

Impact of Covid 19 on the Tamil Nadu School System

A case study by Brickworks Analytics



Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary	3
2. Tamil Nadu Education System.....	3
2.1 School structure and classification.....	3
2.2 Leadership & hierarchy	4
2.2.1 School level	4
2.2.2 District level.....	4
2.2.3 State level	5
2.3 Teachers in Tamil Nadu schools	5
3. Educational trends before onset of COVID-19	6
3.1 Creation of new schools	6
3.2 Why do parents prefer private schools for their children?	7
3.3 Unfair competition	8
3.3.1 How private schools attract students	8
3.3.2 How government schools attract students	8
3.4 Cost of education in government, aided and private schools	8
3.4.1: Fee structure for private schools for the year 2018	9
4. Use of technology in schools before COVID-19	10
Percentage of usage of digital devices in classrooms prior to COVID-19	10
Percentage of usage of websites or platforms before or after school prior to COVID-19, by type of school	11
5. Schools response to COVID-19	11
5.1 Tamil Nadu guidelines for online education.....	11
5.2 Government schools' response to COVID-19	12
5.3 Private schools' response to COVID-19.....	12
5.4 Private schools in financial despair	13
5.5 Teachers in dire straits.....	14
5.6 Students dropping out	15
6. Challenges of Digital Education.....	15
6.1 Reasons for non-attendance.....	16
6.2 Access to devices and internet.....	18
6.3 Engagement in educational activity	19
7. Conclusion.....	20

1. Executive Summary

COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on many countries. Governments of fourteen countries have ordered school closures affecting more than 168 million school children. One in seven children have missed more than a tri-quarter of in-person classes, according to UNICEF¹. The state of Tamil Nadu took preventive measures to control the spread of the virus. For the first time, students continued their studies from the comfort of their homes. This report provides a breakdown of Tamil Nadu education system and analyzes trends in government, aided, and matriculation schools before COVID-19. It also describes the various ways schools responded to the lockdown. The report documents the struggle of teachers to make a living in the lockdown. The report further details how online education discriminates against students from the marginalized sections of the society.

2. Tamil Nadu Education System

2.1 School structure and classification

Tamil Nadu's education system is divided into pre-primary, primary, upper primary, secondary, and higher secondary education. The age group of pre-primary classes is four to five years. Primary classes have children from ages six to ten. Upper primary classes have children aged eleven to thirteen. Secondary education is given to children for the ages fourteen and fifteen. Children of ages sixteen and seventeen attend higher secondary or matriculation schools.²

The schools in the state are also classified into government schools, government-aided schools, and private schools, depending on who owns the schools. In the academic year 2019-20, there were a total of 58,897 schools in the state. Out of which 37,579 were government schools, 8,328 were aided schools, and 12,382 private unaided recognised schools (affiliated to different boards).³ The number of private schools affiliated to the state board in the year 2020 was 4,380 and 4,438 in the academic year 2020-2021.⁴

¹ "COVID-19: Schools for more than 168 million children globally have been completely closed for almost a full year, says UNICEF." *UNICEF*. March 2, 2021.
<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/schools-more-168-million-children-globally-have-been-completely-closed>
Accessed September 22, 2021.

² "Educational System in Tamil Nadu." *Department of School Education, Government of Tamil Nadu*.
<https://www.tn.gov.in/schedu/statistics/picture1-edn.htm>
Accessed September 22, 2021.

³ "Unified District Information System For Education Plus (UDISE+) 2019-2020." *Government of India, Ministry of Education*.
Accessed September 22, 2021.

⁴ "Policy Note 2020-21." *School Education Department*.
https://cms.tn.gov.in/sites/default/files/documents/sedu_e_pn_2020_21.pdf
Accessed September 22, 2021..

A quick glance at the organizational hierarchy of the Tamil Nadu education system is essential to understand the key players in a child's intellectual and moral development.

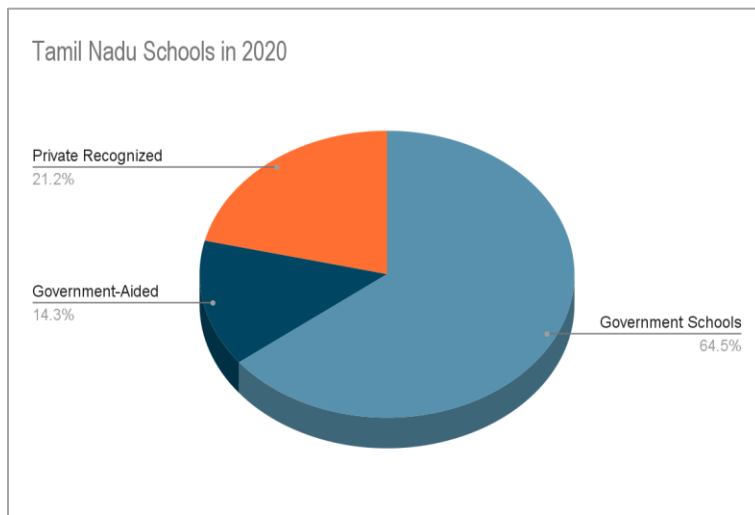


Figure 2.1⁵

2.2 Leadership & hierarchy

2.2.1 School level

In Tamil Nadu, the headmaster is the highest ranking authority of the institution. Each school has a headmaster and he has several roles. The duty of the headmaster is to supervise teachers; maintain records of teachers and students; and make periodic visits to classrooms to ensure that the quality of education is not compromised.⁶ A guide to teachers and students, the headmaster leads the way in the physical, psychological and emotional development of his students. He trains the teachers to bring out the talents hidden deep within each and every student.

2.2.2 District level

At the district level, the Chief Educational Officer (CEO) controls all schools in the district. The District Elementary Education Officer (DEEO) looks after elementary schools. The District Educational Officer (DEO) supervises high schools and higher secondary schools. The Inspector of Matriculation Schools (IMS) administers private high schools and higher secondary schools.

⁵ "Unified District Information System For Education Plus (UDISE+) 2019-2020." *Government of India, Ministry of Education*. Accessed September 22, 2021.

⁶ "Tamil Nadu State Research Report on Working Conditions of Elementary and Secondary School Teachers." *National University of Educational Planning and Administration*. Accessed September 22, 2021.

2.2.3 State level

The government, aided, and matriculation schools are administered by the Department of School Education at the state level. The Directorate of Elementary Education controls the government and aided elementary schools in the state. The Directorate of Matriculation Schools controls the matriculation schools across the state. The Directorate of Government Examinations conducts exams for classes 10, 11, and 12 for all schools affiliated with the State Board.

As the backbone of society, the role of teachers in students' moral and academic progress is indispensable. As such, it is worthwhile to devote a few words to discuss the role and responsibilities of teachers.

2.3 Teachers in Tamil Nadu schools

The teacher imparts his knowledge to his students and molds them into productive citizens of the country. He plays a decisive role in the upbringing of children by identifying their talents and brings them to fulfillment. He is responsible for providing the students with the necessary knowledge to help them cope with realities of life. The teacher maintains attendance records of his students and evaluates the home assignments of his students every day. Entrusted with important tasks, a teacher in the state has to clear several entry checks before he is considered for the position.

The Teacher Recruitment Board (TRB) is an autonomous body that recruits teachers for government schools across the state. TRB conducts the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) to recruit secondary grade teachers and graduate assistants. TET certification is mandatory for teachers in government, aided, and private schools in the state. However, private schools hiring teachers without TET certification, despite the laws against the practice, is happening under the radar!

In order to appear for TET, candidates must have a B.A./B.Sc./B.Lit degree from a recognized university. In addition to that, aspirants must also have a B.Ed degree or its equivalent. They must not be less than eighteen years and not more than forty years old. SC, ST and OBC candidates are eligible for five years relaxation in the upper age limit.⁷

Having seen the faith Tamil Nadu has in their children by giving them the best teachers, it is good to discuss what parents think is best for their children's education and the price they are willing to pay for them.

⁷ "TNTET Eligibility criteria 2021 age limit, qualification details." *TET EXAMS*.
<https://tamilnadu.tetexams.in/tntet-eligibility-criteria/>
Accessed September 22, 2021.

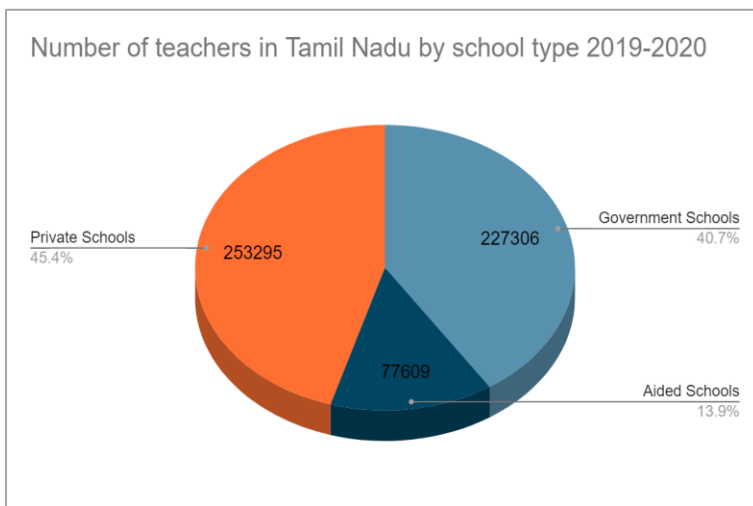


Figure: 2.3⁸

3. Educational trends before onset of COVID-19

3.1 Creation of new schools

The government and the matriculation schools took several initiatives to attract children to their institutions. More schools were established every year for the benefit of students. From *Figure 3.1.1*, it can be inferred that the government led the way in the creation of new schools over a period of five years.

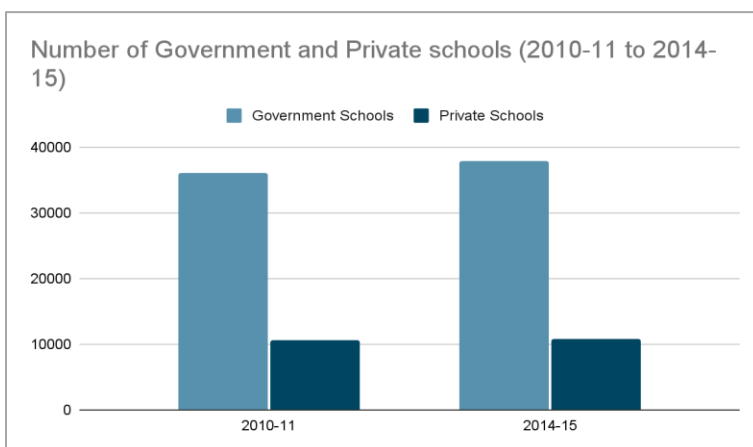


Figure: 3.1.1⁹

⁸ "Unified District Information System For Education Plus (UDISE+) 2019-2020." *Government of India, Ministry of Education*. Accessed September 22, 2021.

⁹ "Report on Budget Private Schools in India 2017." *Centre For Civil Society*. https://ccs.in/sites/default/files/attachments/BPS_Full_Report.pdf Accessed September 22, 2021.

Although *Figure 3.1.1* shows that more government schools were being built each year than private schools, it is erroneous to conclude that students and parents preferred government schools. The private school students outnumbered government school students by over 10% in the academic year 2019-2020 as seen in *Figure 3.1.2*.

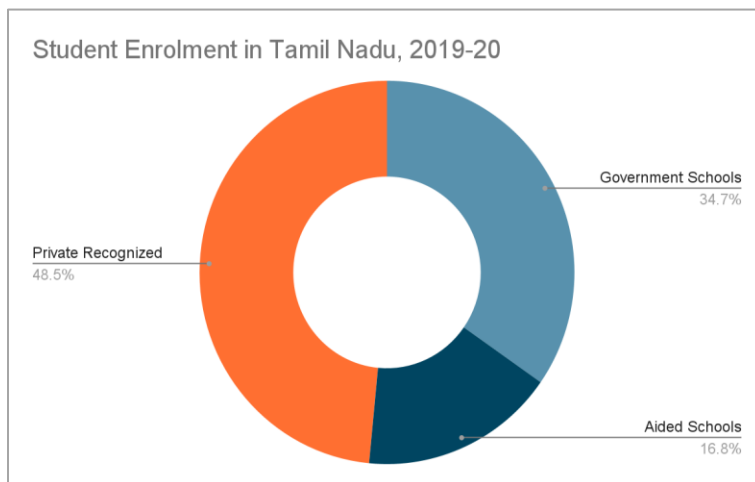


Figure: 3.1.2¹⁰

3.2 Why do parents prefer private schools for their children?

As will be shown, there are several reasons to explain parents' preference for private schools. A study conducted in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu showed that English communication skills, discipline, curriculum, and results are decisive factors in the choice of a school.¹¹ Other reasons like low rates of teacher absenteeism and high levels of teacher activity are not limited to Tamil Nadu schools, but are applicable to all schools in India.¹² Parents believe that English medium schools open doors for employment opportunities and give them a higher social standing in society. Since the medium of instruction in government schools is mostly Tamil, they do not have the same degree of appeal as private schools. Nevertheless, the Tamil Nadu government is taking necessary steps to add more English-medium government-run schools every year.

¹⁰ "Unified District Information System For Education Plus (UDISE+) 2019-2020." *Government of India, Ministry of Education*. Accessed September 22, 2021.

¹¹ "A Study On Factors Affecting the Choice of Parent In Selecting Schools For Kids In Tamil Nadu (Special Reference To Coimbatore City)." *International Journal of Scientific and Technology Research*, vol 9, no. 06, June 2020. <https://www.ijstr.org/final-print/jun2020/A-Study-On-Factors-Affecting-The-Choice-Of-Parent-In-Selecting-School-For-Kids-In-Tamilnadu-special-Reference-To-Coimbatore-City.pdf> Accessed September 22, 2021.

¹² "State Of The Sector Report: Private Schools In India." *Central Square Foundation*. <https://sttar.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/State-of-the-Sector-Report-on-Private-Schools-in-India.pdf> Accessed September 22, 2021.

Parents also believe that the quality of education in private schools is superior. This belief might have more to do with parents' perception of government schools than with the reality present before them. However, not every parent shares this belief. The rise of public officials who enroll their children in state-run schools deserves mention, as they challenge the dominant narrative in the state with regard to public schools. This is exemplified in the case of a Tamil Nadu collector who enrolled her daughter in a state-run Anganwadi.¹³

3.3 Unfair competition

Considering the value parents place on their children's education, the government and private schools in the state compete with each other to attract students to their institutions. However it is not a fair competition. The government has more resources at its disposal.

3.3.1 How private schools attract students

The private schools in the state attract children through extra-curricular activities, special coaching for competitive exams like NEET and JEE, and better infrastructure facilities. They also attempt to lure in students by providing transportation services with a fee waiver for the second child.

3.3.2 How government schools attract students

The government schools attract students by offering freebies. The list of freebies include meal programmes, textbooks and notebooks, laptops, uniform, footwear, school bags, crayons and colour pencils, geometry box, atlas, raincoats, boots, socks, sweaters, bus passes, and bicycles. Besides these, the government offers financial assistance to students bereaved of one or both of their parents and offers cash incentives to reduce dropouts.¹⁴

The schools in the state beckon students to join their institutions through their attractive pricing as well. Some parents are minimalists and keep their expenses to the minimum as much as possible. Others believe that the higher the price, the higher the quality of life. The state provides several choices for schooling and accommodates people from different backgrounds.

3.4 Cost of education in government, aided and private schools

The government schools in Tamil Nadu are free. The government provides freebies and various financial assistance for students, although headmasters of government schools collecting donations from parents go unreported. Collecting donations for admissions is illegal. The law allows for disciplinary action for such rule violations.¹⁵

¹³ "Tamil Nadu collector admits daughter in anganwadi over private schools." *Deccan Chronicle*. January 10, 2019. <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/current-affairs/100119/tamil-nadu-collector-admits-daughter-in-anganwadi-over-private-schools.html>

Accessed September 22, 2021.

¹⁴ "Policy Note 2020-21." *School Education Department*.

https://cms.tn.gov.in/sites/default/files/documents/sedu_e_pn_2020_21.pdf

Accessed September 22, 2021.

¹⁵ "Excess teachers in Tamil Nadu, but not enough to teach students." *DT NEXT*. August 2, 2019.

The aided schools are run by charitable societies. The government pays the salaries of the teachers in those schools. These schools also provide free education. The only fees that they are allowed to collect is Rs. 200 from English-medium students and Rs. 50 towards Parents Teachers Association (PTA). In August 2019, the government announced the waiver of tuition fee for English-medium schools.

The matriculation schools in the state are only allowed to collect fees determined by the state. The Private School Fees Determination Committee determines the fees that can be collected from students studying in matriculation schools. The fee structure for classes 1 to 5 for 2018 ranged from Rs. 4500 to Rs. 12,000; for Class 10, Rs. 7,000 to Rs. 16,000; and for Class 12, Rs. 9,000 to Rs. 24,000.¹⁶

3.4.1: Fee structure for private schools for the year 2018¹⁷

Class	Fees (in Indian Rupees)
LKG, UKG	3,000 to 10,500
1 to 5	4,500 to 12,000
6, 7	5,500 to 14,000
10	7,000 to 16,000
11	8,500 to 18,000
12	9,000 to 24,000

<https://www.dtnext.in/News/TopNews/2019/08/02003531/1169403/Excess-teachers-in-Tamil-Nadu-but-not-enough-to-teach-vpf>

Accessed September 22, 2021.

¹⁶ "Parents bear brunt of hiked fees in private schools, question its validity." *DT NEXT*. June 11, 2019.

<https://www.dtnext.in/News/TopNews/2019/06/11011315/1151629/Parents-bear-brunt-of-hiked-fees-in-private-schools-vpf>

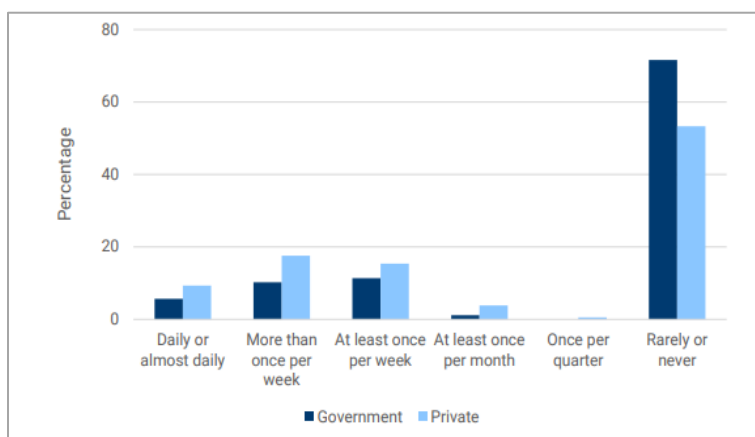
Accessed September 22, 2021.

¹⁷ Ibid.

4. Use of technology in schools before COVID-19

A case study of Chennai's primary-school-aged children conducted by Brookings¹⁸ shows that before the COVID-19 outbreak, the use of technology in schools was limited. Many schools prohibited students from bringing gadgets and laptops to schools. In the schools where gadgets were allowed, the usage of technology was higher among private school students. Less than 10% of students in both government and private schools used digital devices daily in classrooms. The study showed that 72% of government school students and 53% of private school students used digital devices rarely, or never used them in classrooms.

Percentage of usage of digital devices in classrooms prior to COVID-19



Source: February 2021 Brookings phone surveys¹⁹

Apart from edu-tech use in classrooms, 89% of government school children and 85 % of private school students never used educational platforms or accessed websites outside their classrooms.²⁰

¹⁸ "Ed Tech And Educational Opportunity During COVID-19 School Closures: A Case Study Of Chennai, Tamil Nadu." Center for Universal Education at Brookings.

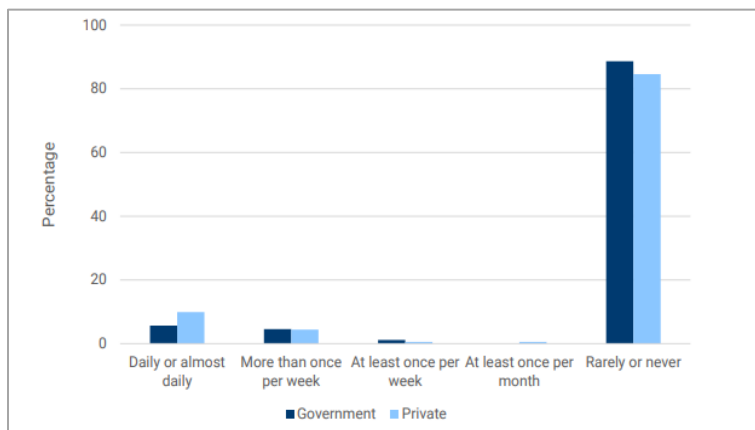
<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Ed-tech-and-educational-opportunity-during-COVID-19-school-closures-FINAL-1.pdf>

Accessed September 22, 2021.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

Percentage of usage of websites or platforms before or after school prior to COVID-19, by type of school



(Source: February 2021 Brookings phone surveys)²¹

Figure 4.2. shows that students were unprepared for a time when schools would go digital. Many schools used smart-boards to teach, but the use of edu-tech by students was limited. The Tamil Nadu government announced its plan to install smart-boards in all its schools.²² Private schools used smart-boards to make the classrooms more interactive and livelier.

5. Schools response to COVID-19

5.1 Tamil Nadu guidelines for online education

When covid-19 first hit the state, the government responded by ordering the closure of all schools and colleges in March 2020. The Tamil Nadu government initially denied permission to conduct online classes across the states. However, the government reversed its decision and came up with guidelines for conducting online classes.²³ The guidelines said that schools could have a maximum of four sessions for Classes 9 to 12, and a maximum of two sessions for Classes 1-8. Each session should not exceed 30-45 minutes. A break of 10-15 minutes should be there between the sessions. The government also warned schools and teachers against compelling students to attend online classes. Students could be encouraged to attend and attendance was voluntary. The guidelines categorized online education into three categories: Online Mode, Partially Online Mode, and Offline Mode.

²¹ Ibid.

²² "Tamil Nadu schools get an upgrade: Blackboards outs, Smart boards in." *The Indian Express*. September 9, 2019. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/tamil-nadu-schools-get-an-upgrade-blackboards-outs-smart-boards-in-5978203/> Accessed September 22, 2021.

²³ "Guidelines for Digital/Online Education." *Tamil Nadu School Education Department*. July 29, 2020. https://cms.tn.gov.in/sites/default/files/go/sedu_e_65_2020.pdf Accessed September 22, 2021.

5.1.1 Online mode:

The term “online mode” refers to classes conducted when internet connectivity and devices such as smartphones, smart TV, and computers are available.

5.1.2 Partially online mode:

In this category, devices like smartphones and computers are available. But internet connectivity is not regular or is partially available.

5.1.3 Offline mode:

This mode of education refers to situations where internet connectivity is poor. The downloading of educational materials can only be done in specific places like hi-tech labs. It also refers to classes broadcasted over television and radio.

Both the government and private schools took various measures to overcome the disruption in the industry. The government schools used traditional means of communication to conduct online classes, while the private schools used the latest technology available to them to overcome the challenges.

5.2 Government schools’ response to COVID-19

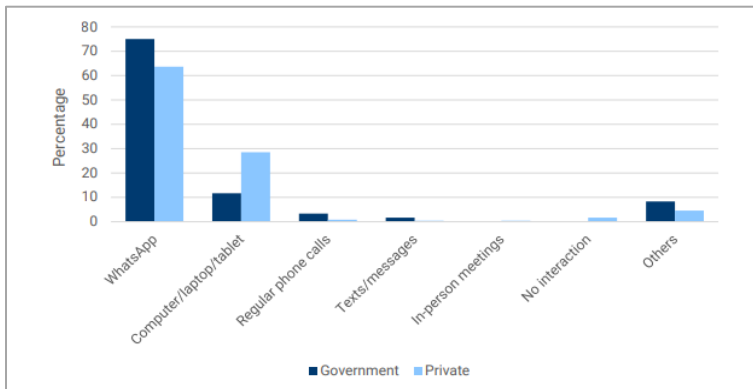
The Tamil Nadu School Education Department launched an e-portal to help students learn from the comfort of their homes during the lockdown. The government’s Kalvi TV aired the video lessons. For the benefit of students, the government took steps to upload the lessons prepared by the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) in students’ laptops. Kalvi Tholaikatchi, the government’s Youtube channel, streamed various programmes for the benefit of teachers and students. The channel published materials for NEET/JEE preparation.²⁴

5.3 Private schools’ response to COVID-19

Private schools took initiatives to resume their classes on Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, and many other platforms. WhatsApp groups were used to share education materials and updates from respective schools. Invite links were shared on WhatsApp groups and other platforms ahead of the sessions. Google Classroom was used to assign and receive assignments; and upload material. Zoom’s free 45-minute meetings helped teachers and students meet.

²⁴ “Policy Note 2020-21.” *School Education Department*.
https://cms.tn.gov.in/sites/default/files/documents/sedu_e_pn_2020_21.pdf
Accessed September 22, 2021.

Figure 5.3.1: Modes of conducting educational activities during COVID19, by type of school



(Source: February 2021 Brookings phone surveys)

5.4 Private schools in financial despair

In April 2020, the Tamil Nadu Government issued a notice directing private schools not to compel students and parents to pay the fees for the coming academic year; force them to pay the pending dues; and levy penalties for delay in payment of fees. Private school managements took the matter to the court. The Madras High Court allowed private schools to collect 75% of the fees with 40% fees as an advance fee to be paid before August 31, 2020. The court later allowed 35% more fees to be collected before February 28th 2021.²⁵

Although the order by the Madras High Court came as a relief to private school managements, they still struggled to run their schools. These schools struggled to pay back loans. Some schools tried to sell school property to pay back loans but there were no takers. The government asked schools to pay property tax, service tax, electricity bills, and road tax. Private school associations requested the government to not burden them. The Federation of Association of Private Schools in Tamil Nadu (FAPSIT) sought the counsel of the Madras High Court to direct the government to consider waiving off property taxes for schools for the years 2020 and 2021.

Many private schools in the state are on the verge of collapse due to the lockdown. As the government provides free education in state-run schools, private schools are at a disadvantage. Private schools have to compete with government schools twice as hard now that the government and the courts control the amount of fee that they can collect from students.

²⁵ "HC permits private schools to collect 35% more fees." *The Hindu*. November 19, 2020. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/hc-permits-private-schools-to-collect-35-more-fees/article33128529.ece>
Accessed September 22, 2021.

5.5 Teachers in dire straits

The salaries of the government and aided school teachers are being paid by the government. However, private school teachers in the state are struggling to make ends meet. Private schools across the state have cut their workforce to 50% in accordance with government directives to discourage social gatherings. The schools pay teachers only half the salary. As a result, many teachers have been forced to take up daily wages to support their families. The Tamil Nadu Matriculation School Teachers' Association has requested the government to provide Corona relief funds to teachers who have lost their livelihood. The Federation of Private Schools Association (FePSA) has asked the government to pay 50% of the salary for matriculation school teachers.

A teacher in Tamil Nadu has not received her wages for the past three months. Her son's school fees are also due. She considers setting up a vegetable or fruit stall near her house to make a livelihood.²⁶ More than 5 lakh teachers working in 16,000 private recognized schools have not received their salaries. They get rice and basic commodities from ration shops and are living in abject poverty. Some teachers have started working in factories. K Mala, worked as a primary-school teacher in Velachery, Chennai before the pandemic took her job away from her. She says that during the first wave she received half of the salary. The second wave forced her to work without pay. Now she has left her job. She is the sole provider of her family. In addition to this, she has debts to repay.²⁷

Parents also struggle to pay for their children's tuition fees. Many students have migrated to government schools. This has deepened the problem for private schools, as they are trying hard to retain their students. As more students move to government schools, private schools are struggling to pay teachers their wages.

The lockdown adversely affected private schools and the teachers working there. But it did not stop there. The government schools fed and brought up many students from poor financial backgrounds. Due to school closures, they had to resort to child labour and support their families. Forced by circumstances to quit studies, they carry on their shoulders the burden of providing for their families.²⁸

²⁶ "No salary for 3 months, scores of pvt school teachers in Tamil Nadu protest." *The News Minute*. July 10, 2020. <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/no-salary-3-months-scores-pvt-school-teachers-tamil-nadu-protest-128373> Accessed September 22, 2021.

²⁷ "Parents cross, teachers caught in the crossfire." *The New Indian Express*. June 27, 2021. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2021/jun/27/parents-cross-teachers-caught-in-the-crossfire-2322095.html> Accessed September 22, 2021.

²⁸ "TN: COVID-19 Pandemic Hit Access to Nutrition for Students, Online Classes Unproductive, Finds Survey." *News Click*. July 23, 2021. <https://www.newsclick.in/TN-COVID-19-pandemic-nutrition-students-online-classes-unproductive-survey> Accessed September 22, 2021.

5.6 Students dropping out

A survey by the Tamil Nadu Science Forum (TNSF) showed that the dropout rate was 11%. Those dropped out had passed fifth and eighth grades, but have not enrolled themselves to the next levels. Among the participants 13% were resorting to child labour to support their families; 60% of the child labourers worked 12 hours a day; and 50% of children earned less than Rs 200 a day. The survey showed that 45% of girls remained in their homes when their parents left for work in unsafe conditions. The girl children reported the unavailability of sanitary napkins during the lockdown. The percentage of children who have lost weight since the closure of schools was 39%. This was the result of the lack of nutritious food which they enjoyed in schools under various meal programmes. The same study reported the willingness of children to go back to school. Around 95% of the students had a longing to go back to school.²⁹

6. Challenges of Digital Education

While online learning makes learning easier through advanced technology, it is not without its downsides. The lack of social interactions make it difficult for students to comprehend the lessons. Students who are used to the traditional blackboard method of learning, find it difficult to adapt to new forms of learning. Lack of access to devices and connectivity issues also affects online education as will be shown. Data collected from surveys conducted by Brookings, ASER Centre, and Tamil Nadu Science Forum illustrate the extent of the digital divide between government school students and private school students.

A survey conducted by the Tamil Nadu Science Forum³⁰ found that 49% students attend online classes and 41% watch Kalvi TV. Among the students surveyed, 56% said that they do not understand what is being taught to them³¹. The pandemic has highlighted the significance of a teacher's role in the classroom. Without a teacher physically present it is incredibly difficult for them to understand their lessons. 16.2% of government-school children and 12.3% of private school students had no contact with their teachers during the lockdown, according to the ASER 2020 report.³² There were also students who skipped classes. They belonged to different socio-economic classes and cited several reasons³³.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "TN: COVID-19 Pandemic Hit Access to Nutrition for Students, Online Classes Unproductive, Finds Survey." *News Click*. July 23, 2021.

<https://www.newsclick.in/TN-COVID-19-pandemic-nutrition-students-online-classes-unproductive-survey>

Accessed September 22, 2021.

³¹ Ibid.

³² "Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2020 Wave 1." *ASER Centre*. October 28, 2020.

<http://img.asercentre.org/docs/ASER%202020/ASER%202020%20REPORT/aser2020fullreport.pdf>

Accessed September 22, 2021.

³³ "Ed Tech And Educational Opportunity During COVID-19 School Closures: A Case Study Of Chennai, Tamil Nadu." *Center for Universal Education at Brookings*.

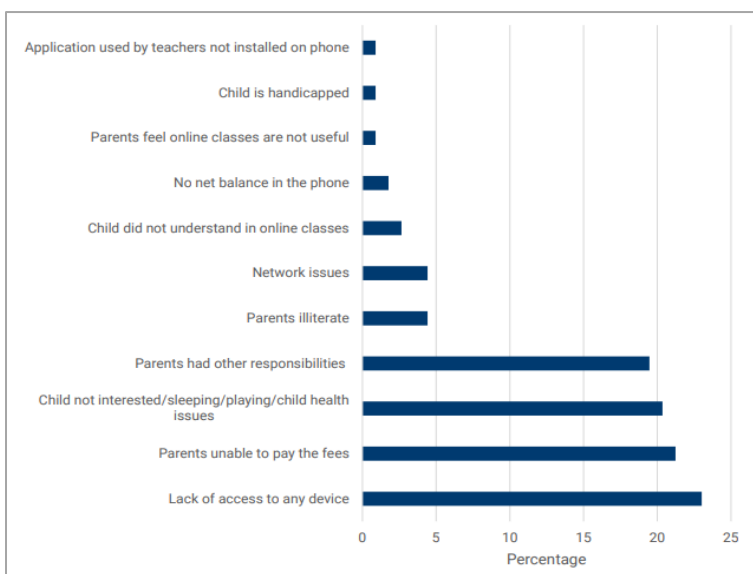
<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Ed-tech-and-educational-opportunity-during-COVID-19-school-closures-FINAL-1.pdf>

Accessed September 22, 2021.

6.1 Reasons for non-attendance

Students surveyed by Brookings³⁴ gave several reasons as to why they missed their classes. Some of the reasons included network issues, inability of parents to pay school fees, and lack of access to devices. The main reasons cited among low-income households were lack of devices and parents having other responsibilities. Students from higher income families missed classes because they had other interests and in some cases, parents were unable to pay tuition fees. Students from high-income households also cited network issues for not attending classes. When one compares government and private students, private school children are more likely to miss classes due to their parents' inability to pay tuition fees. Private school children also reported disinterest in online classes and are more likely to miss classes due to lack access to devices.

Figure 6.1.1: Reported reasons why children did not attend classes regularly during COVID-19

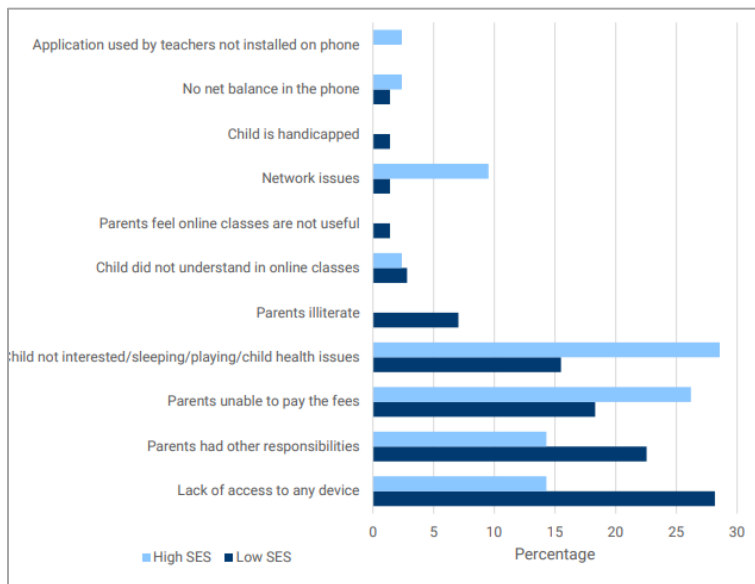


(Source: February 2021 Brookings phone surveys)³⁵

³⁴ Ibid.

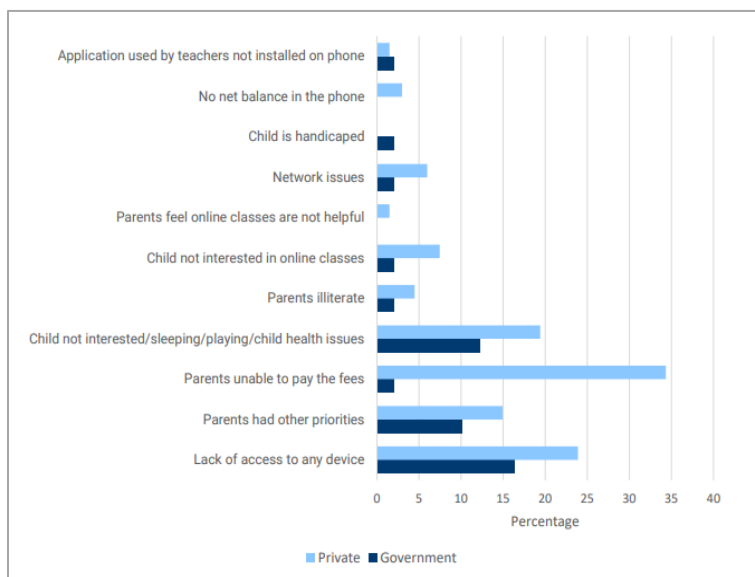
³⁵ Ibid.

Figure 6.1.2: Reported reasons why children did not attend classes regularly during COVID-19, by household income



(Source: February 2021 Brookings phone surveys)³⁶

Figure 6.1.3: Reported reasons why children did not attend classes regularly during COVID-19, by school type



(Source: February 2021 Brookings phone surveys)³⁷

In November 2020, Tamil Nadu government directed zonal supervisors, teachers, anganwadi workers, volunteers, and social workers to conduct a state-wide survey to identify dropouts. They were asked

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

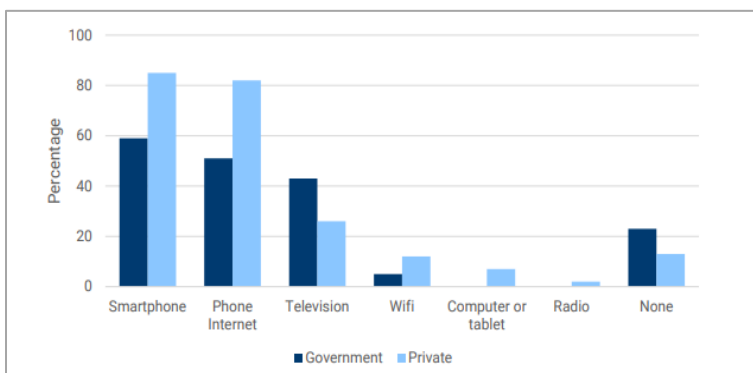
to conduct raids in industries, railway stations, bus stops, construction sites, and market areas to look for child labourers.³⁸ With this information the government planned to bring them back to schools.

The students in the state connected with their peers and teachers through different means of communication. However, the pandemic, together with poverty, imposed alienation and isolation upon some children.

6.2 Access to devices and internet

The Brookings study³⁹ showed that private school students had more access to gadgets and computers than government school students. Government school students, however, were more likely to have access to television where they watch the government-run educational programmes. The gap between private school students and their counterparts grew wider when it comes to smartphones. A little above 20% of government school students and 10% of private school students had no access to smartphone, mobile data, television, wi-fi, computer or tablets, and radio.

Figure 6.2.1: Share of students with access to educational resources, by school type



(Source: February 2021 Brookings phone surveys)⁴⁰

When household income levels are analysed, more than 60% of low-income household students had access to smartphones. Little less than 60% of low income household students had access to mobile

³⁸ "Tamil Nadu government to conduct state-wide census on school dropouts." *The New Indian Express*. November 23, 2020.

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2020/nov/23/tamil-nadu-government-to-conduct-state-wide-censuse-on-school-dropouts-2226811.html>

Accessed September 22, 2021.

³⁹ "Ed Tech And Educational Opportunity During COVID-19 School Closures: A Case Study Of Chennai, Tamil Nadu." *Center for Universal Education at Brookings*.

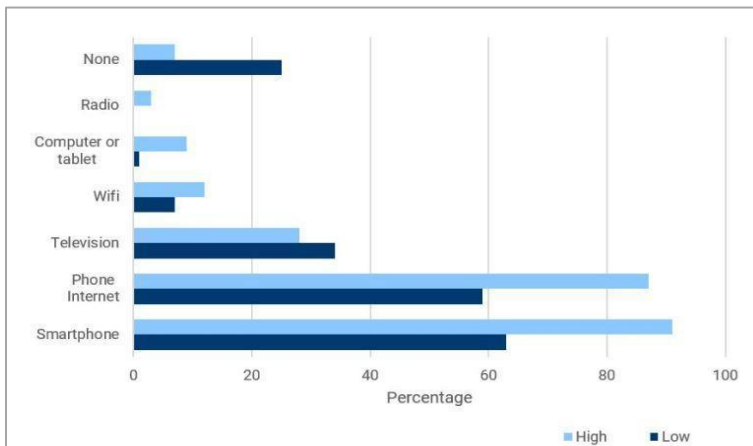
<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Ed-tech-and-educational-opportunity-during-COVID-19-school-closures-FINAL-1.pdf>

Accessed September 22, 2021.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

data. Students from low income households had more access to television, compared to their private counterparts.⁴¹

Figure 6.2.2: Share of students with access to educational resources by household income

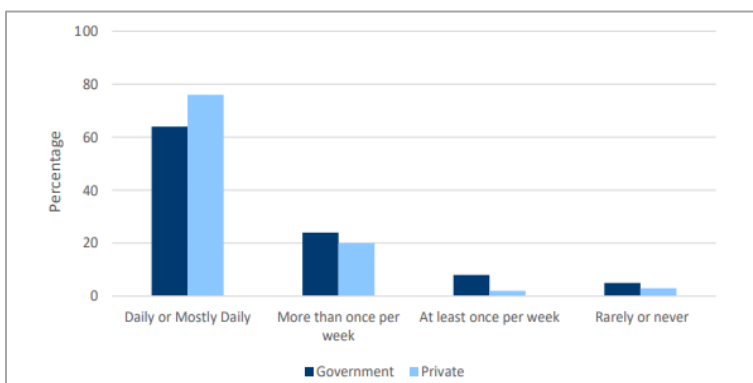


(Source: February 2021 Brookings phone surveys)⁴²

6.3 Engagement in educational activity

For students to engage in educational activities they need access to devices and the internet. It is not surprising, therefore, to see private school students having frequent engagements. Around 5% of government-school students reported zero engagement or rare engagement.⁴³

Figure 6.3.1: Frequency of engagement in educational activities, by school type



(Source: February 2021 Brookings phone surveys)⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

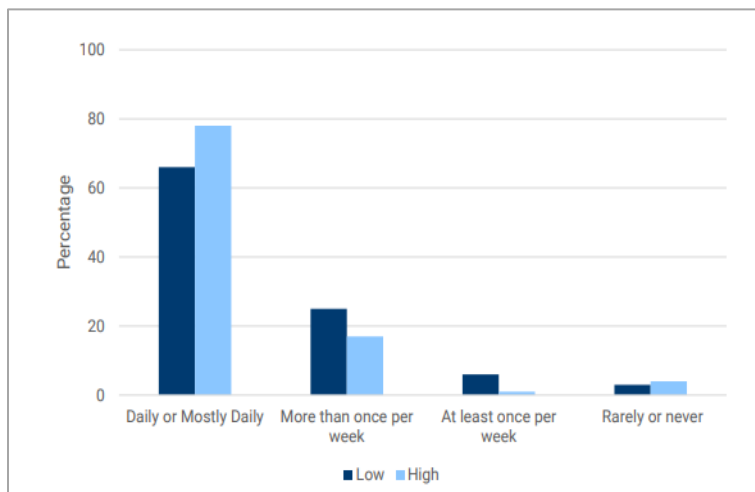
⁴³ "Ed Tech And Educational Opportunity During COVID-19 School Closures: A Case Study Of Chennai, Tamil Nadu." *Center for Universal Education at Brookings*.

<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Ed-tech-and-educational-opportunity-during-COVID-19-school-closures-FINAL-1.pdf>

Accessed September 22, 2021.

When the comparison is made between low and high income households, the percentage of students involved in learning activities every day is 10% greater than the students from low-income households. This shows that students from strong financial backgrounds are consistent in their learning endeavours. Students from low-income family's report doing more activities during the week, albeit not daily. This suggests that a family's financial condition could be a factor that determines the frequency of learning activities.⁴⁵

Figure 6.3.2: Frequency of engagement in educational activities, by household income



(Source: February 2021 Brookings phone surveys)⁴⁶

7. Conclusion

The pandemic has highlighted the need for the major players in the education industry to be flexible and agile. It has reversed trends and has demonstrated how an economic crisis can cause people to rethink their beliefs and preferences. Many students have regained their lost faith in government schools. Poverty has made them realize the goodness of the welfare state. The hardest hit were the private schools and the teachers working there. The welfare state was hard on them by imposing mandatory closures. In addition to that, the government did not exempt them from taxes. The court intervened only to maintain the hegemony and oppression of the state over private institutions. With their source running dry, the private schools struggled to recomposenate the hard and noble work of their teachers. The government exploited the situation to gain a competitive edge over private schools. The pandemic has tested government and private school students in various ways. It has found that the government school students are traditionalists and the private school students as *modernists* through their different means of communication. The Coronavirus' oppressive mandate to conform to the new reality has alienated and isolated some children. They are a victim of circumstances, in need of a saviour to redeem them from their plight.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.