

## The Implications of Covid-19 on learning in Early Years in India- Perspectives from Parents

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**Abstract:** The majority of recent research on COVID-19's impact on school closures has concentrated on primary and secondary education, with very little emphasis laid on early childhood education (ECE). To close this gap, we examine how involved parents with pre-primary school-aged children were in their children's learning during school closures in India. The objective of this review article is to explore parents' perception and involvement during the COVID-19 crisis in order to maintain early learning continuity for their children during school closures. The study highlights the importance of parental involvement, parental access to learning materials and information, and their role in supporting children's learning, play, and psychosocial well-being at home during school closures due to covid-19.

**Key Words:** Early childhood education, online learning, COVID-19 pandemic, Parenting, Parental Perspectives.

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

The epidemic of COVID-19, along with the associated economic and social issues, has had significant impacts on children's education at all levels. According to a recent study, disrupting early childhood education (ECE) programs could result in major educational, health, income, and decreased productivity over the period of a child's lifetime. (Lopez Boo, et al., 2020). Many educational institutions have been forced to cancel courses, examinations, internships, and other activities due to the shutdown and instead rely on online options. Initially, teachers and students were perplexed and unsure of how to deal with the issue of this unexpected crisis that forced the closure of classroom practices. But, as time went on, everyone understood that the lockdown had taught them so many valuable lessons about how to deal with the emergence of such pandemics. As a result, COVID-19 has presented a number of educational challenges and possibilities for educational institutions to improve their technology skills. (Pravat, 2020a). Apart from a physical distance and other personal factors, parents' concerns are thought to have been influenced by: an unwillingness to support their children in distance/online learning or home learning; a lack of access to technology and the Internet; or the inadequacy of technological formats used for children with special educational needs and monetary difficulties (UNESCO, 2020).

#### 1.1. Status of Early Childhood Education in India

It is undeniable that early childhood years are the most critical in terms of physical, sensory, social, emotional, linguistic, and cognitive development. The brain develops at its fastest throughout these years, and how a person is nourished during this period has a big impact on how they learn and develop for the rest of their lives.

Nutrition, health, safety, care, and play-based education are all important aspects of a child's development at this period, which is between 3-6 years. Recognizing its significance, India's government launched the ICDS – Integrated Child Development Services scheme, which presently provides a bundle of six services, including early childhood care, development, and education to over half of the country's 160 million children (0-6 years).

Anganwadi workers offer early childhood education (ECE) in the Anganwadi Centres (AWC). ECE isn't meant to be a drop-off from formal education, but rather a mix of play-based learning. The goal of early childhood education (ECE) is to prepare children aged 3-6 years for formal education by providing them with adequate cognitive and

sensorimotor abilities. Children, who do not receive enough stimulation until they are six years old, according to ECE experts, do not attain their brain's full potential. This is an irreversible process, meaning there is no way to undo it once the time period has passed.

In India, ECE is provided by government pre-schools, NGOs, and commercial pre-schools in addition to ICDS. For ECE, there is no fixed curriculum or technique, and each provider sets its own criteria. Many of these ECE centres have flaws, such as a high child-to-teacher ratio, ineffective pedagogical techniques (most often, formal schooling is used instead of approved ECE modalities of instruction), and a lack of inclusivity. Despite these difficulties, before the present crisis, the great majority of children aged 3-6 were getting some sort of pre-school education.

## **1.2. Impact of COVID-19 on ECE institutions**

COVID-19 has thrown ECE into disarray for a multitude of reasons. The numerous AWWs, present in roughly 13 lakh Anganwadis centers across India, were given COVID-19 awareness training as soon as the epidemic struck. They were required to undertake IEC (information, education, and communication) campaigns on safety procedures like masks and hand sanitation, which, even though important, diverted them from their primary duties.

Other ECE providers, such as government pre-schools, non-profits, and private schools, have closed down as a result of the epidemic, with just a handful operating online classes. Some private schools are collecting full tuition and handing out textbooks and curricula, asking parents to accept responsibility for their children's education. Overall, all children have been left out of the loop, regardless of their socioeconomic status or geographic location.

## **1.3. Parental Involvement in children's education**

From infancy through maturity, parenting implies encouraging a child's emotional, intellectual, physical, and social growth (Johnson B, 2020). When a child is born, parents are recognized to be their first teacher, and as they grow into adults, parents' traditional roles include educating, mentoring, and nurturing children to become strong members of their communities. When children enter formal schooling, most parents allow the school to take over a significant portion of their children's formal education. When it comes to formal education, parents are more of a contributor. Until parents have taken full responsibility for homeschooling, ensuring that children have the necessary provision and assistance to access education and learning (Benjamin, 1993; Ceka & Murati, 2016; Emerson et al., 2012). The elements that impact a parent's capacity to actively participate to a child's education are governed by four constructs, according to Hoover-Dempsey et al (2005):

- The parental role construction, which is influenced by the parent's ideas, perceptions, and experiences;
- The educators and schools engaging parents to be active participants in their children's education;
- The parent's socioeconomic position, which impacts the parent's competence, knowledge, energy, and time available;
- The parent's sense of self-efficacy and confidence as a result of participating in their children's education.

According to research, parental participation in their child's education enhances their educational achievements from an early age, causes them to stay in school longer, and supports a child's overall development (Mapp and Handerson, 2002). COVID-19 has created an enormous impact on children, adolescents, and their families. It has caused more damage than good, particularly for children, and as a result, parenting becomes even more important when children have been deprived of numerous possibilities for their individual growth and development ((Karki et al., 2020).

The objective of this review article is to explore parents' perception and involvement during the COVID-19 crisis in order to maintain early learning continuity for their children during school closures. The analysis of the article is followed by two questions:

1. How much access to learning materials and information do parents and caregivers have during school closures due to COVID-19?
2. How supportive were parents and caregivers of their children's learning, play, and psychosocial well-being at home during school closures?

## **2. MATERIALS & METHODS:**

An extensive literature search was conducted using all relevant search engines for keywords such as challenges or problems faced in an early childhood education as well as parental perspectives on early childhood learning and their involvement during school closures due to COVID-19. The study's data and information come from a variety of papers and articles on the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic released by organizations. Information is also gathered from a

variety of reliable websites. Some articles pertaining to the influence of COVID-19 on the educational system are also referred to.

### **3. DISCUSSION & FINDINGS:**

Early childhood, defined as the years between birth and the age of six, has been medically shown to be the most crucial phase in a child's development and learning trajectory. According to specialists in neurobiology and cognitive development, 90 percent of brain growth happens during the first six years of life. "During the vital early years, children require responsive care, appropriate nourishment, stimulation, and safety in order to develop their social, emotional, and cognitive skills," according to UNICEF. As a result, early childhood education is critical for the development of our country's most delicate individuals. When parents and children work together on learning activities, their connection strengthens because they are able to spend more time together. In such situations, parents may become a source of comfort for their children by relieving their discomfort and concern. They can also participate in conversations with their children to help them cope with their anxiety. It has been suggested that parents be informed on how to offer emotional support to their children during times of uncertainty (Wang, Zhang, Zhao, Zhang, & Jiang, 2020). Parental support guidelines in online learning strengthen the relationship between children and their parents. The importance of a suitable learning environment at home for children to build basic abilities has been well researched (Chansa-Kabali et al., 2014; Dowd et al., 2017). According to research, there are three elements to the early reading environment at home (Korat et al., 2007; Van Steensel, 2006): parental education level, reading environment ((i.e., the number of reading materials and children's books available), and reading frequency (i.e., how often parents read books or help children in their homework).

School closures, minimal interactions with peers and family and friends, limitations on outdoor activities, and trouble accessing mental health support have been consequences of the epidemic for children. Mental health issues, job loss, loss of loved ones, and increasing obligation of working from home and supporting their children at home have all had a negative impact on parents (Fegert JM, Vitiello B, Plener PL, and Clemens V. 2019). It was reported that parents were disturbed by the unexpected shutdown of schools and were concerned about their children's routine. Parents think that most days of the week, a strictly planned pattern is followed in schools, which helps students grasp the significance of time, scheduling, and completing tasks on time. All of these aspects of a structured routine assist students in forming their future work habits. Some parents believe that school plays an important part in disciplining their children (Bhamani, S., Makhdoom, A. Z., Bharuchi, V., Ali, N., Kaleem, S., & Ahmed, D. 2020). Parents were concerned that a rapid transition from physical to online classes, which the great majority of children in India are not used to, was a major transition for children. When education has become virtual, the discipline that children acquire while getting ready for school, participating in numerous activities, and adopting various techniques to study their topics in class is difficult to sustain. The seriousness that a teacher's physical presence can establish seems unlikely to attain with online learning.

Despite the fact that remote learning strategies have emerged as a popular way to ensure learning continuity, more than half of the families surveyed said they did not have access to a radio or television, with significant differences between urban and rural areas, as well as the wealthiest and poorest households. Furthermore, despite evidence suggesting the availability of child-friendly books can play an essential mitigating role in ensuring that children continue to learn (Dowd et al., 2017), six out of ten households said they didn't have any of these books at home. This means that child who does not have access to communication devices or reading materials at home are at a higher risk of failing to complete their education, with the poor children bearing the cost of the consequences. According to several studies, one of the most significant obstacles that parents encounter while educating their children remotely was a lack of financial resources to effectively offer remote learning tools. Some of the barriers to studying remotely were mentioned as high internet data costs, alternate power supplies, and internet-enabled gadgets.

Positive parenting methods regulate the link between parental mental health and children's emotional and behavioral well-being (Giallo et al., 2014). Parental optimism and warmth, according to Eisenberg et al. (2005), might encourage youngsters to practice effortful control, therefore decreasing their aggressive behaviors tendencies. Similarly, self-efficacy, particularly parenting self-efficacy, can act as a mediator between environmental factors or psychological states associated with an external event (for example, pandemic stress) and parental competence. Indeed, environmental factors may have an indirect impact on parent's perceptions of their ability to manage parenting responsibilities, which may result in children's psychological well-being being affected (Jones and Prinz, 2005). As a result, it is critical for parents to have a high level of parenting self-efficacy in order to demonstrate positive parenting practices to help children develop adaptive functioning and emotion control (Stack et al., 2010).

Younger children clearly require additional parental support to engage in learning and play at home during a time of social isolation; however, this is unlikely to be achieved, especially for parents and caregivers who have never attended school, lower-income households, and those living in rural areas. Furthermore, the psycho-social health of children is influenced by a broad array of components elevated by COVID-19—social isolation, parental stress and adversity, and uncertainty. Parents' engagement in homeschooling has ramifications that must be anticipated by parents,

one of which is a sort of parental balance between father and mother (Powell, 2000). This is because, during the COVID-19 epidemic, parental responsibilities in the process of child care and basic education took precedence.

Families with young children require immediate medical and financial assistance, such as emergency food, child benefits, and increased cash transfers, as well as support for parental wellbeing and responsive care giving (Yoshikawa et al., 2020), which is even more critical in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Parents may offer age-appropriate information about the epidemic and the problems it creates to their children. To keep their children active, parents may engage them in board games, singing, painting, reading a storybook, preparing meals together, and indoor activities. Allowing children to ask questions and express their thoughts about the epidemic and how it impacts them is significant. Parents do not always need to have an answer and should avoid making promises they cannot keep, but simply being there and listening may go a long way (Hamoda H.). Fear and other negative emotions connected with the epidemic, as well as isolation, would be a key protective factor for families' health. Parents who know how to communicate with their children about the pandemic will feel more secure in handling their parenting obligations and their children's emotions, which will help their children, adjust positively.

#### **4. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

An overall picture of the role of parents in the implementation of education at home is derived based on the findings and the involvement of parents in early childhood education during the Covid-19 epidemic. The authors based on the findings of the study suggested the following recommendations-

- Parents must be able to serve as role models for their children in their everyday lives, thus they must be skilled in guiding and directing parts of their children's development.
- Parents may take the effort to discover activity content on YouTube, including video and audio lessons, and can even find a range of materials to encourage creativity. Parents' support, as well as the availability of adequate facilities, can motivate children to engage in online classes at home.
- Parents should encourage their children to perform well on a regular basis, including in learning activities, everyday life, and knowledge. During the Covid-19 epidemic, parents offer positive motivation to their children by rewarding and punishing them, praising them, and instilling understanding in them.
- It would be preferable if parents had a particular plan in place to increase their child's interest to continue learning at home during the Covid-19 epidemic, which has been adapted to the child's personality.
- Parents should ensure moderate usage of technology; hydration, healthy eating habits, sticking to a schedule, and encouraging physical activity are all beneficial to children's mental and physical well-being.
- School-based intervention programs should seek to teach parents how to interact with their children and how to enhance their children's participation in online classes and activities.
- Consideration to the children especially from poor households and those with illiterate parents requires more comprehensive assistance, as well as the strengthening of community-based platforms for parents and young children, as they are more likely to face even more difficult circumstances.

#### **5. CONCLUSION:**

Early childhood learning is critical to children's development and has been documented in numerous studies and reports that show it is directly linked to a child's seamless and confident transition to primary school and subsequent transition to secondary education, a reduced likelihood of being a school dropout, and the acquisition of life skills and higher education. The findings reveal that home learning has developed as a potential alternative to traditional education techniques, and it should be enhanced to provide critical learning skills to children at home while utilising the limited resources available. At home, parents may use online resources that are adapted to our curriculum's requirements. The school curriculum should contain carefully designed online courses that integrate physical and psychological components. In the midst of the pandemic crisis, the government's commitment to refocus on this crucial component of child development was evident in the introduction of a new National Education Policy, 2021.

Covid-19 pandemic was uncertain for humanity in general, and for young growing minds. The government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), schools, and parents must offer structure by using regular routines, communication, and creating new partnerships to alleviate the physical and mental health impacts. Although the literature is still developing, there are certain lessons to be learned from earlier epidemics and nations that were first impacted (Wang, 2020). Parents contribute significantly in their children's mental health and development. Positive parenting can help children cope with the effects of the epidemic by building resilience. It can also promote better behavioral, intellectual, emotional, and social skills development.

## Author contributions

Conceptualizations, methodology and analysis by TV and WV; Writing-original draft preparation by TV; Writing-review and editing by GR and WV; Project administration by WV

## Acknowledgements

None

## Declaration of interests

All authors state that no competing conflicts of interest exist regarding authorship and publication of article.

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