

The Role of Parents in Educating Children with Intellectual Disabilities during COVID-19 in India

Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically altered the educational landscape globally, with a particularly profound impact on children with intellectual disabilities (ID). In India, where educational infrastructure and support systems for children with ID are already strained, the pandemic exacerbated existing challenges. In India, the sudden shift to remote learning has placed a significant burden on parents, who have had to take on new roles as educators. Parents have had to step into roles traditionally held by educators, therapists, and support staff, making their involvement crucial. This research article explores the multifaceted role parents played in the education of children with intellectual disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic in India, highlighting both the obstacles faced and the resilience demonstrated by families. This article also emphasized the role of parents in educating children with intellectual disabilities during the pandemic, through case studies and community efforts, highlighting both challenges and innovative solutions.

Key Word: Intellectual Disability (ID), COVID-19, Pandemic, Educational infrastructure, Parents, Special Educators, therapists, and Telepathy.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented disruptions to educational systems worldwide, with significant repercussions for children with intellectual disabilities (ID). In India, where educational resources and support for children with ID were already limited, the pandemic further exacerbated these challenges. The sudden shift to remote learning necessitated that parents assume a central role in their children's education, functioning as educators, therapists, and advocates. This introduction explores the critical role parents

played during this period, the strategies they employed, and the broader implications for the education of children with ID in India.

The educational landscape for children with intellectual disabilities in India is characterized by a complex interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and infrastructural factors. Prior to the pandemic, these children often relied on specialized educational programs, in-person therapies, and tailored support systems to facilitate their learning and development. The closure of schools and therapy centers during the COVID-19 lockdown disrupted these essential services, placing immense pressure on parents to fill the gap (Jeste et al., 2020; Asbury et al., 2020).

Parents of children with ID had to quickly adapt to new roles and responsibilities, often without prior training or support. As primary educators, they needed to develop and implement individualized lesson plans that catered to their children's unique learning needs (Irwin et al., 2022). This included breaking down complex concepts into manageable tasks, using multisensory teaching methods, and continuously monitoring progress (Zaagsma et al., 2020). The role of parents as educators was especially critical given the difficulties many children with ID face in engaging with conventional online learning platforms (Cerna, 2020). Moreover, the role of parents extended beyond traditional educational duties. Many children with ID require consistent therapeutic interventions, such as speech, occupational, and physical therapies, to support their cognitive and motor development. With in-person sessions suspended, parents had to become therapists, guided by virtual consultations with professionals (Ellison et al., 2021). They incorporated therapeutic exercises into daily routines, striving to maintain their children's developmental progress despite the lack of direct professional oversight (Villani et al., 2020).

The advocacy role of parents also became more pronounced during the pandemic. Parents needed to navigate the educational system to secure necessary resources and accommodations for their children. This often involved engaging in regular communication with teachers and school administrators to ensure that remote learning was tailored to their children's specific needs (Willner et al., 2020). Advocacy was crucial for addressing barriers such as the digital divide, which significantly impacted the ability of children with ID to access remote learning (United Nations, 2020).

Emotional support provided by parents was another vital aspect of their role. The pandemic-induced disruption of routines and the lack of social interaction caused heightened anxiety and stress among children with ID (Turk & McDermott, 2020). Parents had to provide constant emotional reassurance, helping their children cope with the uncertainty and changes

brought about by the pandemic (Mutluer et al., 2020). Establishing and maintaining structured routines at home became a key strategy for providing stability and reducing anxiety (Zaagsma et al., 2020).

Despite the numerous challenges, parents demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability. They leveraged community resources, including online support groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which offered educational materials and emotional support (Mathias et al., 2020). These networks facilitated the sharing of strategies and resources, helping parents manage the demands of home-based education (Perera et al., 2020). Additionally, technology played an indispensable role, with parents utilizing educational apps, online learning platforms, and teletherapy services to support their children's learning and development (Cochran, 2020, Nanda et al., 2023).

Case studies from various regions in India highlight the diverse strategies employed by parents. For instance, in rural Maharashtra, a family integrated practical life skills into educational activities, using community-provided materials. In urban Delhi, an online support network facilitated resource sharing and emotional support among parents. In Bangalore, a structured teletherapy approach enabled significant developmental gains for a child with ID (Mathias et al., 2020; Cochran, 2020; Pansyr & Shvedovskiy, 2020).

In light of these experiences, several policy recommendations emerge to better support the education of children with intellectual disabilities in future crises. These include improving digital infrastructure to ensure equitable access to remote learning, providing training and resources for parents to equip them with the necessary skills, developing inclusive educational resources, and fostering collaborative frameworks between educators, therapists, and parents (Zaagsma et al., 2020; United Nations, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the pivotal role of parents in the education of children with intellectual disabilities. While the challenges were significant, the resilience and adaptability demonstrated by parents highlight the need for systemic support and resources to empower them. Addressing these systemic issues is crucial for ensuring equitable educational opportunities and preparing for future disruptions.

This research highlights the resilience and adaptability of parents in managing their children's education during the pandemic. This research article investigates the crucial role parents played in educating their children with ID during this period, highlighting their multifaceted roles as educators, therapists, advocates, and emotional supporters. Policy recommendations for future crises include enhancing digital infrastructure, providing training and resources for parents, developing inclusive educational materials, and fostering collaborative frameworks

to support children with intellectual disabilities. Addressing these systemic issues is crucial to ensure equitable educational opportunities and better preparedness for any future disruptions.

2. The Impact of COVID-19 on Education for Children with Intellectual Disabilities

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted education systems worldwide, significantly affecting children with intellectual disabilities (ID). These children face unique challenges, and the shift to remote learning has exacerbated existing inequalities and created new obstacles. The challenges encountered and the adaptive strategies implemented by parents, educators, and communities in intellectual disabilities (ID) fraternity is highlighted below

A. Digital Divide and Accessibility

One of the most significant challenges faced by children with intellectual disabilities during the pandemic was the digital divide. Limited access to internet connectivity and digital devices prevented many children from participating in online learning. According to a study by UNICEF, only 24% of households in India have access to the internet, with rural areas being disproportionately affected (UNICEF, 2020). This digital divide made it difficult for parents to facilitate continuous learning at home (Xafis, 2020).

B. Lack of Specialized Resources and Training

Parents often found themselves unprepared to handle the specialized educational needs of their children. Special education requires tailored resources and teaching strategies that many parents were not equipped with. The sudden shift to home-based learning left many without the necessary training or resources to effectively support their children's education (Grills et al., 2022).

C. Disruption of Routine and Structure

Children with intellectual disabilities often rely on consistent routines and structured environments for effective learning. The sudden closure of schools disrupted these routines, causing confusion and anxiety among these children (Asbury et al., 2020). The lack of a structured educational setting impacted their ability to focus and retain information (Irwin et al., 2022).

D. Access to Specialized Education and Therapies

Many children with ID require specialized educational programs and therapies that are difficult to deliver remotely. Speech, occupational, and physical therapies,

typically provided in-person, were significantly disrupted, affecting the children's developmental progress (Jeste et al., 2020; Schiariti, 2020).

E. Parental Burden and Stress

The responsibility of facilitating home-based education largely fell on parents, who may not have the training or resources to effectively teach their children with intellectual disabilities. This added burden increased stress and anxiety levels among parents, impacting the overall well-being of the family (Mutluer et al., 2020).

3. Parental Roles and Adaptive Strategies

During the COVID-19 pandemic, parents of children with intellectual disabilities had to step into multiple roles to facilitate their children's education. These roles included being educators, therapists, advocates, and emotional supporters.

3.1 Parents Role

A. Home-based Educational Interventions

Parents had to become the primary educators for their children as schools transitioned to remote learning. During the lockdown, parents took on the primary responsibility for their children's education. This involved creating structured routines and learning environments at home. This required them to engage in direct teaching, plan educational activities, and monitor their children's progress. Given the specialized needs of children with intellectual disabilities, parents often had to tailor lessons to suit their child's learning pace and style (Zaagsma et al., 2020; Cochran, 2020). Studies have shown that consistent routines and structured environments are beneficial for children with ID, helping them to maintain a sense of normalcy and reduce anxiety (Panchal et al., 2020).

B. Utilizing Online Resources and Support Networks

Many parents turned to online resources and support networks to fill the gap left by the closure of schools and therapy centers. Various NGOs and community organizations offered online workshops and training sessions for parents to help them understand how to use digital tools for their children's education (Ranjan et al., 2022). Additionally, social media platforms and online forums provided spaces for parents to share resources, strategies, and emotional support.

C. Psychological and Emotional Support

The pandemic increased stress and anxiety levels among children with intellectual disabilities and their families. The psychological and emotional well-being of children with ID was a significant concern during the pandemic. Parents had to provide emotional support, helping their children cope with the changes in routine and the lack of social interaction with peers (Turk & McDermott, 2020). Parents played a crucial role in providing emotional support and managing the increased stress and anxiety that their children faced. Research indicates that children with ID are particularly vulnerable to changes in routine and social isolation, which can exacerbate behavioral issues and emotional distress (Willner et al., 2020). Parents employed various strategies such as mindfulness exercises, consistent communication, and involving children in household activities to mitigate these effects.

D. Advocates and Therapist

Parents also had to advocate for their children's needs, ensuring they had access to necessary resources and support. This involved communicating with educators and school administrators to secure appropriate accommodations and modifications for remote learning (Willner et al., 2020).

Many children with intellectual disabilities rely on regular therapy sessions, such as speech, occupational, and physical therapy. With the closure of therapy centers, parents had to take on the role of therapists, implementing therapeutic exercises and activities at home based on guidance from professionals via telehealth services (Perera et al., 2020; Villani et al., 2020).

3.2 Adaptive Strategies Employed by Parents

Despite these challenges, Parents employed various adaptive strategies to manage the challenges of educating their children with intellectual disabilities during the pandemic. These strategies included utilizing community resources, implementing structured routines, innovative educational approaches, leveraging technology, leveraging available resources and engaging in collaborative efforts were key to overcoming obstacles and promoting resilience.

1. Community Engagement and Support Networks

Community support played a vital role in helping parents navigate the challenges of home-based education. Online support groups and community networks provided a platform for parents to share experiences, resources, and coping strategies (Mathias et al., 2020). These networks offered emotional support and practical advice, helping parents feel less isolated and more capable of managing their children's education (PLOS ONE, 2020 and Stenhoff et al., 2020).

2. Innovative Educational Approaches

Parents adopted creative approaches to facilitate learning at home. Many reported implementing structured routines and behavioral strategies that mirrored the school environment (Zaagsma et al., 2020). These routines helped maintain a sense of normalcy and provided children with a predictable structure, which is crucial for those with intellectual disabilities (Willner et al., 2020).

3. Leveraging Online Resources and Teletherapy

Teletherapy and online educational resources became essential tools for parents. Educational websites, mobile applications, and virtual therapy sessions provided accessible learning materials and support (Cochran, 2020). While these resources could not fully replace in-person instruction, they offered valuable alternatives that helped bridge the gap during school closures (Villani et al., 2020).

4. Challenges Faced by Parents

Parents of children with intellectual disabilities encountered several challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The sudden shift to online education exposed the digital divide, particularly in rural areas where internet access and digital literacy are limited (Zaagsma et al., 2020; Mathias et al., 2020). Furthermore, the lack of specialized resources and training for parents made it difficult to provide the necessary support at home (Pantsyr & Shvedovskiy, 2020).

A. Balancing Work and Caregiving Responsibilities

One of the most significant challenges was balancing work-from-home responsibilities with caregiving and educational duties. Many parents, especially mothers, had to juggle professional commitments with the increased demands of home-schooling and caregiving, leading to heightened stress and burnout (Mathias et al., 2020). The lack of external support from schools and therapy centers intensified this burden.

B. Digital Divide and Technological Barriers

The transition to online learning was not smooth for many families. In India, internet penetration is uneven, with rural areas suffering from poor connectivity and a lack of digital devices (Willner et al., 2020). This digital divide disproportionately affected children with intellectual disabilities, who often require tailored educational tools and consistent support. Parents struggled to access online platforms, and many were not technologically equipped to facilitate their children's learning (Cochran, 2020). Special educators and therapists often provide tailored interventions that are difficult

for parents to replicate at home without professional training. The interruption of regular therapy sessions meant that many children missed out on essential developmental support, which parents struggled to compensate for (Pantsyr & Shvedovskiy, 2020).

C. Lack of Specialized Resources

Special education teachers play a crucial role in the education of children with intellectual disabilities. However, the pandemic forced a sudden shift to remote learning, leaving many parents without the support of these specialized educators (Perera et al., 2020). Parents had to quickly adapt to new roles as educators, often without the necessary training or resources to address their children's unique learning needs (Pantsyr & Shvedovskiy, 2020).

D. Psychological and Emotional Impact

The pandemic exacerbated stress and anxiety among families of children with intellectual disabilities. The disruption of routines, social isolation, and the absence of therapeutic services took a toll on both children and their caregivers (Villani et al., 2020). Parents reported increased behavioral issues and a decline in their children's mental health, which added to the challenges of managing home-based education (Turk & McDermott, 2020).

5. Outcomes and Observations

The pandemic highlighted both the vulnerabilities and the resilience of families of children with intellectual disabilities. Despite significant challenges, many parents reported positive outcomes and developmental gains in their children, attributed to increased family time and tailored learning strategies.

1. Resilience and Developmental Gains

Several parents observed that the slower pace of life during the lockdown allowed for more quality family time and individualized attention to their children's needs (PLOS Global Public Health, 2020). This period enabled some children to make developmental gains, as parents could implement personalized behavioral strategies and routines more consistently (Pantsyr & Shvedovskiy, 2020).

2. Increased Parental Involvement

The pandemic underscored the critical role of parental involvement in the education of children with intellectual disabilities. Parents' active participation in their children's learning processes fostered a deeper understanding of their needs and strengthened the

parent-child bond (Perera et al., 2020). This involvement is likely to have long-term positive effects on educational outcomes and family dynamics (Turk & McDermott, 2020).

6. Case Studies and Community Efforts

Case Studies

Case Study 1: Adaptive Strategies in Rural India

In a rural village in Dehradun and Nae Tehri in Uttarakhand state, the family of ID faced significant challenges when schools closed. The parents mostly in this area are daily wage laborers, struggled with limited internet access and lack of educational materials. However, they employed creative solutions, such as using printed worksheets provided by a local NGO and engaging the boy in practical life skills like gardening and cooking, which helped maintain his routine and developmental progress (Mathias et al., 2020).

Case Study 2: Community Support in Urban Areas

In an urban setting of most part of INDIA, a network of parents formed to support online to share resources and strategies for managing home education. This network also facilitated virtual therapy sessions, which were crucial in maintaining the child's behavioral progress.

Case Study 3: Role community-based participatory approaches and NGOs

Several collaborated with local communities to support parents of children with ID. These organizations provided digital devices and internet connectivity to underprivileged families, along with training sessions on how to use educational apps and tools. This initiative helped bridge the digital divide and enabled continuous learning for many children (Ranjan et al., 2022).

In the states, where the prevalence of ID is higher, community-based participatory approaches were employed. Stakeholders, including parents, educators, and healthcare professionals, worked together to develop localized educational interventions. These included home visit programs, where trained volunteers provided in-person support while adhering to COVID-19 safety protocols (Panchal et al., 2020).

Case Study 4: Blended Learning Approach in Kerala

In Kerala, a blended learning approach was adopted to support children with intellectual disabilities. The state's "First Bell" initiative broadcast educational content through television, supplemented with printed materials and occasional in-person visits by special educators. This approach helped maintain educational continuity for children with limited access to digital devices (Srivastav, 2023).

7. Policy Implications and Recommendations

The experiences of parents during the COVID-19 pandemic highlight the need for policy interventions to support the education of children with intellectual disabilities in India. Recommendations include improving access to digital infrastructure, providing specialized training for parents, and ensuring the availability of tailored educational resources. Future policies should focus on:

1. Improving Digital Infrastructure

To bridge the digital divide, it is essential to enhance internet connectivity and provide digital devices to families in rural and underserved areas (Zaagsma et al., 2020). Government initiatives and public-private partnerships can play a crucial role in achieving this goal, ensuring that all children have access to online education (Willner et al., 2020).

2. Providing Specialized Training for Parents

Training programs for parents should be developed to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to support their children's education effectively (Cochran, 2020). These programs can include workshops, online courses, and resource guides that cover various aspects of special education and home-based learning (Pantsyr & Shvedovskiy, 2020).

3. Ensuring Availability of Tailored Educational Resources

Educational resources tailored to the needs of children with intellectual disabilities should be made widely available. This includes creating accessible digital content, developing specialized learning materials, and providing ongoing support from special educators (Perera et al., 2020). Collaborative efforts between educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, and government agencies are crucial to achieving this (Turk & McDermott, 2020).

4. Integrated Support Networks

Establishing strong support networks that include educators, therapists, and community organizations to offer comprehensive support to families.

5. Mental Health Resources

Increasing the availability of mental health resources for both children and parents to address the psychological impact of crises.

8. Conclusion

The role of parents in educating children with intellectual disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic in India has been pivotal. The COVID-19 pandemic has posed significant

challenges to the education of children with intellectual disabilities in India, but it has also underscored the resilience and adaptability of parents. Despite facing significant challenges, parents demonstrated resilience and adaptability, utilizing various strategies to support their children's education and well-being. By employing innovative strategies, leveraging community support, and utilizing available resources, parents have played a crucial role in ensuring the continuity of their children's education. This period has highlighted the importance of parental involvement and the need for robust support systems to ensure that children with ID continue to receive the education and care they need, even in times of crisis. Moving forward, it is essential to address the digital divide, provide specialized training for parents, and develop tailored educational resources to support the education of children with intellectual disabilities in any future crises. Future efforts must focus on addressing the gaps identified during the pandemic and strengthening the infrastructure to better support these children and their families.

9. References

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