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Life Skills for Adolescent Girls in Himachal Pradesh: A Critical Evaluation

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The adolescent period is often described as exhibiting high energy, enthusiasm, and a willingness to engage in novel experiences. The phenomenon is characterised by notable changes in cognitive and behavioural patterns, particularly concerning interpersonal interactions. The adolescent population of a country holds significant value in unlocking the nation's potential within the ever-changing global landscape. As per the National Health Mission, it is estimated that India has a population of 253 million adolescents.[1] The female population in the adolescent population is also large. Hence, promoting their health, well-being, and empowerment is imperative.[2] The government tries to resolve challenges of gender inequality and discrimination related to life choices, health, and education, which affect their development, through various initiatives. According to UNICEF India, safety, health, education, and the provision of life skills to many adolescents can yield social, political, and economic benefits that can contribute to the country's sustained progress. But they possess restricted opportunities to cultivate essential competencies that can facilitate their lives.[3]

Investments made towards adolescent reproductive and sexual health are expected to result in various benefits, such as the postponement of the marriage age, a decrease in teenage pregnancy rates, the fulfilment of unmet contraception needs, a reduction in maternal mortality, a decrease in sexually transmitted infection incidence, and a reduction in HIV prevalence.[4] So national and state governments have implemented multiple schemes to address the needs of the youth, with a particular focus on promoting the well-being of women and adolescent girls. These initiatives are also focused on accomplishing the Sustainable Development Goals regarding nutrition and gender equality, among other objectives. Different states have government and non-government initiatives that utilise life skills programmes to resolve the issues of adolescent girls. For instance, the non-government organisation programme 'Anewsha Clinic' in West Bengal and the 'Life Skill Health and Hygiene Project' in Rajasthan use life skills to promote adolescent sexual and reproductive health. Himachal Pradesh has relied on government initiatives that use life skills for the development of adolescents. For instance, to improve the status of adolescent females, the government of Himachal Pradesh has launched schemes like the '*Mukhya Mantri Bal Uddhar Yojana*' (Chief Minister Child Upliftment Scheme), which financially assists girls from economically weaker sections

to continue their education beyond class 10 and pursue higher studies or vocational training.[5] Based on the recommendations of the National Curriculum Framework (2005), life skills education has been integrated into other major schemes in India.[6] Himachal Pradesh also runs schemes imparting life skills as a means for youth development.

Much of the available literature is concerned with evaluating governmental initiatives that predominantly focus on programmes targeting religious minorities, backward classes, women entrepreneurs, and unorganised labourers (Nushruth, Panakaje 2022: 624–36) (Patil, Deepali 2022: 430–39). A limited number of studies examine government programmes for adolescent girls. These studies highlight the degree of cognisance regarding the programme and its financing (Aithal, Ghatage 2018: 851–55). Nevertheless, it has been observed that the studies analysing the impact of such schemes in Himachal Pradesh are minimal. This study aims to critically evaluate government schemes incorporating life skills and other interventions for the development and growth of adolescent girls that have been implemented in Himachal Pradesh.

State Government Initiative Using Life Skills

Many of these schemes concentrated on distinct facets of adolescent development. For instance, the *Kishori Shakti Yojana (Adolescent Girl Empowerment Scheme), Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG-SABLA), Saksham Aganwadi (capable ICDS centres), and Poshan* (nourishment) schemes prioritise the areas of nutrition, sexual health, menstrual hygiene, and empowerment of adolescent girls.[7] The schemes mentioned above possess two distinct facets: nutritional and non-nutritional components. The nutritional component pertains to the mid-day meal. The non-nutrition component encompasses health, nourishment, iron and folic acid supplementation, routine health examinations, referral provisions, guidance and counselling about family welfare, adolescent reproductive and sexual health, childcare practises, and home management. Further, the schemes also include nutrition education, instruction on life skills, the utilisation of public services, and vocational training for females aged 16 and older as part of the National Skill Development Programme. The Adolescent Education Programme employs life skills education to promote awareness about child marriages, substance abuse, AIDS, and other reproductive and sexual issues.[8] The allusion to life skills is also evident in initiatives such as the Himachal Pradesh Sarv *Shiksha Abhiyan* (Unified Elementary Education Initiative), the *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan* (National Mission for Secondary Education), and the New Education Policy of 2020. The programmes also emphasise vocational training, which employs life skills education to prepare individuals to enter the labour market.[9]

Lack of Conceptual Clarity

According to UNICEF and WHO, the life skills framework encompasses ten psychological skills: problem-solving, critical thinking, effective communication, decision-making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness-building skills, empathy, and coping with stress and emotions.[10] The previously mentioned skills are regarded as emotional, social, and intellectual resources that enable an individual to adapt and flourish in various aspects of life, including personal, interpersonal, social, and occupational domains.[11]

Moreover, it should be noted that these previously referred to schemes partially utilise some of the skill sets that international organisations have identified to empower adolescents in the government schemes. Projects such as the Kishori Shakti Yojana and SABLA prioritise the development of life skills as a means of fostering self-confidence. The schemes mention abilities like self-awareness, self-esteem, decision-making, critical thinking, communication proficiencies, rights and entitlements, stress management, peer pressure management, and functional literacy to be taught to adolescent girls.[12] The Sakasham Aganwari initiatives are based on the idea that essential life skills for adolescent females are those that foster leadership qualities and facilitate personal growth.[13] The vocational training programmes offered by Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha encompass life skills related to communication and self-management[18]. The National Education Policy of 2020's life skills aspect significantly emphasises developing creativity, critical thinking skills, communication, cooperation, teamwork, and resilience. This shows that the definition of life skills in Indian content lacks clarity.[14] These programmes have established a set of essential abilities categorised based on their urgency and relevance to address the current needs in India's context. The definition of life skills included in government schemes requires more precision, as skills about personal growth and self-confidence cover an array of unspecified abilities. The terms self-management skills and cooperation skills includes multiple skills.

As a result, the health worker's and trainer's ability to instruct young people can be affected. They also require clarity regarding what they must include while discussing these concepts. The skills involved can facilitate solving a particular concern. While resolving a problem, self-awareness facilitates an individual's comprehension of her personality traits, competency, shortcomings, aspirations, and aversions. Further proficient decision-making and problem-solving abilities facilitate individuals in adapting to their surroundings and taking necessary steps to address their concerns. Critical thinking enables individuals to analyse information and experiences objectively and take proper decisions.

In contrast, creative thinking facilitates the exploration of available alternatives and the potential consequences of one's actions or inaction while dealing with complex issues. Communication skills enable individuals

to express themselves according to their respective cultural and situational contexts and adjust to their surroundings. On the contrary, interpersonal relationships facilitate an individual's ability to establish constructive connections with those they engage with by demonstrating empathy and patience. Cultivating empathy and self-awareness enables individuals to readily discern the perspectives of others, comprehend the context of a given situation, regulate their emotional responses, and adeptly navigate the challenges of daily life.

Influence of Life Skills on Adolescent Health Indicators

Assessing the impact of governmental initiatives on adolescents in Himachal Pradesh poses a considerable challenge as there is a lack of government data regarding adolescents. There is a need for increased government survey data specifically focused on the adolescent population. Nonetheless, the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) provides insights into adolescents' development. Therefore, while analysing the data from the survey, a significant disparity was noted between the data obtained from NFHS 3 in 2005, when life skills were first incorporated into programmes such as the *Kishorie Shakti Yojana*, and that obtained from NFHS 5 in 2019, which included schemes such as *Saksham Aganwari*. Therefore, the data regarding women and adolescent females derived from NFHS3, NFHS4, and NFHS5 were analysed for a more comprehensive comparison.[15] Table 1 and Table 2 provide the data from which subsequent observations are drawn.

Attributes of Adolescent Females in Himachal Pradesh

Himachal Pradesh government policies like Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, Madyamik Siksha Abhiyan, and the New Education Policy emphasise improving the state's education level. Upon examination of the attributes of adolescent females, it was noted that the literacy rate in 2005 was 79.9 per cent. However, the per centage increased to 90 per cent in 2019. Likewise, a more significant number of female students have received education for a span of ten years. The proportion of women has risen from 44 per cent to 65 per cent. The prevalence of females who enter into marriage before reaching the age of 18 has declined from 12 per cent to 5.4 per cent. The proportion of adolescent mothers has declined from 3.1 per cent to 2.6 per cent. Thus, there appears to be some positive impact of life skills and other services employed to create awareness regarding education and marriage.

Nutritional Status of Adolescents

Himachal Pradesh tried to improve adolescent health by providing various benefits and life skills through policies like Saksham Aganwari and Poshan. The result shows that the proportion of adolescent females exhibiting a lower body mass index has decreased from 30 per cent to 14 per cent. Obesity among females has notably risen from 14 per cent to 30 per cent

Table 1 Characteristics and Nutrition of Himachal Pradesh Women and Adolescent Girls

INDICATORS	NFHS5	NFHS4	NFHS3
Characteristics of the population of female aged 15 and above			
Females who are literate (%)	90	88.2	79.5
Females with ten or more years of schooling (%)	65	59.4	44.7
Females aged 20–24 years married before age 18 years (%)	5.4	8.6	12.3
Females aged 15–19 years who were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey (%)	2.6	2.6	3.1
Nutrition status among females aged 15 and above			
Females whose Body Mass Index (BMI) is below average (BMI <18.5 kg/m2)21 (%)	13.9	16.2	29.9
Females who are overweight or obese (BMI ≥25.0 kg/m2)21 (%)	30.4	28.6	13.5
Anaemia among females aged 15 and above			
Non-pregnant females aged 15–49 years who are anaemic (<12.0 g/dl)22 (%)	53.4	53.6	43.2
Pregnant females aged 15–49 years who are anaemic (<11.0 g/dl)22 (%)	42.2	50.4	38.1
All females aged 15–19 years who are anaemic 22 (%)	53.2	52.7	–

from 2005 to 2019. Likewise, a comparison can be made indicating a rise in the prevalence of anaemia among adolescent females between 2005 and 2019. Anaemia represents a significant public health concern among female adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19. The elevated prevalence of anaemia in adolescent females can be attributed to augmented demands during rapid growth, menstrual blood loss, inadequate consumption of iron-fortified foods, and irregular eating patterns (Kumar 2014: 24–32). As a result, adolescent females have become increasingly anaemic. Implementing more efficient techniques and providing better life skills training to make better choices regarding lifestyle habits is recommended for the successful execution of government schemes.

Hygiene, Sexual and Reproductive Health

Similarly, policies like the Kishori Shakti Yojana and the Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls used life skills to enhance the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents. The percentage of females utilising hygiene practices or protective measures during menstruation has experienced a notable increase from 84.3 per cent to 91.5 per cent. There has been a 6 per cent increase in HIV awareness. Female knowledge regarding the use of condoms as a risk reduction measure for sexually transmitted diseases has risen from 61.8

Table 2 Indicators related to Himachal Pradesh Women and Adolescent Girls

INDICATORS	NFHS5	NFHS4	NFHS3
Hypertension among females aged 15 years and above			
Mildly elevated blood pressure (Systolic 140–159 mm of Hg and/or Diastolic 90–99 mm of Hg) (%)	11.9	–	–
. Moderately or severely elevated blood pressure (Systolic ≥160 mm of Hg and/or Diastolic ≥100 mm of Hg) (%)	5.1	–	–
Elevated blood pressure (Systolic ≥140 mm of Hg and/or Diastolic ≥90 mm of Hg) or taking medicine to control blood pressure (%)	22.2	–	–
Knowledge of HIV/AIDS among Female age 15–49 years			
Female who have comprehensive knowledge24 of HIV/AIDS (%)	36.2	30.9	30
Women who know that consistent condom use can reduce the chances of getting HIV/AIDS (%)	76.6	68.6	61.8
Female Empowerment (Female age 15–49 years)			
Currently, married female who usually participates in household decisions (%)	93.9	90.8	–
The females who worked in the last 12 months and were paid in cash (%)	20.2	17	–
Female owning a house and/or land (alone or jointly with others) (%)	23.1	11.3	–
Females having a bank or savings account that they use (%)	83.1	68.8	–
Females having a mobile phone that they use (%)	79.5	73.9	–
Females age 15–24 years who use hygienic methods of protection during their menstrual period26 (%)	91.5	84.3	–
Tobacco Use and Alcohol Consumption among females aged 15 years and above			
Females who use any kind of tobacco (%)	1.7	0.5	1.2
Females who consume alcohol (%)	0.6	0.3	0.1

Note: Data for NHFS3 in Table 1 and Table 2 are from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) by IIPS, 2008 – copyright 2008 by the International Institute for Population Sciences. The data for NHFS4 in Tables 1 and 2 are from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) by Copyright 2015 by the International Institute for Population Sciences. The data for NHFS5 in Tables 1 and 2 are from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) by Copyright 2019 by the International Institute for Population Sciences.

per cent to 73.6 per cent. Thus, programmes incorporating life skills education have a positive impact on the sexual and reproductive health outcomes.

Substance Abuse and Alcoholism

Similarly, the Adolescent Education Programme uses life skills to reduce substance and alcohol dependence. The result shows that the prevalence of tobacco consumption declined between 2005 and 2015. However, an increase in the consumption of drugs and alcohol was observed in 2019. The prevalence of tobacco use among females was 1.2 per cent in 2005. This figure declined by 0.5 per cent in 2015 but increased to 1.7 per cent in 2019. The adoption of substance use was significantly influenced by parental tobacco and alcohol consumption and the presence of addicted peers and siblings (Narain, Gupta 2020: 517–523). This questions the effectiveness and implementation of life skills in mitigating the issues mentioned earlier. The percentage of females consuming alcohol has risen from 0.1 per cent to 0.6 per cent. The 2019 data indicate the emergence of additional problems among females, such as hypertension. This suggests the need for psychological and social intervention.

Adolescent Empowerment

Programmes like Madyamik Siksha Abhiyan, the New Education Policy, and other programmes teach life skills through vocational training to empower adolescents. The statistics show that women have achieved more significant levels of empowerment compared to previous years, with approximately 93 per cent of females being able to make decisions regarding household matters. Additionally, roughly 20 per cent of women receive wages for their labour. Women have become landowners, with approximately 23 per cent possessing property individually or as group members. The adolescent female now has bank accounts. The per centage of females with bank accounts has risen to about 83 per cent, indicating a notable increase from the 68 per cent reported in 2015. It is noteworthy that the use of mobile phones among females was negligible in 2003. However, approximately 79 to 80 per cent of individuals possess mobile devices with internet connectivity. Therefore, the programmes demonstrate their efficacy in empowering adolescent girls.

Based on the previously discussed survey findings, it is evident that the programmes exhibit efficacy in certain aspects, albeit only across some dimensions. Furthermore, the implementation of life skills education is limited to certain areas of effectiveness. Research has demonstrated that the proper instruction of life skills to adolescents can effectively decrease alcohol and substance dependency (Nagler 2019: 399–415). Therefore, the evidence raises doubts regarding the teaching approach employed in imparting life skills as outlined in the programmes mentioned earlier in the study.

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INSIDE

The Academic Motivation Experiences of Adolescent Students in Himachal Pradesh during COVID-19

Anamika Basu*

[COVID cases can still be detected in India after two years of the global pandemic outbreak in 2020. The pandemic significantly impacted individuals and altered societal lifestyles and work practices. Educational institutions were forced to implement online programmes and other techniques that affected the academic motivation and engagement of the learners. This study aims to examine the academic motivation of 275 adolescent school students of Himachal Pradesh during the pandemic's initial phase via electronic survey. This article will discuss the student's perspective on learning.]

Academic motivation pertains to the inclination and aspiration to participate in academic pursuits, including studying, attending classes, and finishing assignments. *Himachal Pradesh* is a northwestern state of India. The state's education system heavily emphasises academics. Most adolescents in Himachal Pradesh are from rural or economically disadvantaged backgrounds. They face difficulty accessing quality education and face gender biases. Despite the challenges, efforts are underway to enhance academic motivation among adolescents in Himachal Pradesh. The initiatives encompass scholarships and mentorship programmes for marginalised students and promote gender equality in education.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, most Indian education literature provided an overview of online learning. Academic articles prioritise higher education over primary and secondary education. Other articles highlight online education's benefits, including new platforms and more affordable, accessible premium courses.(Dhawan,2020) MOOC and E pathshala became popular government platforms. Teaching methods were overhauled. (Jeena, 2020 and Gurukkal, 2020). Mobile devices, computers, and the internet increased education expenses. (Bhattacharya 2020). Limited space, unfavourable learning conditions, resource scarcity, and technological barriers in rural areas cause student absenteeism and stress. Articles highlight teachers' lack of technological skills, reluctance, and scepticism towards online teaching. Challenges such as gender inequality, high dropout rates, and malnutrition were identified. (Gupta,2020). The articles focused on technological advancements and barriers, teachers' perspectives and social impacts. There were not enough scholarly articles about students' experiences in schools. Negligible research has been done on the pandemic's effect on students in Himachal Pradesh schools.

Methodology

Therefore, this study investigates the effects of online education on academic motivation and engagement during the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020 to September 2020), when many students shifted to online instruction. The survey identifies motivating and demotivating factors for public and private school students in Himachal Pradesh. The study included students of both genders, aged 14 to 19 years, who were enrolled in classes 8th to 12th grade in 2020. The survey was administered, and data was gathered through online means. Students were sent a Google Forms link via WhatsApp to complete a structured questionnaire. Snowball sampling was employed to select participants and collect data from students. The data was compiled from students who met the following requirements: The study participants were adolescent students enrolled in government and private schools in Himachal Pradesh. The participants were students in grades 8 through 12 in 2020. Only willing students were invited to participate in the study. Confidentiality was maintained. The data were analysed after being tabulated in an Excel spreadsheet. Most participants belong to the middle-income category. Some also fall into the upper-middle and lower-middle income categories.

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Findings

The survey attempted to investigate the impact of online education on student motivation and engagement during the initial phase of the pandemic in 2020. The survey examined participants' perceptions of the new learning mode, including their views on online education, learning environment, challenges encountered, and student enthusiasm towards online education. The survey had a participation rate of 63% for females and 37% for males. From June, most schools implemented online classes, with 88% offering daily classes. Some students received lessons every other day, while a small number had few classes. Students attended 9 to 15 weekly classes via online learning platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and WhatsApp. Television and radio were prevalent for education in challenging territories.

Advantages of Online Learning

Online learning motivated students for some time. Online education was liked by 59% of students as they could access lecture recordings and course material for later review. At the same time, 23% expressed a positive attitude towards teachers sharing their notes. Online lessons were a safer choice. In addition, it was less expensive as they did not have to spend time or money commuting. Approximately 61% of students reported that online learning allowed them to study under prestigious lecturers. In comparison, 37% liked it as they could enrol in courses that met their specific needs and were still economical. Online classes included educational videos, seminars, and national television programs. PowerPoint presentations increased virtual student engagement. Yoga video content was an effective motivator for students to exercise. Online education facilitated uninterrupted studying and helped students during the pandemic. The multiple-choice question (MCQ) examination was commonly used to evaluate students' understanding, circumventing the adverse impacts of conventional education assessments, such as apprehension and stress. Students favoured mobile devices for educational purposes and developed self-study abilities.

Technological difficulties faced

The participants identified the technical issues during class attendance as a significant source of demotivation. The absence of a consistent electricity supply was a concern for 16% of students, which was crucial for online education. Approximately 50% of the users experienced internet issues and muted their audio and video, while around 60% had personal issues with inadequate connectivity. The problem of unstable connectivity, virtual class disruptions, and the inability to download online resources was prevalent. This experience aligned with the results of Ritika Unniyal's research. Online classes were unpopular, as approximately 30% of students had experienced difficulty in hearing lectures due to inadequate network connectivity, while about 20% had struggled to comprehend the course material. The remaining students were bored during the online class. Students also encountered difficulties in resolving malfunctions with their learning devices and applications. Teachers' potential was not realised in this method. Occasionally, the teacher's network also experienced issues. Technical issues or external noise at either the teacher's or learner's location hindered the student's comprehension of the session's information. Maximum people lacked digital skills.

Online Classroom experience

Online learning requires more engagement, and the teaching methods employed by most teachers demotivate students. Before implementing the government guidelines, the students experienced a sense of being inundated by online lectures and perceived their academic workload as incessant. The teachers lacked a class schedule, and the students had so many daily lessons that they began to experience eye and back discomfort. Moreover, several educators expressed discomfort with their online mode of teaching. Approximately 50% of the students perceived that the teacher's attention was not evenly distributed among all students during online classes but focused on specific pupils. Around 15% of students believed that teachers' proper knowledge of online tools and techniques for teaching would have given better results. Furthermore, 20% of the students expressed dissatisfaction due to the teacher's hurried approach to covering the curriculum to meet the course requirements. Other resources, such as PowerPoint presentations and educational videos, were also utilised as instructional aids in online courses. Approximately 70% of teachers used the lecture method during online classes, and students were assigned written

homework. The lack of understanding of fundamental concepts hindered their performance on the final and admission examinations. Due to the ongoing lessons and the pandemic, students could no longer clarify their doubts with their coaching teacher.

The replacement of revision classes with homework irritated students. Teachers' tests lacked accountability and were unsatisfactory due to their susceptibility to cheating. Teachers frequently use WhatsApp to clarify students' doubts. Additionally, 20% of students expressed apprehension in asking questions due to the possibility of being ridiculed by their peers upon reviewing the WhatsApp conversation. Approximately half of the students experienced data storage issues due to message overcrowding. At the same time, 33% reported losing important messages in the chat due to irrelevant messages and overcrowding. The teacher utilised their administrative privileges to solely post within the group, impacting doubt-clearing questions of numerous students. In the early COVID-19 pandemic, many students experienced a lack of personal interaction in their classes, resulting in decreased focus and engagement with classroom instruction. Furthermore, prolonged screen time and lack of physical feedback during learning caused headaches and emotional issues such as dissatisfaction and worry among students.

Parental Attitudes and Online Learning at Home

Due to the pandemic, individuals had to stay within their homes. Online learning differed from traditional classroom instruction. The learning environment exhibited poor classroom management and focus. Offline Classroom settings allow students to discuss with teachers, peers, and seniors. That level of interaction was not feasible in online education. It was a significant source of demotivation. Several students found their homes unsuitable for studying. Approximately 50% of the students required an appropriate area for studying. They studied either while sitting on the bed, reclining, or in common areas where the rest of the family interacted. Approximately 30% of students faced challenges participating in online classes due to resource-sharing, such as phones or devices. In the initial stage, numerous parents did not possess an Android smartphone. Parents who kept such phones were often obligated to carry them to their workplaces, resulting in their children's absence from virtual classes. They were often interrupted during class for miscellaneous tasks. Around 40% of students experienced difficulty in studying due to frequent interruptions during class. Attending courses was difficult for 11% of the population due to the lack of resources. Regular data recharges for attending online classes were proving to be expensive. The results were in line with Saumajit Bhattacharyya's research. The students excessively relied on technological devices to complete their academic tasks. The online classes were supported by 75% of the parents. However, 9% of participants reported that parents found online seminars irritating. Likewise, students were uncomfortable when some parents monitored their children's online courses, while others were indifferent and did not request class details. Adolescents encounter diverse problems during this time. Approximately 15% of students had experienced difficulty conveying their issues to their families. Around 50% of respondents could not communicate their anxieties about examinations, results, and their future with their parents during the COVID period. About 30% of students could not articulate the reasons for their lack of understanding of the lessons. Due to the parents' busy schedules, students found it challenging to address concerns related to lack of motivation, emotional distress, and physical discomfort.

Changed in lifestyle and problems faced

Online education made the students study throughout the day, and there was less time for recreational activity, especially physical activity during online classes. This made students less engaged and less motivated towards academics. The data has shown that most students had sedentary lifestyles. Daily, almost 50% of students stayed continuously in front of the screen for classes for four to six hours, and around 14% had online classes for seven to nine hours or more. The remaining had classes for less than four hours. Around 40% of students performed physical activity for an hour or less, and 50% engaged in physical activity for two to three hours. Only 10% of the students were physically active for four to eight hours. This kind of lifestyle caused physiological and emotional problems for the students. According to the findings, approximately 50% of students suffered from headaches and watering of the eyes, around 35% experienced back pain, and the remaining experienced

nausea, ear pain, tingling of fingers, and additional discomforts. The students also experienced psychological problems due to those classes. 20% of the students experienced loneliness. About 30% of the people felt stressed, and 30% felt nervous. The remaining students felt depressed, fatigued and fearful. About 45% felt that the pandemic would get over soon and 6% had an unfavourable view, and a few of them thought that they might end up dying.

Online classroom behaviour

According to the findings, online education was unable to motivate all students. Frequently, class lessons resulted in a monologue. Despite having sufficient connectivity, 30% of students frequently muted their audio and video during class, while 25% did so occasionally, which suggested a lack of engagement in the learning process. Approximately 40% of students experienced frequent drowsiness during the course. A few students exhibited engagement in recreational activities, wandered during class, or daydreamed during class time, indicating low motivation among students. Online lessons with limited interaction demotivated the pupils, as they studied alone. In traditional classroom settings, students participated in activities and competed with each other. However, online education relies on self-study. The lack of peer competition diminished students' motivation to achieve academic excellence. The study suggested that students sometimes perceived online education as stressful and demotivating. Online education's drawbacks outweighed its benefits.

Conclusion

Education involves transmitting and acquiring knowledge, skills, and values. The instructor's responsibility to provide knowledge and the learner's duty to acquire knowledge is crucial. Bloom, Papert, and Vygotsky advocate for educators to offer suitable learning experiences, opportunities, and tools to enhance students' cognitive abilities. Online education faced challenges in providing opportunities for students due to inadequate infrastructure, limited interaction, insufficient knowledge and training among teachers, poor time and class management, unfavourable study environments, digital disparities, limited resource sharing, inadequate parental support, and low awareness of online counselling sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Online education in India needed more learner-centred activities and tools that guide cognitive and social processes, as online education theorists like Garrisons and Anderson emphasised. Students' negative impact on physiological and psychological well-being, muting their audio and video despite having good connectivity, playing games, or performing other tasks depicts their demotivation. The low academic engagement could be from a sedentary lifestyle, pedagogy, family, or personal reasons. According to the study, online education brought technological advancement, but the lack of a positive learning experience, learner-centred activities, and opportunities significantly impacted the academic motivation and engagement of the students.

Declaration and Conflict of Interest

The author reports no conflicts of interest regarding the research and publication of this article

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Contents

Academic Motivation Challenges Faced by Himachal Pradesh Government School Teachers During the Pandemic2021–2022: Lessons from Past for Future Preparedness

Anamika Basu[1]

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted the education system in India, and Himachal Pradesh is no exception to it. During the pandemic, governments, schools, and teachers played a crucial role in sustaining educational continuity for their students. Despite COVID's educational policies designed to aid students, they have encountered numerous academic obstacles. This study explores teachers' perspectives on the lack of students' academic motivation in government schools in 2021–2022. The qualitative study was conducted on government school teachers working in the Shimla District of Himachal Pradesh. In-depth interviews were conducted with 50 school teachers who taught 9th–12th-grade students. The data was examined using thematic analysis. The results explored the causes of decreased motivation during online education in 2021–2022 and elucidated how teachers' experiences can be utilised for future crises.

Keywords: academic motivation, COVID-19, government schools, teachers, and Himachal Pradesh

Introduction

Education constitutes the fundamental basis of any given society, given its pivotal role in advancing and developing individuals and the collective entity. Education enables individuals to gain knowledge and skills, promotes the development of empathy and tolerance, and helps people move up the social ladder. Education also fosters inclusivity and fairness and creates a more equitable society. However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the ordinary course of education. It significantly impacted various societal institutions, causing their operations to be disrupted and halted. India has taken several measures under the PM e-VIDYA programme (Prime Minister e-Knowledge Programme) to achieve self-sufficiency as part of the AtmaNirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (Self Reliant Programme) during this period. These measures aim

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to address the pandemic challenges. The educational policy was created to encourage digital learning, make it easier to share knowledge and support home-based education during the pandemic. In addition, Indian states have worked with their education departments to introduce educational programmes to share knowledge with their students. Some examples of these educational initiatives are SikshaDarshan (Education Viewpoint) by Rajasthan, Vidyamrutham (knowledge elixir) by Andhra Pradesh, and HarGharPathshala (Every household is a school) by Himachal Pradesh. Despite the current crisis, the government has tried to enhance the educational process by creating a stimulating learning environment and encouraging students to be motivated in their pursuit of knowledge. Teachers started using different tools and platforms to encourage students to stay engaged and inspired in their academic goals. The students adapted to the changes made in the curriculum, learning modality, and methods used to evaluate their progress. The parents were reassured that their kids could continue their academic endeavours in a safe home setting. However, applying a form of pedagogy does not mean the students are motivated in learning .Motivation to learn in school means actively seeking knowledge and skills rather than completing tasks or meeting minimum requirements. Academic Motivation is a long-lasting inclination to appreciate learning for its intrinsic value, find pleasure in the process, and feel enthusiastic about the results achieved through acquiring knowledge or developing skills. The students actively participate in learning tasks, striving to master concepts and skills, even when faced with academic challenges. Implementing online learning methods during the pandemic elicited varied reactions from people.

Researchers in academia have looked into the effect of online knowledge during the pandemic. They have also discussed how the mode of education has changed over time. During the crisis, online education was a reliable method of learning. Studies have reported a significant transformation in pedagogical approaches (Gurukkal, 2020). Several articles have focused on the advantages and disadvantages of online education (Dhawan, 2020). Other publications addressed how this event led to the development of new online platforms for educational use. (Dhawan,2020). Studies have also shown that the lack of resources has caused the digital divide'. This has a negative impact on society due to the increased dependence on remote educational methods during the pandemic. Various pieces of literature have highlighted these concerns, like

those by Bhattacharya (2020) and Kapasia (2020). Significant challenges, including gender inequality, elevated dropout rates, and malnutrition, are also discussed in the articles (Gupta, 2020). In rural areas, student absenteeism and psychological strain are common problems due to limited physical space, poor learning conditions, insufficient resources, and technological barriers. Both educators and learners experience stress because they lack technical skills and have limited resources (Nambiar, 2020). Unniyal (2020) reported that some students felt anxious about the potential impact on their future as they switched to online education. Numerous studies have investigated teachers' lack of technological skills and reluctance to incorporate online tools into their teaching methods(Adhya& Panda, 2022; Bajaj et al., 2021). According to Verma et al. (2020), educators face difficulties in explaining concepts requiring hands-on or experimental learning in online teaching methods. The literature also showcases how teachers find online teaching and assessment unsatisfactory (Joshi et al., 2020). Articles also discussed the negative impact of online education on students' health (Bashir et al., 2022). Further, the literature also discusses that the new education mode also affects the health and well-being of the teachers (Dayal, 2023).

Most of the literature focuses on the impact of online education, whether it is beneficial or detrimental for students. Other studies investigate the scepticism of teachers regarding online tools. Most studies investigating the effects of online education on students consider students mostly from private schools or include both government and private school students together. Few studies are present on students attending government schools. Studies have yet to focus on how online education has impacted the academic motivation of learners. Having the desire to learn is crucial for academic success because, with motivation, it is easier to accomplish academic goals. Moreover, few studies are available for a state like Himachal Pradesh, which is predominantly rural. It is located in the northwest region of India. The Himachal Pradesh state education system emphasises the academic pursuits of its students. The Annual Status of Education Report for 2022 indicates a decline in Himachal Pradesh's educational level. Therefore, the study's main objective is to understand teachers' perspectives regarding the challenges faced by Himachal Pradesh government school teachers in motivating their students in the academic year 2021-2022, when the online learning mode was common. In addition, the

research would also seek ways in which the education sector can be better prepared for future pandemic situations.

Method Used

The study involved interviewing 50 school teachers (30 females and 20 males) from different government schools in Shimla District of Himachal Pradesh. The sample was select through Purposive sampling. The researchers chose teachers teaching students in grades 9 through 12 as they have been in contact with online teaching the most. Interview appointments were scheduled with the participant. A guide for conducting interviews was created beforehand, emphasising the challenges faced in promoting interest in academics and learning. The interviews began by establishing rapport with the interviewees and discussing the purpose of the interviews. The interview was conducted after obtaining their consent. The interviewer followed the interview guide and noted essential details, such as the interviewees' mood and behaviour. During the interview, the interviewer did not interrupt the interviewees. The interviews were from 45 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes. Data saturation was achieved by conducting 50 interviews. The interviewer transcribed all the interviews word by word. Multiple readings were conducted on the transcript to identify its key ideas and concepts. Codes were generated after meticulously scrutinising and organising the data. After reviewing the codes multiple times, the themes and sub-themes were identified.

Findings from the study

The thorough interview shed light on teachers' difficulties in motivating students towards academics during the 2021–2022 academic year when the COVID pandemic was still present. The following findings focus on the themes that have emerged through the thematic analysis.

Teachers' Experience with Online Classes

According to the findings, teachers could not motivate all the students in virtual classes. About 60 % of the teachers felt they were speaking to a blank screen as they did not get any response from the students. Furthermore, 50% of teachers felt that, despite sufficient connectivity, most students frequently

muted their audio and video during class. In addition, 15% of the students skipped classes even with all the facilities. Only a few students were serious about learning. According to 90 % of the teachers, the students who showed no interest or missed classes usually blocked the teacher's number from their parents' phones. They would not even accept the teacher's friend request on social media or join the links given for the class in the school WhatsApp group. Sometimes the teachers would have to go personally to check on the students. Since most students did not reply in class, the teachers had to rely on the students who responded and teach accordingly. However, there were times when many students voiced their doubts, but such instances were few. The teacher made notes on those topics along with the other topics and sent them to the students. Except for 10% of the teachers,most of the teachers have negative views about online learning. One of the respondents reported that "Online learning is not an effective method for teaching school students and especially government school students as they are not mature enough to study on their own". Other teachers also stated that online education had encouraged students to have an escapist and casual attitude towards studying, especially for students who did not understand the consequences. These students were difficult to motivate to learn.

Students' casual outlook

According to 90% of the teachers, students' lack of discipline is the primary reason for their irresponsible behaviour. According to them, students would wake up 5 minutes before class and start attending it while still being sleepy. The majority of learners would attend class while lying down in bed. Further, 88% of the teachers stated that due to the muted audio and video, students frequently engage in other activities while listening to class. The majority of students would partake in online gaming. Around 85 % sadly stated that the student could not connect with the topic or understand what was happening in the class as they had not read the material supplied to them beforehand. Moreover, they got access to mobile phones and the Internet for the first time. They wanted to play games, surf the Internet, and use their social media handles. They supported their statement by quoting the increase in online gaming players in Himachal Pradesh as reported in the India Mobile Gaming Report. The casual outlook, along with the sudden access to mobile phones and the Internet for a long time, made it challenging for teachers to motivate

the students towards education. This is because, for students playing games was less challenging and more rewarding than studying.

Social media dependence

Around 90% of teachers felt that using social media was a significant factor contributing to the decline in motivation. Since schools were closed, students have been using social media platforms to communicate with their classmates and teachers. Teachers used social media platforms to distribute lecture notes and collect assignments. Apart from their academic objectives, students had begun utilising social media platforms for recreational purposes, such as sharing memes and videos. All teachers have unanimously expressed apprehensions regarding the detrimental impact of prolonged social media consumption on learners' cognitive and academic aptitude. One of the teachers stated, "The students have become dull ,less attentive and remain drowsy during the class". Teachers have also expressed that students get easily diverted from their academic pursuits due to excessive engagement with social media platforms. Students started putting off important academic responsibilities, which had a detrimental impact on their motivation and academic performance. Their excessive screen time on social media platforms was also associated with irregular sleep patterns, irregular meal schedules, and disrupted daily routines. These factors negatively impacted the learner's productivity and academic motivation, as they experienced a lack of energy to pursue their academic goals.

Indulgence in Internet gaming and betting

All the teachers have expressed concern that students have been engaging in online gaming instead of utilising their free time for personal development during the pandemic. It became a more lucrative offer as they could easily access mobile phones because of online education. Students could freely participate in popular online gaming and betting platforms such as Carrom, Ludo Dice, and Dream 11, which have become common in India. The teachers expressed concern that students' excessive engagement with such platforms has led to them overlooking their academic pursuits and other obligations. During the interview, one of the teachers stated that "We hear so many incidences where the students have drawn heft amounts of money from the parent's online

accounts for playing online games." The propensity for online gaming and betting was addictive, adversely affecting students' mental well-being and financial situations.

Lack of Interest in Online Assessments, Homework, and Assignments

The teachers were compelled to resort to receiving and evaluating academic tasks digitally. Almost 90% of the teachers did not favour this assessment method. Around 75% of teachers reported that most examination responses were derived from teacher-provided notes or online sources. The students did not try to write their answers in their own words. This became evident when, except for 10% of the students, the entire class made the same error or presented the same argument and counterargument in their responses. The students had discovered an effortless substitute instead of putting effort into their academic pursuits. Even with assignments, the same tendencies were observed. Around 60 % of the teachers stated that students turn in their assignments while replicating all of the material from WhatsApp. They would then delete the videos and notes provided for the new material. Thus, the students could not answer the questions regarding the material from earlier weeks as they had deleted it. Almost 90% of the teachers complained about not having a consistent study routine. The lack of a consistent study routine was more widespread in online classes than in traditional classroom teaching, where the teacher could ask questions between the classes. Peer competition, maintaining a positive image in front of peers, and receiving feedback from the teacher were identified as factors that contributed to academic motivation among students. These experiences were not observed in isolated learning environments, which was also a reason for students' lack of motivation.

Teachers struggle to engage students in blackboard-dominated subjects

Almost 75% of science and mathematics teachers experienced considerable difficulty teaching their respective subjects without their traditional teaching tool, the blackboard. They stated that these subjects heavily rely on formulas, visual aids, and diagrams that are difficult to convey through a computer screen. Approximately 40% of the teachers utilised virtual whiteboards or drawing instruments and made interactive presentations that captivated students. Nonetheless, not all educators possess proficiency in technology.

Despite these efforts, it remains challenging for instructors to guarantee that all students comprehend complex mathematical and scientific concepts without a physical blackboard. All te1achers believed grasping the complex concepts on their phones' small screens was difficult. Most of them thought the students also got demotivated to learn these subjects as they could not understand the concepts.

Absence of a strong teacher-student relationship in virtual classrooms

A significant obstacle for 80% of teachers was the absence of rapport with their students, owing to their inability to engage with them in the same manner as in a conventional classroom setting. In addition, the pandemic outbreak resulted in an influx of students from private institutions enrolling in government schools due to the comparable amenities offered at a more affordable cost. Consequently, a substantial surge of new students was observed, particularly in grades 9 through 12. Additionally, teachers were unfamiliar with students who had completed middle school and were entering senior secondary school for the first time. Therefore, both the teacher and students needed to become acquainted with one another. A teacher in her interview sadly expressed that " It is sad nowadays that most of the students don't know us and we do not know them. We do not share the bond like the earlier days with our students". Due to online learning, the students were unfamiliar with their teachers and peers. They felt alone, which had a negative impact on their motivation.

Teachers' offline teaching experience

Since the partial reopening of schools, students have been able to interact with teachers in person. Most teachers perceive a significant challenge in achieving uniform academic progress among all students. Approximately 70% of educators reported that online learning resulted in educational disruption. Addressing these learning gaps resulting from extended school closures and remote learning was imperative. About 60% of teachers used a customised approach to address the unique requirements of their students. Almost 95% of the teachers perceived a lack of enthusiasm among the students after remote learning. The teachers assert that students lack creativity and diligence. They have become sluggish and rely on quick internet answers. Their motivation to learn has decreased. Even after adhering to all the safety norms, the schools

suddenly closed due to the detection of cases or a rise in COVID cases in the state, which was also detrimental to their learning. The students who had started adapting to the offline classes were again forced to join the online classes. The frequent changes in the approach to learning hampered the motivation of the learners.

Teachers view on the effect of family environment on learning

Teachers explained that 75% to 80% of the students belong to the lower economic group. Most students lacked a suitable study environment. Approximately 60% of teachers reported that the majority of students' parents struggle to provide the necessary resources for online education. Some students' education was sacrificed or overshadowed by their parents prioritising the education of their male siblings or siblings in high school. One of the teachers stated, "Although the government promised to provide Android phones to the needy students, however only a few of the students could get these Android phones". The teachers emphasised that educated parents could support their children's studies during the pandemic, while illiterate parents could not help their children with their studies. Additionally, 80% of teachers reported that students were obligated to support their family members by engaging in household chores, working on farms, taking care of the castles, and assisting in their parents' shops while attending online classes. The students' lack of resources and daily tasks led to a loss of interest in academics.

Technological Problems

Almost 60 % of the teachers stated that many students could not access their mobile phones even in the academic year 2021-2022 because of economic constraints. They had to share the resources. Sometimes they also miss their classes to accommodate their siblings and parents. In addition,70% of teachers also pointed out that some students and teachers' residences or schools were in difficult terrain where internet availability is difficult. Further, severe weather conditions, such as snow storms or heavy rainfall, affected the teacher's and students' internet connectivity. When the teacher did not have internet receptivity, the whole class missed their lecture, and it became difficult to cover the course. However, when the students did not have internet receptivity due to the weather and their location, they missed important concepts covered in

the class. Thus, this also disrupts learning and affects the learner's academic motivation.

Teachers' health and well-being

As a result of the global pandemic, teachers were required to conduct classes through both virtual and in-person modalities most of the time. Around 70% of educators expressed that the situation had become quite chaotic. They frequently encountered issues such as eye-watering, adverse effects on visual acuity, and discomfort in the lumbar region. Almost 90 % of the teachers experienced heightened fatigue levels due to the challenges associated with fulfilling responsibilities at home and in an academic setting. In addition to encountering technological difficulties, the participants faced challenges locating a noise-free environment within their residential dwellings for teaching. Students' responses to online teaching have been a source of demotivation for many educators. Moreover, teachers encountered challenges reviewing assignments submitted via online platforms as it negatively impacted their eyes. Hence, at times, the teachers also felt demotivated, and they could not motivate the learners.

Lessons for the future crisis

The teachers proposed suggestions for managing future pandemics or crises. According to 75% of teachers, they must enhance their online teaching abilities. This can happen when schools are serious about training teachers on new online tools, teaching platforms, and pedagogy. The teachers should also attend to them sincerely.

Further, 99% of the teachers reported that the pandemic has revealed that some students need more maturity to utilise resources responsibly. Therefore, educating students about the privileges and benefits available to them is essential. They should be taught to appreciate these resources and use them sensibly. All the teachers also felt the students could not make appropriate choices regarding themselves. Therefore, the teachers or guardians should enable them to develop cognitive skills to help the students make more rational and mature life decisions.

According to 85% of the teachers, many students live in challenging terrain,

so it is recommended that government school authorities consolidate all government schools into a single institution. Students and teachers living in the same geographical area could be grouped together for educational purposes. The government school teachers and other voluntary teachers living in that same rural community could instruct and mentor the students. If the teachers cannot resolve a student's issues, the problems could be sent to the teacher with that expertise. They could later revert to the community teachers, who can explain the explanation to the students.

Further, 80 % of the teachers also suggested that the government and schools could establish mobile centres that allow students to rent mobile phones for a specified period by submitting a deposit or rental fee. Upon returning the phone, the warranty would be refunded. This will benefit students who lack access to phones or share mobile devices. These phones may deactivate the social media and gaming applications features. Since the mobile phone would not always be available, the students would try to understand and note important information discussed in class.

In addition, 65% of the teachers suggested grouping same-class students based on their geographical proximity, which would facilitate discussions and help clarify doubts over a small meeting or phone call at their convenience. The group's instructors should also deliberate on the assessment scores, assignment grading, and homework feedback. This approach would promote accountability, competition, and motivation among students, leading to higher performance than their peers.

Around 55 % of teachers stated that younger and ground-level teachers should also be involved in the decision-making process regarding crisis education since these teachers interact most with students.

Around 45% of the teachers suggested that the government, schools, and technological experts should collaborate to develop simpler, more convenient tools for teaching, checking assignments, and grading purposes, along with other essential infrastructure required to effectively manage future pandemics.

Conclusion

The COVID pandemic had a strong impact on students nationwide. However,

the severity was seen more in students from the lower economic bracket or rural areas. Himachal Pradesh is predominantly a rural state that is developing its infrastructure. The government and the teachers tried their best to educate and keep the students motivated during the lockdown. The effect on academic motivation and progress could be seen more in the 9th to 12th grades, as they attended online classes the most during the pandemic. Since fewer studies are available on government school students, this study wanted to understand the teacher's perspective on the student's lack of motivation in government schools. The study showed that the pandemic affected them the most because they lacked resources and parental supervision. Most of the students were easily lured to the Internet and became Internet-dependent as they got access to Android phones for the first time. The students were not mature enough to make rational choices regarding their time and resources. On the other hand, some students wanted to learn but were trapped by the technological divide and huge learning gaps. The study also focuses on various suggestions, such as mobile centres, community teachers, and teachers' participation in decision-making, that could help the authorities and schools in a future crisis.

Declaration and conflict of interest

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research and publication of this article.

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