
Adapting Remote Learning Practices for Early Childhood and Elementary School Classrooms in India

By

Prof. Pravat Kumar Dhal

Head Department of Education Magadh University, Bodhgaya,

India <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4318-2468> Email: pravatkumar.dhal@gmail.com

Abstract

The present crisis of the world compelled to teachers, educators, administrators, academia and all the stake holders of education to think deeply about alternative strategies of teaching-learning during Post Kovid Pandemic. Though education is the panacea for all evils in society, it is no doubt that since April 2020, the teaching learning process of India is jeopardized. Some advanced schools established in urban areas are adopting digital learning. The major learners are deprived of from this opportunities. According to ASER2018 report, enrolment of rural India elementary learners (5-14 age group) is 95%. They mostly depend on Government schools which are not well equipped with advanced technology. Maintaining school education for such a huge number of learners is a challenging task. This circumstance enforced to paradigm shift of education from traditional learning to use mass media, electronic device, mobile technology, online learning, blended learning or hybrid learning. Adequate resources, proper training, contextual understanding and fulfil the shortage of teachers are required to make it more meaningful. Teachers, parents, learners, educators, administrators and academicians should prepare to face the new challenges and Government should provide necessary help to combat this challenge.

Key Words: *Remote Learning Practices, Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Indian School Classroom, Online learning, asynchronous learning, synchronous learning*

Background

“Necessity is the mother of invention.” The present situation of the world compelled to teachers, educators, administrators, academia and all the stake holders of education to think deeply alternative strategies of teaching-learning during Kovid Pandemic. Though education is the panacea for all evils in society, it is no doubt that since April 2020, the teaching learning process of India is jeopardized. To some extent, the higher classes are maintained through digital platforms. Some advanced schools established in urban areas are adopting digital learning. The major learners are deprived of from this opportunities. According to UNESCO and NWEA, ‘certain groups of students have suffered greater setbacks and will continue to face more obstacles in remote-learning environments’. There are “more than 888 million children worldwide continue to face disruptions to their education due to full and partial school closures

(UNESCO Data)”. “Schools for more than 168 million children globally have been completely closed for almost an entire year due to COVID-19 lockdowns. (UNICEF, March3, 2021)” There are 506 million rural population (67%) in India. Out of 196 million elementary school children 146 million are enrolled in rural schools (U-DISE 2015-16). According to ASER2018 report, enrolment of rural India elementary learners (5-14 age group) is 95%. They mostly depend on Government schools which are not well equipped

with advanced technology. Yet, elementary schools are not opened. Though India’s rights to education commitment includes digital learning, it is far reached yet. To Sero Survey Report, the antibody has been developed among 70% of children within 6-10 years of age and 74% of children within 11-18 years. Presently children are affected more in pandemic. A fearful atmosphere has been created. In this situation, maintaining school education for such a huge number of learners is a challenging task. Since early childhood is the foundation stage of any learner, it is very important for teachers and educators to find the strategies to make remote learning more effective. Hence, the study is taken.

Objectives

- ❏ To understand the importance of early childhood and elementary education;
- ❏ To find the present status of elementary schools in India;
- ❏ To acquaint with remote learning practices for early childhood and elementary learners;
- ❏ To implement the best practices of remote learning in elementary stage;
- ❏ To investigate the challenges and remedies in this field.
- ❏ To highlight the suggestions given by experts in Remote Learning area

Early Childhood Education in India

The NEP 2020 of India emphasized in the field of Early Childhood Education (ECE), which was neglected in previous policy. It is considered as pre-primary education. The children of aged three to five come under this stage. In urban areas it is called KG I & KGII. During this period the learners learn alphabet and numbers from 0 to100 through play way method. In rural areas, it is called ‘Anganwadis’, where storytelling, songs, poems and showing images are taught. Some places, alphabet and numbers are also taught.

In NEP 2020, foundational stage of education is five-years of duration (3-8 years): Three years for ECE and two years of primary school. The existing infrastructure of Anganwadis, pre-primary sections will be attached to schools and it is hoped to strengthen the ECE. It is suggested that there should be continuity from ECE to Grade 1 and 2 in structure of curriculum. It is also recommended to introduce three Rs(reading, writing, and arithmetic) in ECE. A clear cut curriculum will be prepared shortly.

Elementary Education in India

According to Economic Times e-paper (June 17, 2021), “The gross access ratio for primary- and upper primary-level education — access to primary and upper primary schools within a distance of 1-3 km — has now reached more than 97% habitations. With this, the gross enrolment ratio at the primary level has reached 100%, while at the upper primary level, it has improved from 75.8% in 2009-10 to 87.7% in 2018-19.”

The ‘Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)’ scheme was launched by the government of India in 2001. It impelled to improve the status of infrastructure of schools, creating new schools and classrooms as well as teachers. At present, there are about 15 lakh schools, 25 crore students and 89 lakh teachers in India. The New Education Policy of India (NEP) 2020 targets to achieve 100% GER in pre-school to secondary level by 2030.

Indian Elementary School Classroom

The elementary/ primary classroom in India has been running in three stages: LP (Lower Primary I to III classes), UP (Upper Primary IV to V classes) and Middle School (VI to VIII classes). The middle school learners seat on the benches and use desks for keeping learning materials and writing and I to V class learners seat on the carpet spread on the floor. The teacher uses chair and table. The text book, black board, chalk, bids, sticks, maps, globe are only aids used generally. Some private schools in urban areas have more facilities like: pan board, smart class, AV aids, notice board, two dimensional and three dimensional aids etc. The student teacher ratio is 40:1. There are no sufficient teachers in school as per norm. Govt. has provided midday meal, permanent building, toilet and drinking water facility.

According to Government data, there are 95% schools have functional toilets, 80% have functional electricity connections, 93% have functional drinking water facilities, and about 90% of schools have a hand-washing facility. (UDISE 2019-20)

Reviews of Related Literature

Emiliana Vegas, Sunhwa Lee & Unika Shrestha" (Feb., 2021) in their survey “Ed tech and educational opportunity during the COVID-19 school closures: A case study of Chennai, Tamil Nadu" found the followings:

🔗 Application of education technology differs across and within countries. The learners of high-income countries and communities are able more to use online, virtual schooling than their peers in low- and middle-income countries and communities.

🔗 The students having high socioeconomic status (SES) in private schools have more access to digital devices (smartphones, internet, and computers/laptops) and are more engaged in regular educational activities than their peers in government schools and from low-SES households.

🔗 Girls are more likely than boys to have access to digital devices for learning and to engage in more regular educational activities.

In concern with growing inequality of educational opportunity, they suggested for policymakers to support access to regular learning opportunities at home for children from low-SES households in government and private schools.

Ghate, Swati (Oct., 2020) in her paper, 'Guidelines on School Reopening, Remote Learning and Curriculum in and After the COVID-19 Pandemic', coined "Every school is going to have a different capacity to implement guidelines," She further remarked, "schools as places of social interaction and social learning rather than just places to complete the academic backlog," . Even if schools can call a child once or twice a week, it will be a good start... after many months of the pandemic, we see that children are resilient against Covid-19."

Khaitan, Shreya (13 Sep, 2021) in her article “What Schools Must Do to Re-open” mentioned:

- ✎ For maintaining Kovid protocol;
- ✎ Running multiple shifts and if required alternate days;
- ✎ Awareness about masking;
- ✎ UNICEF’s checklists for schools and governments before schools re-open;
- ✎ “Schools will need to continue with a hybrid model--combining in-person teaching with digital lessons and at-home assignments” (Arora)
- ✎ Awareness about the importance of hygiene, frequent hand-washing, clean toilets and school environments;

The Indian Academy of Paediatrics (IAP) (October, 2020) in its guidelines suggesting that “schools open when they have the necessary infrastructure to implement Covid-19 protocols, emphasising staggered timings, social distancing, and hygiene and hand-washing. They also recommend restricting the number of people school-going children interact with outside of their cohort”.

On 25th August, 2021 India's health minister declared that the central government would provide an additional 20 million vaccine doses to states to vaccinate all teachers before teacher’s day 5th of September 2021. It is a nice step.(News)

The guidelines of central government, Govt. of India(March,2021) directed to prepare their own guidelines for school re-openings. It advocated:

- ✎ Both online and face to face learning
- ✎ Running classes in shifts or biweekly classes per grade;
- ✎ Seating arrangement will be at least six feet apart having wearing mask;
- ✎ Using open spaces when possible,
- ✎ Alternate seating on school buses and to avoid overcrowding
- ✎ Maintaining health and hygiene standards and avoiding school assembly or events;
- ✎ “In case a child or staff member was diagnosed with Covid-19, a physician or a district response team should assess the risk, contact screening be conducted and the school premises be disinfected”.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) recommends masking based on several factors, for children between the ages of five and 12. “It includes the intensity of Covid-19 transmission in the community, the child's ability to manage a mask and the impact of mask-wearing on child learning and development.”

UNICEF (2nd March,2021) urges governments “to prioritise the unique needs of every student, with comprehensive services covering remedial learning, health and nutrition, and mental health and protection measures in schools to nurture children and adolescents’ development and wellbeing.”

Method

In this study online resources will be taken to collect the data. The author is acquainted with elementary teaching learning for 30 years. His experience and observation of some schools, teachers, academicians, administrators including news and views of experts were taken as remarkable sources.

Remote Learning Practices

All the techniques or skills may not be applicable for all learners or situations. As per need and circumstances it may vary from place to place and situation to situation and individual to individual. The local people, parents, educators can create suitable means to teach children as per their needs in pandemic period.

The classes with small group is more meaningful. In rural area, classes may be run in open space like open field, under the tree, hillside, riverside etc. During rainy days, they may come to school building either in shift or in alternative day. As the intensity of pandemic, masking and social distancing will be applicable. Neat and cleanness, hand washing, must be maintained by every institution. Urban locality may adopt online learning if available.

There are numerous ideas on remote learning have been given to practice by various experts. Some of those are given below:

- 🔗 Applying different modes of remote learning such as: access to SMS text messages, using whatsapp group, phone calls, posters, pictures, radio, TV, and various other types of online tools;
- 🔗 Ensuring students have Plan to reopen schools safely as soon as possible with support of health authority;
- 🔗 Decisions about opening school should be taken by the school, parent-teacher committees and the local administration.
- 🔗 Educators can encourage parents to let their child play on the phone or make video call to his class fellow. Kids can work through the assignments together, play music, lighting, games, and sound or tackle the work any means. This allows students to keep “the opportunity for that peer interaction asynchronously as they learn,” (Cottingham)

☞ Communicate regularly with parents and families regarding expectations and student progress;

☞ A single learning management system will be more helpful, that supports easy access and integration of different learning assets such as polling, screen share, chat, raised hand and breakout rooms, etc.

☞ Think individual difference and act accordingly and provide regular timely constructive feedback;

☞ Pre-record short video (10mnts) will be helpful. Insert personal stories, humor and anchoring. YouTube helps for caption improvements on many videos.

☞ Students are to be engaged by including interactive lessons, reflective questions, polls, videos, virtual reality field trips, guest speakers (live or video), case studies, group discussions, homework, group work and projects etc. ;

☞ Self-learning is encouraged through open resources, family members and mass media etc.

☞ Planning may be made for collaborative work, solo work or group discussions;

☞ Colorful short Screen share, animated Power Points, documents, videos, etc. for 10 mnts, during the lesson;

☞ Break students into small, collaborative groups interact and assess students on a regular basis. Encourage students' reflection and collaboration;

☞ Both asynchronous and synchronous instruction or blending of two are useful;

☞ Inviting experts to take class can promote engagement, diversity, inclusion, and enthusiasm.

☞ Learning the important features of Zoom like: virtual one-on-one or small-group meetings, raising hands, chat, questions, interactive active learning and discussions and using Canvas can have a good initiative.

☞ “Share slides, transcripts, chat logs, videos, and images for students to download and examine afterward. This will especially help students with dyslexia and other reading impediments”.

☞ “Interactive simulations such as the PhET tools are usable by the blind. Check to see whether your resources indicate WCAG AA 2.0/2.1 compliance, or Section 508 compliance”.

☞ Creating and uploading the materials in the platform, however students can get it anytime as they required;

☞ One can synchronize library resources and other digital materials.

☞ One can use a blackboard or whiteboard may need to adapt to showing a single screen's worth at a time;

☞ Discussion board works for highlighting readings ,focus on key parts of course content, current events or their own projects or work;

☞ One can also enable and encourage student-to-student collaboration through tools like Slack.

Findings

According to UNESCO, there have more than 168 million children globally been completely closed for one year due to COVID-19 lockdowns. As to ASER2018 report, enrolment of rural India elementary learners (5-14 age group) is 95%. They mostly depend on Government schools which are not well equipped with advanced technology. Since April 2020, the teaching learning process of India is jeopardized due to Kovid Pandemic. Though India's rights to education commitment includes digital learning, it is far reached yet. There are no sufficient teachers in school as per norm. Govt. has provided midday meal, permanent building, toilet and drinking water facility. In the case of ECE, new curriculum framework is going to execute shortly. The students of rich family have more access to digital technology and are more engaged in regular educational activities than their peers. It was found that the lack of digital facility for the poorest and most vulnerable families has increased inequality. Inconsequence, children have lost opportunity of social, emotional and peer learning as well as friendships.

All the researchers have opinions to open schools. The local people, parents, educators can create suitable means for their own schools to teach children as per their needs in pandemic period. The classes with small group is more meaningful. In rural area, classes may be run in open space like open field, under the tree, hillside, riverside etc. During rainy days, they may come to school building either in shift or in alternative day. India Govt. prefer both online and traditional learning. As the intensity of pandemic, masking and social distancing will be applicable. Neat and cleanness, hand washing, must be maintained by every institution. Urban locality may adopt online learning if available. All are in opinion that Kovid19 protocol must be maintained. UNICEF stresses on the unique needs of every student, with remedial learning, health and nutrition, and mental health and protection measures in schools.

Some finding strategies on remote learning for elementary and Early Childhood education are as below:

- Applying different modes of remote learning such as: access to SMS text messages, using whatsapp group, phone calls, posters, pictures, radio, TV, and various other types of online tools;
- Ensuring students have Plan to reopen schools safely as soon as possible with support of health authority;
- Educators can encourage parents to let their child play on the phone or make video call to his class fellow. Kids can work through the assignments together, play music, lighting, games, and sound or tackle the work any means;
- Single learning management system, communication with parents, regular timely constructive feedback, encouraging self- learning are very useful.
- Both asynchronous and synchronous instruction or blending of two are useful;
- Learning the important features of Zoom like: virtual one-on-one or small-group meetings, raising hands, chat, questions, interactive active learning and discussions and using Canvas can

have a good initiative.

- Students are to be engaged by including interactive lessons, reflective questions, polls, videos, virtual reality field trips, guest speakers (live or video), case studies, group discussions, homework, group work and projects etc.
- Colorful short Screen share, animated Power Points, documents, videos, etc. for 10 mnts, during the lesson;
- Break students into small, collaborative groups interact and assess students on a regular basis. Encourage students' reflection and collaboration;
- Pre-record short video (10mnts) will be helpful. Insert personal stories, humor and anchoring. YouTube helps for caption improvements on many videos.
- Black board, white board, discussion board and slack(collaboration) may be used;
- Uploaded SLM, Share slides, transcripts, chat logs, videos, and images for students to download and examine afterward, using PhET tools for blind are very useful.

Conclusion

Schools are abode of learning deity. They provide a congenial learning environment where learners ensuring the physical safety, mental health, and social and emotional wellbeing. School system must ensure a congenial environment that encourages learning.

“As Indian policymakers and government leaders continue to imagine and inquire about the role of ICT in their ever-important elementary school system, more research, based on a systemic inquiry will expose the realities and, potentially, help transform the barriers into possibilities” (Byker,2014)

Remote learning is a challenging task for elementary-school students. It is sure that online teaching cannot provide the needs of elementary children like: guidance, social interaction, and influential learning opportunities. The disadvantaged learners must be supported through significant resources, so that they have the devices, internet connection, and by teacher's support they may be able to learn at home. Adequate resources, proper training, contextual understanding and fulfil the shortage of teachers are required to make it more meaningful. On the whole, government and all

stakeholders will have to enact strategies to help students recover from the learning losses during the school closures and to return to school. Govt., industrialists, philanthropists and other volunteers may help the poor for providing necessary facilities for learning. Digital facilities and training must be provided to teachers and learners to access the online learning.

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