

# Online Education and Reproduction of Educational Inequalities: Schooling Practices in India during Corona Pandemic

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## Abstract

*In India, efforts to make educational systems accessible and inclusive of the needs of students were still in progress, when an unprecedented situation caused by the Corona-virus pandemic 2019 (Covid-19) radically changed the landscape and functioning of the schools all across the country. With schools shifting completely to online mode during the pandemic times, students belonging to disadvantaged groups got placed at risk of missing educational opportunities. The present paper attempts to study the nature of educational practices in an elite private school in the capital city, Delhi, India at the time of nationwide physical school closures due to Covid-19. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, findings from this study suggest that the online mode of education is causing several challenges related to access and participation. Using Pierre Bourdieu's key concepts of field, capital and habitus, findings from the field have been analyzed in light of the theoretical framework of reproduction of inequalities in education.*

**Keywords:** India; School Education; Online mode; Disadvantaged groups; Reproduction of inequality.

## Introduction

The past decade has marked significant progress in the domain of school education in India. Landmark legislation of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act (2009) brought new hopes to many children for whom education was still a distant dream otherwise. Many students got enrolled in government-run schools as their right under the act, and a sizable population of children belonging to economically weaker sections and disadvantaged groups were admitted to private schools across the country under the provision of clause 12 (c) of the RTE Act (2009). The aforementioned clause of the Act made non-minority private schools legally bound to reserve 25 per cent of their admission seats for students from economically weaker sections (EWS) and disadvantaged groups (DG), which were otherwise not accessible to these

children due to socio-economic barriers (Sarin, Dongre, & Wad, 2017).

Kumar (2014) posits that discrimination within the classroom is still a reality in present India and schools which are treating students equally are not commonly noticeable. Students get treated differently in the same school depending on their socio-economic positioning in the society and these discriminatory practices become a critical factor leading to dropouts and educational backwardness of children from marginalized communities compared to those from the forefront in socio-economic status (Nambissan, 2009). It is unfortunate that despite several pertinent provisions to make the system inclusive, discrimination against those belonging to Dalit, tribal, and Muslim communities as well as against girls, other gender and the differently-abled, is very high in India

(Bajoria, 2015).

While efforts were still in progress to make schools and educational systems inclusive of the needs of students belonging to disadvantaged groups, an unexpected situation caused due to the Corona-virus pandemic 2019 (Covid-19) radically changed the landscape and functioning of the schools all across the globe. The unpredictable onset and harsh spread of the coronavirus-2019 (Covid-19) pandemic has changed the scenes and functioning of almost every sector of the world. As per information status published by World Bank (EduAnalytics@worldbank.org accessed on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2020) on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2020, due to the Corona-virus pandemic 168 countries across the world were completely closed, 12 were closed in select areas, 5 were open with restrictions and only 7 were open. This implicated that the lockdown of schools in countries with full closing of schools impacted the education of 1,276,396,954 students and 412,319,964 students were impacted in countries with partially closed schools. In simplistic terms, the Covid-19 pandemic caused the lock-down of schools for 85 per cent of students worldwide. World Bank Group Education in its report (2020) during the lockdown phase of the covid-19 pandemic expressed serious concerns regarding consequences of the pandemic and lockdowns on education at an immediate level as well as its long-term. Concerns ranged from immediate effects in terms of high drop-outs, declines in learning, lesser school belonging, shrinking of budgets on educational programmes, reduced number of teaching staff, closure of schools, etc. and long-term effects of increased learning poverty, declined human capital, poverty and inequalities increases and possibilities of social unrests, etc.

In India, very soon after the enactment of nationwide closures of educational

institutes as a precautionary measure to control the spread of covid-19, numerous private elite schools across the country started to conduct digital classrooms for their students to continue the educational exercises following the school closure orders (Basu, 2020) and this gave scope to various private technological companies to spread their technological services in the field of education.

The practice of technology-assisted pedagogies and assistive e-learning practices may not be new for many of the private schools, especially the high-fee elite schools; however, going thoroughly online has created a very new and exceptional paradigm shift in the field of education. This shift towards online education emerged very rapidly and seemed to have been into enforcement without reflecting considerably on the feasibility of this mode or even assessing the ground realities for those belonging to EWS and DG categories. Delivering as well as participating in the online education not only requires rather absolutely depends on the possession of several facilities such as suitable electronic device (preferably laptop/computer/desktop, etc. or at least a smartphone), smooth internet service and standard e-literacy. While most of the student population of elite private schools can be expected to have possession of the prerequisites for participating in this technology-mediated, device-dependent mode of education, assuming that the students belonging to EWS and DG categories studying in these well-equipped private schools too have possession of these resources should be considered no less than a daydream. With schools shifting completely to virtual/online mode, students belonging to EWS and DG categories get placed at risk of missing or at least falling short of the opportunity to learn due to a lack of the requisite resources. This kind

of education system may add more challenges to their ongoing struggles and can deprive them of their right to education in an inclusive education system.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction presents a critical perspective vis-à-vis class analysis to understand the scenario related to school practices as mentioned above. It relates education (and educational institutes), family and social class to understand the mechanisms of social inequalities—particularly through concepts of habitus, capital and field. In Bourdieu's conceptualisation, the field represents the context of occurrence of the social phenomenon, habitus refers to the dispositions individuals acquire based on their social positions and capital (economic, cultural, social and symbolic) is about possessions and privileges of different kinds. According to Bourdieu's theory, social class differences produce varied capital possession by individuals, and these differences further get deciphered into their assorted habitus. Interaction among habitus, capital and field yield particular experiences for the individuals. While everyone carries different forms and degrees of capitals as well as habitus, an individual's experiences in any field depend on the match or mismatch between possessed habitus and the legitimised habitus of the field in context. Those who possess the habitus that the field legitimises have higher chances of acquiring positive experiences and others who do possess not such a valued habitus may face negative experiences in that field.

In this context, the present paper attempts to study the nature of technology-mediated educational practices in an elite private school in the capital city, Delhi at the time of nationwide lock-down and school closures due to the corona-virus pandemic. It further aims to examine these practices to understand their

engagement with students from diverse socio-economic classes. After presenting details of the setting and methodology adopted for this study, the next sections in this paper attempt to present and discuss the findings related to EWS students' experiences of online teaching practices in school.

### **Setting and Methodology for Present Paper:**

The present paper is based on the study of an elite private school in the capital city of Delhi, India. Located in the South region of the city, this co-educational school affiliated with the Central Board of School Education (CBSE) has a total strength of 1297 students from Nursery to Grade XII. This school has a reputation as an elite school in this region and it caters majorly to upper and upper-middle social strata. The total student population includes 193 students (149 EWS, 32 DG and 12 children with special educational needs (CWSEN)) admitted under the provision of reservation under clause 12(1)(c) of the RTE Act (2009).

Keeping the exploratory nature into consideration, this study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods for collecting and analyzing the relevant data. Quantitative information was deliberated to explore the degrees and patterns in student's enrolment, attendance and participation in ongoing online classes and qualitative data was collected for advancing the understanding of processes and subjective experiences of teachers, parents and students. Primary as well as secondary data was utilized in the process of this research. Primary data was collected from the school under study and secondary data included academic as well as non-academic literature accessed through various online research journals, newspapers, popular magazines and books. Analysis of primary data was done mainly

through statistics and a thematic approach. Primary data was collected from administrative staff, teachers, students and parents of students belonging to EWS and DG in the school regarding various domains including demographic details of the student population, online learning mechanisms adopted by the school, and subjective experiences of participants.

Due to the nationwide lockdown in the country at this time, physically reaching the respondents was neither feasible nor desirable by the researcher, hence modes of communication were chosen as per the feasibility and comfort of the participants and it encompassed various virtual ways such as emails, video calls, telephonic calls, audio and text messages. After obtaining permission from the school authorities to collect data for the purpose of this research, data figures were collected from administrative officials and teachers on a weekly basis on various educational parameters. It mainly included information on enrolment and attendance of students in the 'virtual home-based learning modules'. Teachers were also requested to maintain a diary to record their experiences of online teaching-learning on a regular basis in a particular format which included aspects related to effective, concerns and challenges from the perspective of teacher, students and parents. Most of them adhered to the suggested format in this regard and shared their notes by the end phase of this research study.

A total of 12 classes from the multiple sections from nursery to grade IX were chosen for this study. Subsequently, 15 teachers, 36 parents (3 parents from each class) and 42 students belonging to EWS and DG categories enrolled in various grades were interviewed using a semi-structured open-ended interview schedule to understand their experiences of the online teaching-

learning process. It seems pertinent to mention here that the present research is part of my doctoral research which is an ethnographic study of the experiences of students belonging to economically weaker sections in a private school. The methodology used in this paper draws mainly from that standpoint. Also, the researcher's earlier research involvement with this school was instrumental in accessing the needed details and communicating with school officials, teachers, students and parents. Most of the respondents interviewed for this research had met the researcher personally in the past as participants of her doctoral research related to the educational and social experiences of students belonging to the EWS category. Data was collected over a period of two months, starting with the occurrence of receiving the information of the school's initiative of starting online modules through their school's Facebook page.

During the phase of data collection, participants were interviewed (telephonically) twice, once at the end of the first week and then at the end of the second month. The language of the communication was mainly Hindi or English depending on their comfort and conversations were either recorded or noted with main points depending on their consent. Interviews were semi-structured in nature however, to reduce the possible biases of the researcher primacy was given to the respondents for leading the conversations. Collected data was later organized quantitatively in the form of frequencies and qualitatively in the form of transcriptions of individual interviews and diary notes. Statistical methods were used to interpret quantitative data and for qualitative data, thematic analysis in form of coding, sub-themes and themes extraction as proposed by Braun & Clarke (2012) was used and qualitative research software Atlas.ti (2019) was utilized to ease the organization of

codes and narratives.

## Findings and Discussion

The following section summarizes various sub-themes, themes and analyses that emerged from the data and responses from teachers, parents and students.

### The Locale of Virtual Home-Based Learning Modules

'Stay at home announcement' came at a time just before the pre-scheduled opening time for the next session in the school under this study. Students were already off the school for session-transition holidays with an expectation of reopening of school at the beginning of the third week of March 2020. In the light of the non-feasibility of students' presence, authorities of this school had already instructed the teachers to conduct online orientation programmes for parents and students on the scheduled day of school re-opening and subsequently running virtual classes for students till school reopens again. School decided to use the 'Google Classroom' app in its initial step towards an online mode of education. Google Classroom is a free application that can be downloaded on computers, laptops as well as on smartphones. It is based on Gmail and Google Drive and has functions for sharing, organizing and managing the documents. Setting up a Google classroom involves the initial steps of signing up, creating the class by the teacher and inviting the students to be part of it. Teachers were given the task of setting up the Google classroom for every batch and then sending the invite to students to become a part of this platform. Invitations were shared via email and parents were notified about the same in the WhatsApp group of which they all are part and calls were made by teachers to those who didn't accept the shared invitation. Additionally, teachers

were instructed to conduct face time with students through Zoom Meetings, Google Hangouts as well as conducting the video conferencing with smaller groups using WhatsApp. Students were expected to do the given tasks and upload it on the suggested platforms, mail it to the given id or WhatsApp to the concerned teacher in case of network issues in uploading. All these procedures foremost require individual's (both provider and receiver) access to gadgets like computer/desktop/ laptop/ smartphone and internet facility along with basic technological skills, e-literacy and functional English proficiency are essential for ensuring this mechanism. This array of prerequisites itself becomes the criteria of inclusion and exclusion of students to become a part of this enterprise.

### Students Response to Virtual Home-Based Learning Modules

School initiated the virtual home-based learning modules via Google Classrooms and sent the invites to each student/parent's registered email id by the end of the third week of March itself. It was followed by the facetime via zoom meetings, however after a few days of Zoom classes, school authorities shifted to Google Hangout considering the e-security issues with Zoom. A significant number of students followed and joined given links immediately, these were mostly the students belonging to non-EWS families. Few needed reminders to enroll as per the given instructions and joined subsequently. To understand experiences of students about virtual home-based learning modules, data was collected for 896 students from Nursery to 9<sup>th</sup> grade. It contained information about the student's enrollment, attendance, degree and nature of participation and assignment submission during the period of research.

Alternate week-wise data on the domain

of enrollment in different platforms administered official on every last was collected from the designated working day of the week.

**Table-1: Week-wise Data of Student’s Enrolment in Virtual Home-Based Learning Module**

Domain	Status	Week Order							
		1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8 <sup>th</sup>
Google Classroom	Total Enrolments	705	751	771	783	788	790	793	793
	Non-Enrolments	191	145	125	113	108	106	103	103
Demography of Non-Enrolled Students (Google Classroom)	General	35	14	7	4	3	3	2	2
	EWS	128	112	108	103	100	98	96	96
	DG	18	13	6	4	3	3	3	3
	CWSEN	10	6	4	2	2	2	2	2
Zoom Meetings	Enrolled	676	715	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Non-Enrolled	220	181	-	-	-	-	-	-
Demography of Non-Enrolled Students (Zoom Meetings)	General	42	18	-	-	-	-	-	-
	EWS	144	139	-	-	-	-	-	-
	DG	24	17	-	-	-	-	-	-
	CWSEN	10	7	-	-	-	-	-	-
Google Hangout	Enrolled	-	-	757	771	784	790	793	793
	Non-Enrolled	-	-	139	125	112	106	103	103
Demography of Non-Enrolled Students (Google Hangout)	General	-	-	7	4	3	3	2	2
	EWS	-	-	121	115	104	98	96	96
	DG	-	-	7	4	3	3	3	3
	CWSEN	-	-	4	2	2	2	2	2

A frequency analysis of the enrolment data of students regarding Google classroom, Google hangout and Zoom meetings depicted the unevenness across different social groups (Unreserved, EWS, DG and CWSEN) regarding the feasibility and ease to participate in online learning modules. Most of the students who were not enrolled till the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> week belonged to EWS and DG categories. Although enrolment figures for these

categories improved over the period, a significant number of students were not able to join till late. Most of the students who were not able to join these virtual modes were from the EWS category.

Further, after the 8<sup>th</sup> week, for the next two weeks, attendance records of the students who were enrolled were collected from their respective teachers. Out of 793 enrolled students, 736 were from the general category,

27 were from the EWS group, 23 were from DG and 7 students belonged to the CWSEN group. An independent-samples t-test was conducted using SPSS to compare the difference in mean scores of attendances of students belonging to the EWS+DG+CWSEN group (N=57) and the General group (N=736). Group statistics are M=4.68, SD=1.43 for the EWS+DG+CWSEN group and M=7.14, SD=1.41 for the General group. Intermediate values used in calculations are  $t = 12.6949$ ;  $df = 791$  and standard error of difference = 0.194. The two-tailed P-value is less than 0.0001. By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be extremely statistically significant. Hence, it can be interpreted that variance for the two groups cannot be assumed equal and they are significantly different. Specifically, the result suggests that the average attendance scores of students belonging to the EWS+DG+CWSEN group are significantly less in comparison to students belonging to the General group.

### **Reasons for Non-Participation in the Virtual Home-based Learning Module**

At the end of week 8, students who didn't enrol in the virtual home-based learning modules were contacted telephonically to enquire about the reasons for their non-enrolment in the virtual home-based learning module. Analysis of the factors responsible for their inability to join the virtual modules revealed that scarcity of device and internet service, poor network connection, lack of understanding about the involved processes and absence of e-literate adult's support was the major hindrance for these children to participate in the above-mentioned learning modules.

Interview data revealed that most of the students (especially the ones in Junior grades) and their parents who belonged to EWS were not even aware of the process of login. Several of them

lacked requisite understanding about the obligatory internet operations and never had even an email account. In addition, few of them reported that neither anyone else in their family possesses the requisite understanding. Teachers in the interview shared that it was very difficult for them to explain the process of enrolling in the Google classroom to parents or to students because they do not possess the vital vocabulary of virtual teaching-learning modules. One of the teachers said in the interview,

It took me more than an hour to explain to them about all this, what it is and how to go about it, and again I was realizing that what I am talking to appears to be Greek or Latin to them, they were not getting what I was saying.

While laughing sarcastically, one of the parents (whose child is in grade 2) shared in the interview,

Hum kha se aise internet wali padhai karwa payenge bachho ko, mere bachhe ko phone me kaam karna nahi aata aur mujhe to padhna bhi nahi aata, to main kha se madad karu?" (How can we help our kids do this virtual learning? My kid doesn't know how to work on the phone and I can't even read, so how can I help him?).

These parents did get to know about the provision through WhatsApp communication but were unable to proceed further to enrol in the module. There was another group of parents who were not even aware of the provision because they do not check WhatsApp messages frequently especially when there are many messages together. One of the parents said in the interview,

Mam, ye sab messages English me hi aate hein, aur mujhe English aati nahi hein, to main padhta hi nahi hu ye sab messages, kuch bhut urgent baat hoti hein to madam bachhe se kah ke message bhijwa hi deti hein. Ye desh

band k time hi jyda problem hein, hume pta hi nahi chlta kaya karna hein. (Mam, all these messages are communicated in English and I don't understand English, so I don't read the messages circulated on WhatsApp. And if there used to be something extremely important to be conveyed, the teacher used to communicate that by telling the child in person. This lockdown is creating more problems, we don't get to know what we have to do).

Few other parents were not able to enrol because they either did not have any compatible device for the purpose or did not have internet services. It was beyond their affordability to have a laptop or desktop and at maximum, there was only one android phone which was being shared by all and mostly remains in possession of the father. One of the teachers shared that

Android phones can be used for the purpose but it is much better to work on the big screen devices such as desktops and laptops.

Further, in circumstances of lack of any device, it gets really impossible to be a part of virtual classrooms. The process also requires a good internet service with ample speed which is unfortunately not an obvious possession for these students.

During these lockdown times, fulfilment of everyday necessities is more difficult for those belonging to poor strata of society. Most of them used to work as daily wage labourers and bread and butter at the evening to get purchased from the earnings of that day itself. With complete lockdown and lack of essentials, these people have to find some way to earn at least for their survival. One of the parents shared,

Mam, kha dimag chal rha hein humara ki bachhe ko phone pe padhaye, hume to pahle uske khane ka sochna hein, jaise ta ise khane ka hi jugaad karne ki

tikdum mein din nikal jatahein. (Mam, our mind is not directed to get our child educated through the phone, our priority is to ensure the availability of some food for him, the whole of our day passes off in just arranging some food for them by hook or crook).

Another parent said,

Mam, ye sab phone aur computer ki padhai sirf amiro ko hi suit karti hein, es mahamari ke waqt me hum garibo ko aur bhi bahut chintaye hein jo sambhalni hein, padhai par to dhyan pta nahi kab jayega. (Mam, this education through phone and computers suits only rich people. In these times of pandemic, we poor people have much more complications that we need to sort out, we don't know when we will be able to pay heed to studies).

One of the parents (A non-EWS single mother) shared that her timing of work from home clashes with the time of the virtual classes which doesn't allow her to be with the child who can't operate the classes on her own. Two parents (1 non-EWS and 1 CWSEN category) expressed that they feel that virtual learning needs a lot of screen time and they are not interested in joining the programme because they don't believe in its effectiveness of this programme.

After the teacher's intervention and regular inputs from the teachers, a significant number of students belonging to EWS and DG categories got enrolled in the programme over time. However, subsequent interviews with teachers revealed that participation of these students in the classroom discussion and submissions remained very low. Interviews with the teachers and parents on this domain again pointed to the lack of capital required for enduring participation in virtual home-based learning. Factors like lack of resources, unavailability of minimum internet speed and lack of understanding



of the process were featured again in the interview of parents and students regarding low participation. Neither parents of these students are equipped enough to help children for participating in the programme nor do they have other available help. When a parent was not able to proceed despite the support from the teacher, teacher asked the parent if it is possible for the parent to seek support from other fellow parents, to which the parent replied,

“Hum to jyda kisi aur parent se baat kabhi karte hi nahi hein, jarurat padne par ek-do se contact karte hein jo EWS wale hi hai aur unhe to khud hi jyda samajh nahi aa rha.” (We generally don't talk to other parents, there are one or two parents to whom we contact in case required, they are also from EWS and they are struggling with understanding the process).

Also, it was reported that some subjects are difficult to learn as well as teach through virtual classrooms. In the subjects falling under the category of visual and performing arts and are almost fully practical oriented, students were expected to access all materials listed for demonstrating such activities at home. Normally in classrooms students have a tendency to share them hence usually it would not get noticed. But virtual classrooms do not permit such options. It was reported by several EWS students that while teachers shared the videos of making paintings and sculptures at home, these students were not able to demonstrate them due to a paucity of requisite materials which made their participation chances much lower. Similar challenges were reported by parents about other activity-based tasks assigned by the teachers.

This economically rooted discrimination is not ending there. Findings revealed that most of the EWS students use mobile phones for participating in online classes because they can't afford laptops

or desktops which have larger screens. Along with impacting the learning experiences, it can eventually affect their vision and other related organs (Sadagopan, et al., 2017) and gradually decrease motivation to continue this mode of schooling. Similarly, the issue is getting more complex when there is more demand for the same facility within a family. In some cases where there was more than one student studying under the EWS category in the same school or the different schools, it was getting very difficult for parents to accommodate the requirements of facilities for children together. Parents' responses in this regard indicated preference given to fulfil the needs of male children who are able-bodied against female, younger, or children with disability. Such instances will strengthen the discriminative social practices of our society.

This situation is not exclusive to the Indian context rather most of the developing countries have faced similar issues. Pokhrel & Chhetri (2021) also mentioned similar challenges in their work on the impact of covid-19 pandemic on teaching and learning in the Bhutanese context. They found that larger class size, lack of infrastructure for online teaching and professional development of teachers as well as non-participation of the students made online teaching-learning more challenging in the Bhutanese context. Moreover, the effectiveness of online modes of teaching-learning is also doubtful as of now. Foo, Cheung & Chu (2021) in their comparative study in Hong Kong attempted to study the effectiveness of the conventional face-to-face approaches and online teaching approaches. They found that students who learned through online mode had lower levels of proficiency in key areas of study in comparison to students who were taught by a conventional face-to-face approach.

The data shared in this paper related

to students and parents belonging to economically weaker sections present their struggles and challenges in participating in a newly implemented field of online education. The possessions of capitals (in the form of devices, internet and knowledge) that online education demands as a prerequisite are often not owned by these students. Further, the kind of pedagogies and activities chosen in this mode of education, such as videos and books from paid sources are mostly not affordable to these students, which makes them devoid of desirable acquaintances. This mismatch places them in the state of “fish out of water”, a phrase often used to describe the feeling of not belonging to a particular field. It creates a mechanism where capital formed through family-based endowments gets further rewarded or underestimated by the schools and teachers (Tzanakis, 2011).

Findings of this study suggest that pedagogical practices (of online education) are reinforcing the strengths and privileges of students belonging to elite social classes and are ignoring the viability of these practices for students belonging to economically weaker sections. Such a situation is creating an undeniable form of exclusion for them and hence disavowal of their right to receive equitable and quality education under RtE (2009).

## Conclusion

As the corona shutdown exposed the possibilities of virtual classrooms for the first time in front of the public, it is speculated to become an alternative strategy to provide education in coming times. Like the virtual schools of the West, institutions that exist and operate in the digital world may be the next level of virtual classrooms in India. As the ‘holographic sentient librarian Vox-114’ in the film ‘Time Machine’, a teacher in the digital screen may be presented

as the only option for uninterrupted qualitative teaching aid at places like geographically far away, isolated islands, less populated human habitats and wandering communities. A number of corporations are already directing efforts to consider online education services as a business opportunity and entering the market of online education rapidly. Information technologies have marked many changes in education delivery models and have transformed the education landscape through onsets of online and blended learning (Palvia, Aeron, Gupta, Mahapatra, Parida, Rosner & Sindhi, 2018). It is doubtful that these agencies which are based on capitalism will be able to do justice to the idea of education as a public good.

While state administrations may pursue the idea as the sole option for universalisation of education due to financial constraints, other agencies such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can push the idea as the cheapest solution for receiving world-class education in backward regions. In such likelihoods, the investigation into the constraints created by virtual classrooms should be considered of high academic relevance. Data from this study suggests that e-learning programmes are resulting in the exclusion of some students from the regular classroom activities who are facing several challenges for participation. Various factors included reasons such as lack of device, electricity issues causing the problem in battery charge of the device, poor internet connectivity, non-availability of support from someone who has e-literacy etc. are causing them hindrances in joining these classes on a regular basis. Their delayed joining and lower enrolment rates, lower attendance, silence during sessions and subsequently low submission of assigned tasks expose hard realities of digital divides and complexities of online mode of

education among students belonging to the EWS category and society at large. While the primary reason for the non-delivery of such predicted and promised benefits is the absence of minimum needed electronic gadgets and internet speed, the principal reasons are those related to economic and social inequalities existing in the society.

Schooling has already been biased towards the students belonging to marginalized groups and centres mainly on the needs and demands of those from the advantaged group. Modes such as virtual learning are excluding children belonging to marginalized sections from the process of learning. Further, virtual classrooms can create a bipolar society where students of affluent communities distance themselves from others by organizing classes privately (like at residential complexes, community clubs or specially designed educational facilities) with the assistance of a

general teacher. When such digital breakthroughs provide more challenges than opportunities to marginalized communities, it is definitely opening up unending opportunities to those who can afford them. This concern of the reproduction of inequalities in education gets accentuated by the reality of the austere digital divide and usage asymmetry in India across groups such as urban-rural (TRAI, 2018-19), rich-poor, male-female and across different age-groups (Muneer, 2020; Parsheera, 2019; Kwatra, 2019; Panda, Chhatar & Mharana, 2013) and those who lack these facilities get devoid from opportunities to learn in online mode (Goradia, 2020). It is worrisome that present practices of online teaching-learning can cause a kind of technological discrimination which can further lead to the reproduction of another level of educational inequalities in India.

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