



Covid-19 pandemic and experiences of parents of rural school children

Jaspreet Kaur, Arshdeep

Senior Research Fellow, Department of Education, Punjab University, Chandigarh, Punjab, India

Abstract

The spread of Covid -19 pandemic has put everything on standstill. The education sector has faced major challenges to cope up with the sudden shift from on campus teaching to online and virtual teaching. Unfortunately for this sudden shift of educational process, the teachers, families, and students were not prepared. It is the time to test the effectiveness of the online modes of teaching and learning with respect to the learning outcome and learning satisfaction of the children and their parents too. The role of parents to engage and assist their children at various levels of online education was most significant and challenging. The objective of this study was to explore the experiences of parents whose children were attending online classes during covid-19 pandemic. Descriptive survey method was used to explore the experiences of the parents and the data was collected through the self-constructed close ended questionnaires. Two villages for this study were randomly selected from district of Sri Muktsar Sahib, Punjab. The sample of 140 participants was selected with purposive sampling technique. The data collected with the help of two questionnaires was analysed with percentage analysis. The results of the study showed that there were majority of the parents who have found it difficult to help and assist their children because it was not only the challenge regarding their financial conditions but also they were worried about the future of their children.

Keywords: Covid-19, online education, parents experiences, remote learning, home environment

Introduction

COVID-19 Pandemic has significantly disrupted every sphere of life. As it was declared a public health emergency by World Health Organization, almost all the countries of the world enforced lockdown and brought everything to an abrupt halt for a certain period of time. During lockdown, school education was a great real-time human experiment in teaching and learning. The switch to online teaching and learning has been ensuring that students suffer no loss of studies and their progress is being tracked simultaneously with timely evaluation. UNESCO has estimated that around 1.26 billion children or 70 percent of children around the world have had their education interrupted because of the pandemic and a large number of these children are from what UNESCO calls the “low tech or no tech” phase, with India contributing 300 million of the 1.26 billion children (Dhoot, 2020) [2].

Due to closure of schools there is sudden shift happened from the traditional way of teaching to online teaching-learning. Unfortunately for this sudden shift of educational process, the teachers, families, and students were not prepared. The role of parents to engage and assist their children at various levels of online education was most significant and challenging. Because there was no control of class teacher over the students’ behavior and learning, it was the responsibility of the parents to conduct and to check the activities of the children at home. The schools and teachers had to provide students with learning materials, instructions and assistance by distance so parents had to function as home schooling tutors for their children while maintaining their regular jobs at the same time (Lagomarsino *et al.*, 2020, Parczewska 2020) [11, 12]. In such critical times, where parents have to be more actively engaged in their children’s learning programs (Bubb and Jones 2020) [4], parents’ satisfaction with school’ initiatives becomes a crucial factor.

Digital education needs a balanced coordination between course content, technology, teachers and students and it can only be successfully implemented with the availability of basic facilities like internet connectivity, availability and affordability of gadgets like smart phones, PCs, laptops, etc. and also the space for uninterrupted studies at home. During this period, for the parents who lives in villages and who have not afford these facilities, it has become a biggest challenges for them to arrange all the facilities for their children’s education. This contributed to a substantial widening of educational inequalities between those from disadvantaged families and their better-off peers (Rose *et al.*, 2021) [13]

Review of Literature

Bhamani *et al.* (2020) [3] conducted a study on home learning in times of Covid: Experiences of Parents. In this study, the data was collected from 19 parents who were selected through purposive sampling technique. The major themes emerged from the data that were (1) Impact of Covid-19 on children learning (2) Support given by schools and (3) strategies used by caregivers at home to support learning. It was identified that parents were disturbed by sudden shift of online education when teachers were not trained enough. It was also explored that parents were worried regarding children social, educational and physical development. Furthermore, study resulted that schools had taken appropriate measures in this time of pandemic to ensure that the education is not compromised.

Dhawan (2020) [5] studied on the topic of Online Learning: A panacea in the time of Covid-19 crisis. The study explained the SWOT analysis and challenges of e-sources of learning during this pandemic. The study stated that technology provides innovative, creative and resilient solutions at times of crisis. Technical problem, direct

communication between teacher and students, learner's non-sense behavior were the difficulties identified in the study. The engagement with students and make them participate in the teaching-learning process, quality education, technology cost and obsolescence were the major challenge revealed by this study.

Garbe, *et al.* (2020) ^[7] investigated parents' experiences and struggles during school closure using an online survey. The study identified that parents agreed with the school closure and were satisfied with the level of support provided by schools. However, study described some areas of struggle such as parents faced difficulties with balancing responsibilities, learner motivation, accessibility, and learning outcomes from online education through digital platforms.

Gopal, *et al.* (2021) ^[8] underscored four factors such as quality of teachers, course design, feedback, and expectation of students positively impact students' satisfaction and further highlighted student's satisfaction positively impact students' performance through the online mode of learning. In the study data were collected from 544 respondents through online survey who were studying the business management and hotel management courses in Indian universities. The study showed that there was positive correlation between student's satisfaction and their achievement if quality of content and instructor were provided to the students.

Guvercin, *et al.* (2021) ^[9] analysed the distance education experiences of teachers and parents during the Covid-19. The data of the study was collected through open ended questions from 83 teacher and parents of different areas of Turkey. The result of study revealed that online education is not able to replace conventional education, particularly in terms of socialization of the students. The study also stated that teachers encountered the challenges such as managerial problems, social interaction, academic competence, technical skills, learning motivation, technical support and internet access costs. In the study, it was also identified that parents have to share equal responsibility to maintain physical environment for the online learning of their children.

Haller and Novita (2021) ^[6] examined various factors such as parent's perception of schools, parents' resources to assist with home schooling, a teacher's technical ability, schools ability to support distance learning and children's characteristics regarding online learning during the lockdown. It was found that parents' satisfaction seems to be at risk when teachers were not able to deal with the new teaching methods. The study also identified that a parents were less satisfied with current mode of education in comparison to previous way of teaching and parents felt overburdened because of not well-equipped with the capabilities needed for home schooling.

Joseph, *et al.* (2021) ^[10] explored the perceptions of the parents about online learning of children during Covid- 19 pandemic. The study was conducted on 300 parents of children and identified that pandemic has effects children education. Parents worried about prolonged exposure to

screen devices in online learning. The study pointed out that online study affect child health's visual, physical, and psychological aspects.

Relevance of the Study

The sudden shift from school teaching to online teaching due to the pandemic has put a lot of questions about the success of the teaching and learning process. It is the time to test the effectiveness of the online modes of teaching and learning with respect to the learning outcome and learning satisfaction of the children and their parents too. In Indian context, where almost seventy percent of the population lives in villages and there exists problem of electricity and internet connectivity in the rural areas. So, it is important to get the picture of how the students and their parents had taken this sudden transition from offline to online mode of teaching and learning. It is a challenge for the parents to provide their children the environment of learning at home and to provide the gadgets for their online learning. This study becomes relevant to explore the experiences of the parents and the challenges they have faced and still facing to cop up with this sudden transition due to the pandemic.

Objectives of the study

The objective of this study was to explore the experiences of parents whose children were attending online classes during covid-19 pandemic. The experiences of the parents regarding their young children's learning pattern and also the challenges faced by them due to this shift has been studied through this study.

Methodology of the study

The present study is descriptive in nature. The data regarding the experiences of the parents was collected through the self-constructed close ended questionnaires. The first questionnaire has two parts: one deals with the profile of the parents in which the educational qualifications and occupational status of the parents has studied and in second part the information regarding the educational status of the children has collected. The second questionnaire deals with the questions regarding the infrastructure facilities available at home, the experiences of the parents and their perceived challenges due to this pandemic. Two villages for this study were randomly selected from district of Sri Muksar Sahib, Punjab. The sample of 140 participants was selected with purposive sampling technique. The data collected with the help of two questionnaires was analysed with percentage analysis and further described in table form.

Results and Discussion

The data collected from the parents through two different questionnaires was analysed in the form of percentage analysis. Firstly, the data about the educational and occupational status of the parents was analysed and then the information regarding the children who were attending the online classes was analysed. Secondly, the data about the parents' experiences was analysed. The table and discussion below showed the results of this study.

Table 1: Profile of the parents

A. Educational Qualification	Response	In (%)
1. Illiterate	42	30
2. Up to Matric level (Class VI to X)	28	20
3. Higher Secondary	42	30

4. Graduation Degree	18	12.9
5. Post-Graduation	8	5.72
B. Occupational Status		
1. Unemployed/ Household work	52	37.2
2. Own independent occupation (such as shopkeeper, farmer, land laborer etc.)	82	58.6
3. Government Service	6	4.3
C. Monthly Income		
1. Below 10000	82	58.6
2. 10000 to 20000	36	24.8
3. 20000 to 40000	18	12.9
4. 40000 to above	4	2.8

Table 1 presents the status of parents regarding their educational qualification, Occupational status and their monthly income. It is found that out of total (140) respondents average numbers of parents (50%) were attained till the secondary school education. The study surveyed that lesser number of respondents that is only 12.9 percent and 5.72 percent reached to the higher education. The above data presents that 30 percent of the people of the study were illiterate. The second part of the questionnaire deals with occupational status of the respondents. It is identified that more than half of the respondents (58.6%) were indulged in their own occupation i.e own shop, farmer, laborer etc in the study. On the other hand, 37.2 percent respondents were unemployed or doing household chores. The data depicts that very few (4.3%) respondent were engaged in Government services. The third part of the questionnaire deals with monthly income of the respondents during Covid-19 pandemic. The study reveals that majority of the parents (58.6%) was earned below Rs.10000 during this crisis. It is also found that near about 37 percent of respondents were receive the income between Rs. 10000 to Rs. 40000. And only four respondents earned income more than Rs. 40000.

Table 2: Educational Status of the Children

A. Classes in which Children Studying	Response	In (%)
1. Up to 5 th class	41	29.3
2. 5 th to Matric class	62	44.3
3. Secondary Class	37	26.4
B. Number of Children attending Online Classes at Home		
	Response	In (%)
1. One	42	30
2. Two	82	58.6
3. Three	12	8.6
4. More than three	4	2.8
C. Gadgets Used for Online Learning		
	Response	In (%)
1. Smart Phone	132	94.3
2. Laptop	4	2.8

Table 2 presents the educational status of children at home. It shows that 29.3 percent children are studying in primary class and near to 44 percent studying in high school. Only 26.4 percent children were doing study in secondary classes according to provided data. The section B of the table gives the information regarding number of children attending

Table 4: Various challenges perceived by parents

Sr. no	Statements	Yes		No	
		Response	In (%)	Response	In (%)
1.	I was unable to assist my child for online classes	78	55.7	62	44.9
2.	I felt overburdened due to other work responsibilities at home	112	80	28	20
3.	I was concerned about the potential misuse of social sites by children	128	91.4	12	8.5

online classes at home. It is found that majority (58.6%) of the homes have two children who were attending online classes. The next part of the table shows that majority of the students (94.3%) were using Smartphone rather than laptop or desktop for online classes.

Experiences of parents

The experiences of the parents were studied through three different aspects which included the availability of infrastructure facilities for online education of the children at home, various challenges perceived by parents and their experiences about the children behavior during online classes.

Table 3: Availability of Infrastructure for Online Education at Home

Sr. no	Statements	Yes		No	
		Response	In %	Response	In %
1.	Availability of online learning gadgets at home for all children	60	42.9	80	57.2
2.	Availability of uninterrupted supply of electricity and internet connection	102	72.9	38	27.2
3.	Availability of personal space/ room for children’s study	45	32.2	95	67.9
4.	Sharing of devices among sibling.	88	62.9	52	37.2

Table-3 presents the facilities of infrastructure in the house. The study states that the availability of online gadgets to attend the online classes was available to less than average (42.9%) children. One of the study identified that the parents were not well-equipped with the capabilities required for home schooling, they may have felt overburdened and it was argued that this can lead to lower satisfaction with school (Haller, 2021) [6]. In addition to it, respondent that is 32.2 percent indicated that there was less availability of personal space to attend the classes. The study showed from the collected data that 72.9 percent respondent agreed that uninterrupted supply of electricity and internet connection. The range of sharing device with their sibling also depicted in the study. Only 37.2 percent respondents were disagreed with the statement.

4.	It was very challenging for me to cope up with this sudden shift	106	75.7	34	24.3
5.	I felt financial overburdened to provide facilities for online education of my child.	127	90.7	13	9.3

The table 4 shows the challenges encountered by parents during attending online classes by their children.

The data states that out of total respondents, majority of parents (55.7%) were not able to help their child during attending online classes due to their technical illiteracy. Further, the figure reveals that parents (80%) felt overburdened because of their different work responsibilities and household chores in the house.

The most significant aspect came out from the survey that huge number of parents (91.4%) worried for their child regarding the misuse of search engines and social sites. Moreover, sudden transfer of education mode from conventional to online became a big challenge to deal with in the pandemic of covid-19. Only 35 percent parents agreed that they are able to adjust with latest mode of teaching. On the other hand, financial issue creates matter of great concern for parents as due to lockdown salary of the employees cut down and income from occupation reduced. According to available data it is indicated that a big number of respondents that is 90.7 percent agreed that they were unable to provide essential facilities to their children due to financial problems.

Table 5: Experiences of parents regarding children behavior during online classes

Sr. no	Statements	Yes		No	
		Response	In (%)	Response	In (%)
1.	Children were curious and interested in online classes	98	70	42	30
2.	Children attended all online classes with discipline	62	44.3	78	55.7
3.	The teacher gave proper attention and interacted with children during online classes	35	25	105	75
4.	I was satisfied with the learning achievement of the children.	66	47.1	74	52.9
5.	Children felt overburdened while attending online classes.	128	91.4	12	8.5

The table-5 presents the experiences of parents with respect to children behavior while attending online classes in the pandemic. The result of the study indicates that out of total, 70 percent of the parents showed that their child were very interested and curious to attend the online classes and lesser number of respondents (i.e 30%) showed lack in interest of their children in joining online classes. 44.3 percent of parents expressed that children were discipline during attending online classes and 55.7 percent respondents were disagree with the statement. In addition to this, lesser number of parents (25%) revealed that there were gap in one to one interaction between teacher and students during online classes. Similarly, the above data depicts that majority (91.4%) of parents of the children felt overburdened due continuous classes without break and long sitting hours in front of screen generates reason of stress and tension. There are number of studies provides the evidence that the learning experiences of children during the first round of school closures fell far below the standards of their pre-pandemic experiences (Andrew *et al.*, 2020) [1]. In the study less than average (47.1%) parents were satisfied with the learning achievements of their children through this online teaching and learning in the pandemic.

Conclusion

The shift from school learning environment to home learning has posed various challenges not only to children but their parents too. Especially the rural parents who have limited resources for their children’s online education, it was more challenging. The results of the study showed that there were majority of the parents who have found it difficult to help and assist their children because it is not only the challenge regarding their financial conditions but also they were worried about the future of their children. They were not satisfied with the learning pattern of their children and also they found their children got distracted from the studies due to smart phone and other available online platforms. To understand and address the concerns of the parents, the school management should frame strategies and online parent-teacher meetings to listen the parents’ concerns should be organized.

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