

Online Learning during Pandemic in India: Parents' Perspective

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Abstract

COVID-19 has impacted several economies globally, with most countries closing their academia resulting in the transition of face-to-face classes to online learning and later converted into the blended mode of education. This has affected over 320 million students in India. With self-initiative and parental involvement along with internet availability, online education has become a household function. "Learning Enhancement Guidelines", issued by MHRD, puts the focus on parents' role in online learning. This paper is an attempt to understand the perceived role and contributions of the parents in the learning of their wards under online learning. Parents contributed in various ways to online learning for their wards but they faced a lot of issues and challenges in the online mode of education for their children. For many parents, financial crunch, lack of infrastructure for online learning and lack of technological skills to help their wards in handling online classes and providing relevant educational resources, lack of subject content understanding to support the learning of their wards were major challenges in online learning during the Pandemic.

Keywords: Pandemic, Online Learning, Parents' Perspective,

Introduction

The COVID-19 Pandemic brought a sudden halt to all essential services including education. As the lockdown was eased in stages, essential services including the educational sector restarted in a phased manner. Even though the quarantine and movement restrictions were relaxed in various economies, the track to normalcy and recovery is expected to be very slow and uncertain.

Online learning became the new custom. With the rise of the new online model, the education sector faced a new challenge of managing the schedule of such online learning. Parents as well as teachers need to be well-versed in technology to adapt to this new format. Online learning was not only the need of the hour but it is fully supported by NEP 2020 also.

NEP 2020 recommends a multi-modal approach to learning including face-to-face learning, online learning and distance learning or virtual learning thereby focusing on online teaching-learning. Online mode of learning not only gives round the clock facility but defeats the time limitation also. Though there were many teaching methods available, with the sudden emergence of the pandemic, the online mode of learning came as "Best of all worlds". NEP 2020 gives the flexibility to students to choose the activities which suit their circumstances, giving it a stature of "a la carte model".

"On 14 July 2020, MHRD proposed some guidelines for online classes under "Pragyata", recommending a cap on screen time for students with two online sessions of up to 45 minutes each for classes 1-8 and four sessions

for classes 9-12. It further proposed that the duration of online classes for pre-primary should not be more than 30 minutes" (The Economic Times, 2020).

To keep students busy at home and engage them in continued learning, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has come up with an Alternate Academic Calendar (AAC) for various stages of school learning wherein the teachers will keep in touch with the parents through mobile phones and instruct them of the interesting activities to be conducted at home and also to supervise their children.

This Pandemic has brought with it many new challenges, for not only the teachers and students but also for parents at the same time. Parents' role is intensified to observe the emotional well-being of their wards by providing encouragement and support besides taking care of their physical health while keeping them busy with learning. Parents and other family members need to be vigilant towards the emotional behaviour of children of primary and pre-primary levels. Many Parents were not happy with the decision of reopening the schools. "Reopening Of Schools: Parents Not On Board" clearly indicates the hesitancy shown by parents (Times of India, 2021). On the other hand, some Parents approached the Supreme Court for seeking direction from the Centre and States on reopening of the schools claiming to end the deprivation of regular schooling in a congenial atmosphere for the underprivileged and disadvantaged sections of society (Times of India, 2021). This indicated the wariness of parents towards both modes of teaching-learning, traditional as well blended.

Review of Related literature

Singh (2018) explored the scope & challenges faced by developing

countries in digital education including infrastructural bottlenecks, issues of language and attitude from a cultural viewpoint, lack of trained faculty and less tech-savvy parents.

Ali (2019) advocated the necessity and importance of ICT in education, especially for the professional development of educators and opined that ICT like Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) offer a potent stage with low cost and higher efficiency. The paper also suggested the ICT options available include videoconferencing and various websites.

Kanvaria (2020) summarized that the confinement at home due to the lockdown has brought about distance learning through digital mode and discussed the factors affecting the teaching cum learning of educators, students and teacher educators. He, however, also commented that this boon of distance learning came together with a question mark over the quality of such education.

Olasile Babatunde Adedoyin & Emrah Soykan (2020) differentiated online learning from emergency remote teaching. CRM methods are adopted without getting into the depth of theories and models of effective online education, and hence should only be taken as a platform for digital education.

Hodges et al. (2020) suggested online education during the Pandemic to be "Emergency remote teaching" which is lacking a prudent design and development process.

Strielkowski (2020) is the forerunner who branded the digital transformation during the Covid-19 crisis as a "Saviour" rather than a disruptive process. He also reiterated that the innovations in the higher education field, which would otherwise take many years to come into existence, appeared in a very short

time, mainly due to the Pandemic.

Wu et al. (2020) studied the effect of the national policy of home quarantine during the outbreak of Covid-19 on the mental health of students' parents in China and found that the mental health of parents was affected mainly by a variety of factors like good marital relationships, social support, harmony in family and history of mental illness. It was found that depression, anxiety and stress were significantly higher in the parents with conflicts in the family than those with a harmonious family.

Kapasia et al. (2020) enumerated challenges faced by college-going students in West Bengal during the lockdown period and suggested interventions required to build a resilient education system.

Gupta (2020) studied the perspective of teachers of schools in the Faridabad district towards Hybrid learning during the Pandemic and suggested recommendations for policymakers and schools.

Rationale of the Study

Many guidelines have been issued by the Government from learner's and teacher's perspectives with a focus on online learning of kids during their confinement at home due to lockdown. During this difficult time of the Pandemic, the most general apprehension is about the quality of education provided by these online methods together with the capability and ability of educational institutions in adapting to them in a substantial manner. Besides this, the COVID-19 fear has brought about many new challenges for parents and families in the learning spectrum.

In the current scenario, where alternative modes are being used for online learning, the parent's role has become even more significant

as they spend maximum time with the children's waking hours. Their behaviour, attitude and cooperation will have a mighty impact on their kids. Parents therefore must support their children's cognitive, affective and psychomotor development. Parents' role is crucial and needs to be further studied at length. Hence the purpose of this study is to find the perspective of parents towards the online learning model during this COVID-19 Pandemic.

Research Questions

1. Are the parents aware of the guidelines issued by the government regarding online learning of children at home during the Pandemic?
2. What role and contributions have the parents played/made in their ward's online learning during the Pandemic?
3. What are the challenges faced by parents in their ward's online learning during the Pandemic?

Objectives

1. To study the contributions of the Parents in their ward's online learning during the Pandemic in India.
2. To find out the challenges faced by the parents in their ward's online learning during the Pandemic in India.

Sample

The technique of Purposive sampling was used to collect the data from 93 parents of school-going students for classes k -12 from Faridabad.

Tools

An online survey was conducted to collect the information. A structured questionnaire was designed by authors in Google forms in consultation with

colleagues & experts from the field. On the basis of discussion and the opinion of experts, the dimensions were listed for opportunities and challenges in the questionnaire. The dimensions were technology, discipline, assessment & supervision, socio-economic factors, digital competency, compatibility, workload, health problems, digital divide, human & pet intrusion, flexibility, interactivity, autonomy etc. A rough draft consisting of 35 statements was prepared on the basis of the dimensions. After a try-out, 28 statements were finally shortlisted for the questionnaire. Statements were then placed in logical sequence (dimension-wise). This structured questionnaire was sent to the parents through WhatsApp and E-mail. The survey included some questions designed to reveal parents' awareness of guidelines issued by the Government regarding online learning during school closures at the time of the Pandemic. Two open-ended questions queried parents about their experience while children were being educated at home during COVID-19 school closures.

Analysis of Data

Descriptive statistics was carried out to

understand the perspective of Parents. Analysis was done using Google analytics. Analysis of the data was done using statistical tools like a percentage.

Findings of the study

Nearly the majority (59 per cent) of the parents were aware of the Alternative Academic Calendar (AAC) and Learning Enhancement Guidelines issued by NCERT regarding online education and capping screen time for students. Further, the parents (62 per cent) informed that their ward's school was implementing NCERT's Alternative Academic Calendar/guidelines for attending online classes. A large number (41 per cent) of the parents were not aware of AAC as schools have not shared any such guidelines with them.

Most (88 per cent) of the parents told that their wards were using laptops and desktops for online learning at home during the Pandemic. Few (12 per cent) of them reported that their wards had to study through textbooks /books available at home during the Pandemic.

Table-1: Contribution in child's online learning at home during the Pandemic (n= 93)

Parameter	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<i>I am able to contribute to my child's online learning at home during Pandemic</i>		
Through my ICT skills in joining the class (while operating Google meet, Google classroom, YouTube, YouTube Live, Zoom meetings etc.)	32	35
By increasing my ICT skills on my own	17	18
By updating my ICT skills through learning support from my ward's school	11	12
By increasing my subject knowledge	22	24
By providing dedicated study place to my child	38	41

By providing all the required resources in order to study online at home	49	53
By helping in completing home assignments given to my ward	47	50
By providing help from online material available for completing assignments	25	27

Half (53 per cent) of the parents contributed to their ward's online learning during the Pandemic by providing all the required resources in order to study online at home and 41 per cent of the parents could provide a dedicated place for study to avoid any disturbances during online learning at home during the Pandemic.

Some (35 per cent) of the parents could contribute towards their ward's online learning in joining the class and handling the Google meet, Google Classroom, YouTube, YouTube live, zoom meetings etc. Few (18 per cent) of the parents accepted that they had to upgrade their ICT skills on their own to help their wards in their online classes and

studies at home during the Pandemic, whereas 12 per cent of the parents got support from the school of their wards in updating their ICT skills.

Half (50 per cent) of the parents contributed to the learning of their wards by helping in completing and submitting/sending assignments in online mode. While some (24 per cent) of the parents reported that they had to update their subject knowledge to contribute towards their wards' online learning at home during the pandemic. Some (27 per cent) of the parents had to search for online material to help their wards in their online learning at home during the Pandemic.

Table-2: Challenges faced by the ward during online learning at home during Pandemic (n = 93)

Parameter	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
All the subjects cannot be taught effectively during online classes specially subjects with practical and laboratory sessions	87	94
Lack of physical proximity with peer group hampering emotional and mental well-being of the child	79	85
Complements/encouragement by teachers do not seem to have same positive effect as in traditional teaching	32	35
Background noise of announcement from teachers' side while classes are being conducted	11	12
Commands to pets and interruption from courier deliveries	14	15
Disturbance by phone calls/messages while attending class through phone	19	21
Added pressure as principal and parents are watching their live class performance	25	27

Almost all (94 per cent) parents had the opinion that all the subjects cannot be taught effectively during online classes, especially subjects with practical and laboratory sessions. Most (85 per cent) of the parents reported that lack of physical proximity with the peer group was the biggest contributor in hampering a child's mental and emotional well-being.

Regarding the teaching-learning environment, they reported different kinds of issues and challenges faced by their wards in online learning such as disturbance by phone calls/messages

while attending online classes through phone (21 per cent), background noise due to announcements from teachers' side, commands to the pets and courier deliveries at home etc. Some (35 per cent) of the parents also mentioned that compliments and encouragement by teachers did not seem to have the same positive effect as traditional teaching.

Some (27 per cent) of the parents felt that students were under added pressure as parents and teachers were watching their live class performances at home during the pandemic.

Table-3: Contribution towards mental well-being while online learning during the pandemic (n = 93)

Parameter	Frequency (n)	Percentage
<i>I am able to contribute to my ward's mental wellbeing</i>		
By involving the child in fun-filled activities	54	58
By involving the child in physical activities	54	58
By keeping a check on posture while online studies	19	21
By educating/implementing a healthy lifestyle	49	53
By introducing a screen-free zone at home	30	32
By talking with my ward about responsible use of internet	38	41
By discussing with my ward netiquette	30	32

Table 3 shows that the parents contributed to their wards' mental well-being by involving them in some physical and fun-filled activities, educating and implementing a healthy lifestyle, continuously check on their posture while online studies, keeping out their wards for some time from mobile/laptops and talking to their kids regarding the responsible use of the internet and making aware of netiquette etc.

It shows that some of the parents could contribute meaningfully in supporting their wards during the Pandemic. There

were parents who could not provide support to their wards to keep them mentally healthy so that the children can focus on learning in online mode.

Discussion

It was found that more than half of the parents (59 per cent) were aware of the Alternate Academic Calendar (AAC) issued by NCERT and their ward's school conveyed the guidelines online through phone messages or emails. This clearly indicates that parents were concerned with the education of their wards even during the pandemic period to cut

down the learning loss created due to the sudden emergence of the COVID-19 resulting in the closure of schools.

Some parents played a significant role in their wards' learning during Pandemic in India. They contributed by providing required resources to their children for online learning such as mobile/laptops with internet in order to study online at home.

Annual Status of Education Report 2020, also highlighted that 54.29 per cent of the population was subscribed to the internet in 2019-20 and there was a substantial increase in the broadband subscribers/users in the year 2019-20 during the Pandemic in India, which indicates that parents contributed in their ward's learning by providing them infrastructure required for online classes at home during the Pandemic. Some parents also provided academic support in explaining the concepts and completing their ward's online assignments. Some parents had to upgrade their subject knowledge and improved ICT skills to contribute towards their wards online learning at home.

More importantly, parents contributed to their wards' mental well-being by involving them in physical and fun-filled activities, educating and implementing healthy lifestyle keeping the child away from mobile/laptop for some time at home. Some parents counsel their kids regarding the responsible use of the internet.

This implies that some parents not only contributed by providing necessary infrastructure and technology to their wards but tried to maintain a positive attitude towards learning and looked into the emotional and physical well-being of the students which certainly works as a main driving force behind sailing through this tough time of Pandemic. OECD skills outlook 2021

throws light on the significant role played by parents' emotional support to students as a main driving force behind their learning achievements. A strong positive relationship between learning achievements and emotional support provided by parents was reported. While a positive attitude plays an important role in achieving learning goals during normal times, it becomes all the more significant during this challenging time, when students are facing challenges of online learning (OECD, 2021).

Though parents showed a positive attitude towards online learning for their wards and contributed to support the children in online education, they faced a lot of issues and challenges in the online mode of education for their children. Some parents found the adverse effect on the discipline of the students as there was no face-to-face interaction with the teachers. The majority of parents felt that practical subjects which require laboratory sessions and activities could not be taught effectively online. The online assessment was also found to be a challenge. "Offline assessment continues to retain its credibility" clearly shows that the integrity of online assessment is questionable (Times of India, 2022). Many parents found that the lack of proximity with the peer group was hampering a child's mental and emotional well-being. Some parents reported disturbance by phone calls/messages, courier deliveries and commands to pets and background announcement noise in the school as one of the challenges in online teaching-learning during the Pandemic. Though some of the parents were considering their presence in their wards' classes as a support to their learning while others considered it as added pressure on their children as well as an additional responsibility of helping schools in teaching kids at home during the pandemic. Abuhammad (2020) also observed that parents faced many

types of barriers like financial, technical and logistical to help their children with distance learning during the Pandemic.

Conclusion

The study found that some parents were not only restricted to their daily routine tasks but they had to shoulder the additional responsibility of helping their wards by providing the required resources to their children for online learning such as mobile/laptops with internet in order to study online at home, involving them in physical and fun-filled activities, educating and implementing healthy lifestyle keeping the child away from mobile/laptop for some time at home in order to keep their wards mentally healthy, supporting schools in various ways etc.

The majority of parents contributed in various ways in online learning for their wards but they faced a lot of issues and challenges in the online mode of education for their children. For many parents, financial crunch, lack of infrastructure for online learning and lack of technological skills to help their wards in handling online classes and providing relevant educational resources, lack of subject content understanding to support the learning of their wards were major challenges in

online learning during the Pandemic.

It is not sure that we will have Covid free scenario in the near future, which leads us to ensure covid-appropriate measures all the time and it should be Non-negotiable. Covid environment leads to the situation where Blended learning will stay so long as the Pandemic lasts.

We have to build on and strengthen family support by increasing parents' ICT skills, developing a positive attitude towards online learning and enhancing their awareness of judicious use of the internet with safety and security in order to make them able to counsel their wards for responsible use of the internet and making them aware of netiquette etc.

Implications

Based on the findings, school management can devise ways and means to bring parents into their fold for the enhancement of their contribution towards their ward's overall growth. Findings can help policymakers to incorporate and implement various plans of action under national-level policies to provide quality education to all the stakeholders including parents even during the time of the Pandemic.

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