

# Online Learning for a Tribal Child During the Pandemic: A Study from Jammu and Kashmir in India

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## **Abstract**

The present study was conducted on the perceptions of tribal children toward online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The objectives of the present study were to find out the perceptions of tribal children about online learning during the pandemic. The data was collected from the tribal children of the Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir. The investigator collected data from the 100 tribal children of elementary schools which includes (50 male and 50 female tribal children). The data were collected with the help of a self-made questionnaire. The interpretation of data was done with the help of percentage analysis of statistical techniques. The finding of the study revealed that overall, the majority of tribal children have a very negative attitude towards online learning during the pandemic. Almost the majority of tribal children do not like the online learning system. At the same time, the tribal children preferred and considered on-school education more effective and successful than online learning. The study also states that the tribal children faced a lot of challenges and problems in their education during the pandemic. These challenges and problems include internet connection problems, electricity problems, financial problems, lack of technological

skills among tribal children, etc. Overall, a greater number of tribal children are of the view that online learning does not fulfill their learning satisfaction level.

**Keywords:** Online Learning, Tribal children's perceptions, Classroom Education, Covid-19 Pandemic, Problems, and Challenges.

## 1. Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic is supposed as the most influential international health calamity of the era and the biggest challenge that mankind faced since the 2nd World War. In the month of December 2019, a novel transferable respiratory disease came out in Wuhan, Hubei province, China, and was named by the WHO as COVID-19 "coronavirus disease 2019" (Chakraborty and Maity, 2020). Due to the coronavirus pandemic, all universities, colleges, and schools are announced to be closed. This destroys the structure of the entire education system. Educationalists, as well as policymakers, are looking for many challenges and problems in making the policy associated with the education system. On the other side, teaching is taking place from on-school learning to online learning. Due to these transitions in teaching techniques, parents, students, and teachers are facing many challenges (Tarkar, 2020). Although online learning has a larger number of problems that have come across by two important stakeholders; teachers, as well as students, dealing with all these problems attentively, can have the possibility to produce a favorable environment in the field of education as a substitute teaching-learning resulting in successful results in all respects (Alam, 2020). Ali and Kaur (2023) discovered that, in comparison to the national average, the scheduled tribes in Jammu and Kashmir have a shockingly low level of education. Tribal communities face many systemic challenges that make education difficult for them to receive, such as poverty within the family, parental illiteracy, early marriages, inadequate supervision, a shortage of teachers and school infrastructure, a curriculum that is out of date, a migratory lifestyle, the location of the tribe, etc. Kaur (2023) examined that our social and political failings have been exposed by the current health crisis. This issue forces us to reconsider our development policies and educational presumptions. For students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged or who have fallen behind academically, interventions are necessary. A culture of Taylorism in education has been fostered by the marketization of education, which was brought about by proponents of neo-liberal policies and the values of output, productivity, and efficiency while ignoring the true worth of education.

Nisar and Nabi (2022) in their study concluded that "Being economically backward and illiterate, the tribal children have a very high chance of throwing up their education and they always drop out very early from school education. Moreover, in the pandemic, the gap in their learning has further increased due to digital deficiency. During a discussion, a tribal teacher mentioned that during the pandemic, we assume a greater increase in the dropout ratio of the tribal children as we know that many of these tribal children will not find their direction back to the classrooms. (The wire (28 February 2022))

## 2. Review of Related Literature

Many studies have pointed out that online education is a challenge for marginalized children.

Jena (2020) revealed that the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic is seen in every single section throughout the world. As far as the education sectors of India and the entire world are concerned, it has been badly affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Due to this pandemic, there has been a worldwide lockdown situation which creates a very harmful outcome on overall student life. Throughout 32 crore students stopped to go to colleges/schools and on the other side, all educational exercises stopped in India. The sudden appearance of COVID-19 has directed us that the change is unavoidable. It has brought a change for the educational environment and institutions to develop and select manifestos with technologies, that have not been used earlier. The education sections have been struggling to handle the setback with a different path and digitizing the problems to clean away the danger of the coronavirus pandemic. Rout (2021) revealed that scheduled tribes people encounter very poor gain access to education, safe water, health, sanitation, etc. Currently due to this pandemic tribal communities face the highest issues and challenges to control the position of the absence of healthcare provision and substitute livelihood chances for survival. The coronavirus pandemic has damaged all sections of the tribes including children, women, men, and elders too. Nachimuthu (2020) finds out that the usual classroom experiences do not alter the attitudes of students toward online education and also on the other side there is no vital difference between the female and male attitude outcomes of student teachers toward online learning practice during the coronavirus pandemic. Mehmood et al., (2020) revealed that in countering the problems of the coronavirus pandemic, e-learning is progressively being used in distinct institutes in Pakistan that is why the learners can have access to education from their residences. Irrespective of all these efforts, teachers, as well as students, are quite in the procedure of becoming used to the newest technology. Therefore, there is a serious need to direct this issue faced by teachers as well as students to carry on with the online system of education. Kanungo (2020) finds out that when parents from wealthy families are in a fight to stop the overuse of technology among their children, so, if we look at the other side among poor tribal communities, how online learning programs can be administered as a comprehensive solution for the poor tribal, how they make adjust themselves in the urban-centric education system. Likewise, in the urban counterparts, there is an advantage of computer facilities and electricity in the schools but these kinds of facilities are not available for the tribal children who are studying in government schools without computer facilities and electricity. Burgess and Sievertsen (2020) reveal that the worldwide lockdown of educational institutions is moving to bring a major cause of interference in learners' learning, disturbance in internal evaluation, and the abolition of public evaluation for qualifications or their backup by a subordinate substitute.

### *2.1 Objective of the Study*

The objective of the present study was to find out the perceptions of tribal children about online learning during the pandemic.

### *2.2 Research Questions*

The present study aims to examine the following research questions

1. What were the perceptions of tribal children towards online learning during the

COVID-19 pandemic?

2. What were the challenges faced by tribal children during online learning enforced by the pandemic?
3. Does online learning fulfill tribal children's needs?

### 3. Methodology of the Study

The objectives of the present study were to examine the perception of tribal children about online learning during the pandemic. The present study was conducted in the Doda District of Jammu and Kashmir. The present study consists of 100 tribal children which includes 50 male and 50 female tribal children from grade 6th to 8th. To carry out this, the most suitable method was a mixed research design, which includes qualitative and quantitative methods. The investigator has visited different villages of Doda District in order to select the tribal children. The investigator has used the purposive sampling technique to collect data from the tribal children. The investigator collected the data with the help of a self-made questionnaire. The questionnaire analysis holds four domains, i.e., perception of attitude domain, perception of effectiveness domain, perception of satisfaction domain and perception of challenge domain and each domain/area had different questions. The investigator interacted with the tribal children and collected data from them. To analyze the collected data, the percentage analysis of statistical techniques was used by the investigator.

### 4. Results and Discussion

#### 4.1 Perception of Attitude Domain

In the first domain, there are four items in the questionnaire that address the tribal children's perception of online learning to that of a physical one.

Table 1. Perception of Attitude Domain

Items	Strongly Agree (1) %	Agree (2) %	Total (1+2) %	Neutral (3) %	Disagree (4) %	Strongly Disagree (5) %	Total (4+5) %
1. I feel good about online learning.	6%	3%	9%	1%	29%	61%	90%
2. I like the way online learning is.	4%	2%	6%	2%	17%	75%	92%
3. I want to carry on with online learning in the upcoming years.	2%	3%	5%	2%	16%	77%	93%
4. I am happy with school education than online learning.	72%	18%	90%	-	7%	3%	10%

The table value reveals that on the item of whether I feel good about online learning, mostly 90 percent of tribal children strongly disagree and disagree with the item. The tribal children believe that they are not feeling well because there has been no online learning taking place during the pandemic. They were not aware of the technology before and after COVID-19 when there was been lockdown situation in the country, they were locked in their houses without any resources. Then how we can say that tribal children feel good about online learning? On the item of whether, I like the way online learning is, mostly 92 percent of tribal children strongly disagree and disagree with the item. Imagine if the children heard about the technology for the first time, then how difficult it was for them to adopt technology during COVID-19 and continue their studies. They are not in a condition to sell books, notebooks, pens, pencils, etc. for their study due to poverty, then how they can sell an Android mobile phone, and after that they can take their classes online? It has been a very difficult task for them to remain in contact with their studies and with their classmates.

Table values reveal that 93 percent of tribal children do not carry this burden of online learning for their upcoming years of studies. They are saying that online learning is only the name that they were listening to every day during the pandemic, but the actual execution and implementation were far away from them. Only hearing the name of online learning would not give education to them. Tribal children were far away from education during the pandemic and they mostly involved themselves in doing some labor work, and housework and wasted crucial time of their life due to this pandemic. On the item of whether I am happy with school education than online learning, 90 percent of tribal children strongly agree and agree with the item. Imagine how curious they were for school education and how difficult time it was for them during the pandemic. Moreover, tribal children gave more importance to school education/offline education than online learning, then the question arises why? Because there were no resources and facilities available for them to use online methods of teaching and learning. There was a complete failure from the Education department as well as from the local administration to provide some sort of facilities to tribal children so that they could continue their studies. But this kind of support and help did not happen from any of the authorities and administration and that is why children remained away from online learning. Moreover, tribal children were destroyed and disconnected from their studies and books and unable to create the habits of reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

In the same way, Mrinalini and Patel (2022) found that Worldwide school closures were caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. All educational institutions converted to an online curriculum in response to these conditions, seeing it as a practical choice. For teachers as well as children, this adjustment was a difficult task. With their high dropout rates, particularly when they start secondary school, children from disadvantaged neighborhoods face even more difficulties. An example of a disadvantaged community is the Scheduled Tribes (ST) tribe in India. The majority of dropouts at all educational levels were tribal children even before the pandemic. Without a doubt, they found it difficult to transition to an online learning environment.

#### 4.2 Perception of Effective Domain

Table 2 Perception of Effectiveness domain

Items	Strongly Agree (1) %	Agree (2) %	Total (1+2) %	Neutral (3) %	Disagree (4) %	Strongly Disagree (5) %	Total (4+5) %
1. Online learning is more effective and successful.	5%	3%	8%	2%	35%	55%	90%
2. Learning is the same in the classroom and the same at home on the internet.	2%	3%	5%	-	46%	49%	95%
3. I am able to manage my time very easily with online learning.	5%	1%	6%	9%	33%	52%	85%
4. Online learning is not as much as stressful than classroom learning.	4%	1%	5%	4%	42%	49%	91%
5. There is more benefit of online learning.	4%	1%	5%	6%	44%	45%	89%

Table value reveals that 90 percent of tribal children cited that online learning is not effective and successful in any way. 95 percent of tribal children mention that online learning and classroom learning are quite different from each other. Tribal children cited that there is no comparison of classroom learning with online learning. Also, they thought that we only want to learn through classroom learning and want to spend more time with our teachers, friends, and peer groups. However, we know classroom learning is much better than online learning. We can learn better through classroom learning, by interacting with teachers in face-to-face mode, and can creating such an environment by which we can develop our behavior and personality in a very good manner. Further table value reveals that 85 percent of tribal children cited that online learning is nothing but it is only a waste of time for them. They think that we do have not any idea about online learning, even if we don't know the exact meaning of online learning.

The table value reveals that 91 percent of tribal children mention that online learning is more stressful than classroom learning. They mention that there are lots of challenges and obstacles in the implementation of online learning. Whereas classroom learning has no barrier it is an

open discussion for both students as well as teachers. We never replace classroom learning with online learning. Further table value reveals that 89 percent of tribal children cited that there is no benefit of online learning. They said that online learning is when we do classes through online mode, do some sort of activities online, do some discussions with teachers and with pair groups online, then we can say that there is the use of online learning. Without implementation and execution how we can say that online learning is beneficial for us?

In the same way, Sadiq (2022) examined that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, education is only available online or through digital media in India, where all colleges, schools, and other educational institutions are closed. The advantages and disadvantages of digitalized education are well-documented, but when it comes to tribal areas—many of which are still without internet connectivity—accessibility and cost come first. The tribal population's lack of technical expertise in rural areas, where parents, students, and others are unaware of the use of technology, is another problem. Using digitalized education presents challenges since teachers are not proficient in technology either.

#### 4.3 Learning Satisfaction Domain

Table 3. Perception of Learning Satisfaction Domain

Items	Strongly	Agree (2) %	Total (1+2) %	Neutral (3) %	Disagree (4) %	Strongly	Total (4+5) %
	Agree (1) %					Disagree (5) %	
1.I am satisfied with online learning as compared to classroom learning?	8%	6%	14%	6%	42%	38%	80%
2. Communication is very easy with my classmates during online learning.	3%	1%	4%	3%	43%	50%	93%
3. I am able to cooperate with my classmates during the online task.	2%	3%	5%	-	54%	41%	95%
4. Online learning is really	5%	2%	7%	3%	60%	30%	90%

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helpful for  
students.

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5. Online learning helps the students mentally as well as emotionally.

3%	2%	5%	-	56%	39%	95%
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Table value reveals that 80 percent of the tribal children are not satisfied with online learning as compared to classroom learning. In addition, 93 percent of tribal children strongly disagree and disagree with the item regarding communication during online learning. Moreover, 95 percent of tribal children strongly disagree and disagree with the item regarding classroom cooperation and social aspects of life during online learning. Tribal children felt that there was no comparison between school learning and online learning. School learning is much better than online learning. After the pandemic children were concerned about their education. In our opinion, when there are some sort of curricular and co-curricular activities then we can say that children may be satisfied with online learning. If there is no interaction between teachers and students, children are at their homes without proper formal education, without a proper timetable, and without proper guidance, then how we can say that online learning has helped tribal children? Moreover, during school learning we have several opportunities to interact with teachers in the classroom, interact with our friends, and participate in various activities like games, sports, quiz competitions, etc., that environment can build confidence within the students and create such a wonderful environment and also gives direction to the students to choose a right career in the right time. So, during the pandemic, tribal children remain away from all those curricular and co-curricular activities and the gap that has been created during the pandemic is very harmful to the children. How this gap in learning which is created due to the pandemic will be filled is the big question mark for the School Education Department and the administration at present.

Further table value reveals that 90 percent of tribal children disagree and strongly disagree with the item, whether online learning is really helpful for students. On the other hand, 95 percent of tribal children disagree and strongly disagree with the item on whether online learning helps children mentally as well as emotionally. Without the execution and implementation of online learning, there will be no outputs. The tribal children don't know about Google Meetings, zoom meetings, online classes, discussion forms, etc. so where the online learning help them mentally as well as emotionally? We are living in the 21st century, and the government has made lots of schemes, programs, policies, etc. but the condition of tribal communities is like this where there is no knowledge about the technology, they don't know about online teaching methods, even don't know how to join and leave a class, don't know how to present a paper/assignment online, then what is the output of all those schemes, policies and programs which were developed for the upliftment of the weaker sections of the society. The hidden truth is placed somewhere else, the government has framed schemes and



policies from time to time but the implementation and execution of all those schemes have not been seen anywhere. So, we have to think about why the implementation of such schemes has not been executed on the ground level. In the Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir, the majority of tribal people even don't know all the schemes and policies that the government has made for them. Then how we can say there is proper execution of all types of schemes and policies? Nevertheless, tribal children suffer a lot in terms of their education during the pandemic.

Similarly, Nayak and Alam (2022) found that the digital divide for the tribal females living in the hinterlands is both created and reinforced by aspects of social and cultural difficulties. Drawing from the data gathered from the interviews, the report highlights the need to reconsider the digital learning ecosystem and offers policy suggestions to mitigate the widening digital divide and educational disparities among disadvantaged communities.

#### *4.4 Perception of Challenge Domain*

In the fourth domain- the challenge domain, tribal children were asked open-ended questions. This means that tribal children have mentioned any problems and challenges they have faced during online learning during the pandemic situations. The responses were categorized and the percentage was taken from it.

Table 4. Perception of Challenge Domain

Items	Number of students	Percentage
1. No difficulty comes across in online learning?	2	2%
2. Have you taken online classes during the lockdown?	9	9%
3. Have you a personal Android mobile phone?	3	3%
4. Have proper Computer or Android Mobile phone skills for online learning?	2	2%
5. Have network problems throughout online learning?	96	96%
6. Have financial problems and challenges during online learning?	97	97%
7. Having electricity obstacles and problems during online learning?	95	95%

Table 4 demonstrated that only 2 percent of tribal children don't face any difficulty during online learning, on the other hand, only 9 percent of tribal children have taken online classes during the pandemic. On the other side, out of 100 tribal children, only 3 percent of tribal children have personal Android mobile phones. Moreover, there is only two percent of tribal children have proper computer and Android mobile phone skills for online learning. The data shows how the tribal children have been neglected during the pandemic in the Doda district

of Jammu and Kashmir. Imagine the actual situation of the tribes even in the 21st century who are still backward and marginalized in many ways. Tribal children even don't know about the various skills, and how to use a mobile phone for online learning. However, numerous challenges and barriers in front of tribal communities hinder their education a lot.

Table value reveals that 96 percent of tribal children think that there has been a network problem in their respective areas. On the item of whether, having financial problems and challenges, the collected data revealed that 97 percent of tribal children are in favor that they have faced a lot of financial challenges and problems during the pandemic. Poverty has become a big hurdle in front of tribal children and they can't do anything about it. There has been a complete lockdown situation in the country everyone was in trouble. At the same time, it was a very difficult task for the tribal children to continue their studies without proper resources and facilities. Further, table value reveals that 95 percent of the tribal children have cited that there have been electricity problems in their respective areas. Without proper electricity how we can assume there will be proper online learning? This is the main concern how do the poor become poorer, where are resources and facilities, where are your schemes, where are your policies, and why the policies have been framed, for whom the policies have been framed? If you are framing some schemes and policies, then why these policies and schemes should not be implemented on the ground level?

Fernandes and Mendes (2023) explored that due to the worldwide health crisis and the closing of all educational institutions, the academic community was compelled to reconsider, adjust, and move to online or digital learning environments. The so-called traditional classroom arrangement has been disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Emerging trends in online learning, where platforms and technologies such as Google Classroom, Zoom, Cisco Webex, and others gained popularity, have supplanted traditional classroom settings. Through these online platforms, teachers and students interacted with each other rather than in person in this arrangement. Without question, these technical instruments contributed to the spread of information, but we also cannot ignore the digital divide that resulted between the affluent and the poor. On the one hand, a portion of the population—particularly the marginalized groups like the tribal children—was unable to access these internet resources when certain students were able to take advantage of them. We ought to bring up the most important arguments concerning the digital divide whenever we are talking about the newest developments in online teaching, learning, and evaluation.

## **5. Findings of The Study**

The results of the study revealed that overall, the majority of tribal children have a very negative attitude toward online learning. Almost the majority of tribal children do not like the online learning system. At the same time, the tribal children preferred and considered classroom teaching and learning more effective and successful than online learning. The finding of the study also states that tribal children have faced a lot of challenges as well as problems in their online learning. These challenges and problems include internet problems, electricity problems, financial problems, lack of proper computer and Android mobile phone skills, etc. The study also showed that the overall majority of the tribal children believe that

online learning does not fulfill their learning satisfaction level.

## 6. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic situation has had a very bad impact on overall every community in the country. In India, every community has faced a lot of problems as well as challenges in their education system during the pandemic. Moreover, as we know the status of education among the tribal community in Jammu and Kashmir is not good, as if we compare it to the other sections of society. The tribal community in the Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir is one of the backward and marginalized groups in terms of their education as well as literacy rate. Tribes are living in far-flung, backward, and hilly areas, where there are limited resources, very negligible facilities, and very little awareness regarding education as well as the development of life. So, it is very difficult for a tribal child to receive an education come from these types of situations, and compete with other children who are from urban and well-developed areas. So, imagine how difficult is for any child to receive an education, where there is poverty, poor family background, illiteracy of parents, no awareness of education in the society and family, children's early marriages, migratory way of lifestyle, location of schools in far-flung and hilly areas, electricity problems, internet issues, very bad conditions of schools, like poor infrastructural facilities in schools, negligible implementation of government schemes and policies in schools, etc. The COVID-19 suppressed the education of tribal children who were already facing various challenges before the pandemic. After COVID-19, the challenges and problems of tribal children increased in the Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir, and due to this children remained away from school for a long time of period. They also remain away from online education there was no other source of providing online education to the tribes who are living in the far-flung and hilly areas where there is no electricity and no internet connectivity. They have no resources like no mobile phones, no computers/laptops, no internet connection, etc. So, imagine how difficult it was for the marginalized tribal children who have been already facing a lot of difficulties and obstacles in their education.

## 7. Suggestions

There should be proper planning for the backlog in the education of tribes, which the tribal children have faced during the pandemic. There should be proper planning that how we can overcome the learning loss of tribal children in the Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir. Government should take some steps regarding the financial problems related to tribal children in terms of their laptops, computers as well as Android mobile phones. So that the tribal children can compete with the other students and achieve a quality education. Moreover, there should be at least one training program every month in their respective schools, regarding computer as well as Android mobile phone skills, so that tribal children be familiar with all the modern technological skills. This study will provide some basic information about the perception of tribal children towards online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic providing the authorities with some scope for improvement.

## 8. Delimitations of the Study

The present study has been delimited to only those tribal children who were enrolled in 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade in the government elementary schools in Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir.

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