother for sending their ward to school by avoiding child labour (APGOV, 2020). They are also provided with either mid-day meals or dry rations during the lockdown (MDM, 2020). The main concept of a mid-day meal or dry-ration is to provide the school-going children with healthy and nutritious food in government primary schools besides reducing the dropouts. To distribute the dry-ration during the COVID-19 lockdown, the parents were instructed to bring their authenticated identity card like Aadhaar along with students' school ID

proof and Aadhaar for verification. The items included in monthly dry-ration are eggs, peanut chikkis, and rice. During the mid-day meals, they provided nutritious and healthy food consisting of egg, peanut chikkis, vegetables, and daal. The students can opt for any one form of meal and the survey revealed that most of the students were interested in taking dry ration to home instead of mid-day meal at school during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the rapidly spreading virus, most parents instructed their children not to eat at school. Keeping this in view the government of Andhra Pradesh started giving dry-ration to the children who were not having mid-day meals at school.

Sustainable learning and evaluation during COVID-19

To avoid interruption in the education of the students The State Council for Education and Training (SCERT) suggested e-learning (APSCERT, 2016). Online classes were telecasted through television on the Doordarshan channel, YouTube, Radio, and WhatsApp. The SCERT is in charge of updating the academic curriculum and training teachers, as well as updating textbooks and teaching competency schedules. To give students easy access to subject-related topics, each topic in the textbook has a QR code that redirects to the Diksha app, where they can access digital textbooks, watch recorded videos specific to the topic, practice papers, question banks, assessments, quizzes, lesson plans, and teaching tools (DIKSHA, 2020). The government of Andhra Pradesh was having an online education portal named the Directorate of School Education, AP called the CSE portal (CSEportal, 2020). In this portal, we get information regarding the government school's teachers and student reports. Every teacher can access the portal with their employee ID to log in and to enter the details of students timely. During COVID-19, teachers were informed to interact with students and parents on phone to take the feedback regarding the academic work. Also, to upload weekly reports and monthly portfolios of every student in the CSE portal. These reports were analysed by the directorate of the education department and taken necessary steps by conducting audits and training to teachers.
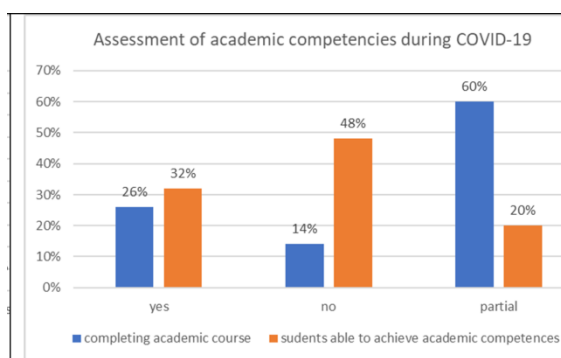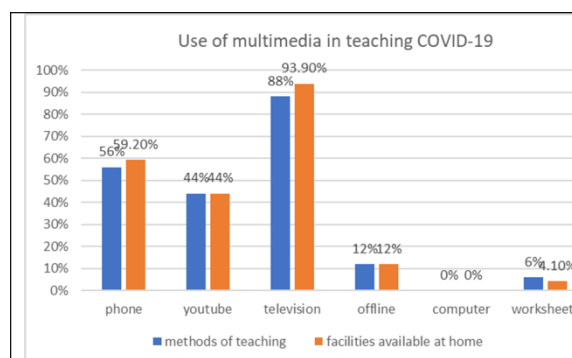
ref. (field survey, 2021) [Figure.3 Use of multimedia in teaching, Figure.4 Assessment of academic competencies during COVID-19]

The survey revealed that most of the students were attending classes through television as their houses are equipped with either tv or smartphone. Whereas the usage of YouTube and radio was in lower proportions Figure.3 ref. (Survey, 2021). According to the teacher's assessment and feedback taken from the parents of the concerned wards, 78% of teachers reported more than 50>=75% of students are following the classes aired on television regularly and practicing the worksheets given Figure.2 ref. (Survey, 2021). Most teachers were able to complete at least half of the important syllabus for the students. But only 32% of students were able to achieve academic competencies during COVID-19, with the remaining 48% unable to do so due to the absence of interactive classes, failure to attend online classes, and failure to exercise on worksheets Figure.4 ref. (Survey, 2021). As a result, in order to overcome these challenges and improve students' academic competencies, teachers regularly contacted students via phone calls and

messages for evaluation of the work given. Students were given worksheets, videos from online classes were shared via WhatsApp groups, and questions were answered on the phone. Some teachers mandated students to write main points from previous lessons and to complete regular assignments. The students' performance was evaluated using worksheets along with feedback from their parents on their attendees at broadcasted classes. Consequently, teachers did an excellent job of improving students' academic competencies and ensuring sustainability during the pandemic.

Post COVID-19 situation in schools

The respondents mentioned that the government of Andhra Pradesh has taken necessary measures to run the government primary schools post lockdown from the COVID-19 pandemic. Every school followed the instructions given by the government such as sanitizing the entire school, classrooms by appointing sanitary workers, sanitizing the students while entering the school premises at the entrance and instructed to wear masks, recording the body temperature, maintaining proper social distancing among each one, instructing the students to bring parents willing letter for sending the ward to school, to maintain separate water bottle and not to share eatables among themselves. These are the steps mandated by the government and enacted by schools. The school was sanitized regularly by the government-appointed contract-based sanitary workers and continuous running water was provided. After lockdown above 50% attended the school and based on the class strength, room size, and ventilation 50≥75% of students are permitted to sit in a class maintaining social distance among them Figure.2 ref. (Survey, 2021). In some cases, open classrooms were held on school premises. As the government school children cannot afford to maintain personal sanitary equipment. The government schools distributed masks to every child at the entrance of the school who was not wearing masks.

Measures and Suggestions are given in the google survey form

Many respondents believed that the school should not reopen because the COVID-19 3rd wave primarily affects children. The teachers are ready to take up the classes online and follow up with the worksheets to meet the academic competencies. Every teacher should be vaccinated before coming to school, and parents should

be vaccinated and educated on the preventive and sanitization measures that must be followed. The parents must follow up with their ward at home and assist them in attending the classes that are regularly televised on different online platforms with the help of smartphones, radio, television, or whatever source that will be available to the students. A proper parent-teacher follow-up on the student is required. If the student is attending school, the parent should inform the available school teacher about the student's health if he or she is feeling unwell. A clean environment must be maintained both at school and at home. Only a limited number of people should be permitted to sit in the class, based on the size of the room, ventilation and should maintain proper social distance between each individual. Some of the respondents felt providing tetra milk packets to primary children can be more beneficial to children which helps in building immunity during COVID-19 and were suggested in the suggestion section in the google form survey.

CONCLUSIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown for a long duration has put us in unprecedented challenges. This issue has also revealed that our educational system is not digitally equipped. This problem affects most countries across the world that are attempting to move learning from classrooms to the internet. Communication competence, strategic thinking, future thinking competency, Complex problem-solving communication competence, and a competence to apply Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to teaching are the sustainability competences necessary throughout COVID-19 (Shin, 2020). Despite the challenges faced, the government made valuable efforts to reduce the dropouts in this pandemic by using every medium to maintain the literacy rate and sustainable education. By training the teachers accordingly and conducting online classes, providing nutritious food to students, and following with parents and students through the phone. Since teachers play a subservient role when executing classes online, students should remember that they are the key players, and they should be conscious to be more effective in seeking responses to online education with all their efforts. If the schools were reopened under any circumstances, sanitary procedures must be followed, as well as hygiene in and around the campus must be maintained. To ensure that everyone gets vaccinated, a vaccination drive must be conducted. As a result, we

must recognize that, while the pandemic limits us in many ways, the government and teachers are working hard to make the virtual sessions a success and an inclusive place.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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