

Chapter 8

Remote Literacy Interventions With Children During COVID-19: Understanding the Access, Use, and Effect Factors in the Indian Context

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ABSTRACT

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic resulted in large-scale educational disruptions for school-going children around the world. India was among the worst hit, as multiple lockdowns put a sizeable percentage of Indian children, out of school which resulted in accumulated learning gaps, particularly for children coming from marginalized socio-economic backgrounds. To confront this learning crisis and curricular deficits, Room to Read India, a global organization working towards a world free of illiteracy and gender inequality, adopted multiple remote literacy interventions to reach out to children from vulnerable families. The study recommends that a blended hybrid mode of education, incorporating both online and offline mediums of learning, is significant in bridging the digital divide for marginalized children, who do not have adequate access or knowledge about digital resources. It was inferred that successful digital learning for children cannot take place in isolation and a dynamic partnership between teachers and parents is essential to reach out to vulnerable children.

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INTRODUCTION

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the globe, a majority of countries undertook strict precautionary measures to curb the spread of the virus, including widespread shutting down of socio-economic and educational activities (Anderson et al., 2020). This resulted in large-scale literacy and learning disruptions for school-going children around the world (Kaffenberger, 2021). Countries such as India, which were among the worst hit by the virus, witnessed a long-term lockdown of many months together (Khlaif & Salha, 2020; Mishra, 2020).

Following the closure of schools, a sizeable Indian children population were kept away from educational institutions, resulting in widened and accumulated learning gaps, particularly for children coming from marginalized socio-economic backgrounds (Jena, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2020). Primary class children have been the most severely afflicted in India, with over 143 million (UNESCO, 2020).

The learning crisis and curricular deficits were acute for children of vulnerable families who did not have adequate access or knowledge about digital resources (Mishra, 2020). As unemployment was rampant, parents from low-income families did not even have enough resources for two square meals a day and children's uninterrupted education was last on priority list (Khanna & Kareem, 2021). Even if online-classes were accessed at home, preference was usually given to the boy child, leaving the girl child to be primarily engaged in household chores and child-care. It was also reported that there was a rise in cases of girl-child marriage, school dropouts and child-abuse.

In these unprecedented times of worldwide learning crises, many governmental and non-governmental international organizations, working in the field of child-education, sought to re-invent and re-design their interventions (Jena, 2020). Room to Read (RTR), a global organization focusing on literacy and gender equality in education for millions of children in third-world countries, also adapted its on-field programs as a COVID19 response strategy.

Room to Read's Literacy Intervention During Covid19

It has been researched that the school closures can result in hindrances in routine patterns of studying and can produce substantial long-term learning gaps (World Bank, 2020; Kuhfeld et al., 2020). As a result, children miss out on acquiring foundational literacy skills and lag behind their age-appropriate learning level (Beatty and Pritchett, 2015). Along with unprecedented learning gaps, there are very real possibilities of children dropping out, getting involved in activities of child-labor to support thier family income and never returning back to education, once school reopen (UNESCO et al., 2020).

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