

Global Call for Evidence to Children's Institutional Care and Education

Topic: Educational policy and practice that promote care reform

Abstract:

The current article establishes an evidence-based link between a child's right to education and the right to family. Miracle Foundation works to ensure that every child has an opportunity to grow up in a family, to become a healthy, happy, educated, income-producing person and experience a true sense of belonging. By leveraging its proprietary Thrive Scale™ methodology, the organization facilitates transitioning children from CCIs back with family or family-based - alternative care options, ensuring fulfilment of children's rights right where they are in the communities.

More than 250 children were sent back home from some of Miracle's partner CCIs during the first wave of the pandemic. Miracle Foundation had been working to build the capacity of its CCI partners on integrated case management, particularly coining the expedited case management to effect safe and permanent reintegration of children during the emergency crisis situation like the pandemic. Within this larger context of upholding a child's overall right to family, Miracle Foundation is committed to ensuring that there is no disruption in the educational journey of the child as they walk the reintegration path.

The paper brings out how in keeping with its belief, and upholding the spirit of the order of the Supreme Court of India, to cater to the educational needs of children who have been restored with families, Miracle Foundation undertook a mix of hybrid/blended educational interventions. The paper highlights Miracle's learnings, insights, and challenges in this journey.

Keywords:

CCI: Child Care Institution, EC: Education Coordinator, SW: Social worker, CT: coaching teacher, TLM: Teaching Learning Material

Background & context:

This section talks about the global scenario and the steps taken by the government of India and the state board.

With the school being closed down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, children are unable to attain quality education. It's been a challenge for the government, educators, institutions, parents, caregivers and students around the world.

The education sector has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. By April 2020, governments across 195 countries shut down schools in an effort to reduce transmission and protect their students, teachers, and staff, impacting the lives of almost 1.6 billion children, youth, and their families. One estimate from The World Bank suggests that this generation of children could



potentially lose an estimated USD 10 trillion globally in their life earnings. This could potentially increase the Learning Poverty levels to 63% and drive countries even further off-track from achieving their Learning Poverty goals.

In India alone, an estimated 1.4 million anganwadis (government-run child nutrition and early childhood education centres), 55,000 private pre-primaries, 1.5 million K-12 schools, 41,901 colleges and 1,028 universities have been sporadically shut for over 11 months, disrupting learning, and incurring economic losses estimated at over USD 400 billion in the country's future earnings.

Many countries are handling this disruption by deploying different modes of learning. Educators around the globe are identifying ways to reach children on virtual platforms. These platforms are allowing teachers and students to connect over video calls to enable a classroom-like environment and to have interactive sessions for better learning. The current situation has accelerated the use of technology.

In India, steps were taken by the central government and state government to continue the education of children.

On 15th December 2020, the Supreme Court of India passed a slew of directions to States/Union Territories to cater to the educational needs of children in CCIs, and children who have been restored to families from CCIs:

The District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) will play an important role to facilitate the process:

- Provide necessary infrastructure, books, stationery, printers and other equipment necessary for online classes. This will be on the basis of recommendations made by the District Child Care Protection Units (DCPU) within a period of 30 days from the issue of this direction.
- The DCPU shall inform the District Legal Services Authorities about the progress made in the infrastructure being provided to the CCIs and the functioning of online classes periodically, once a month.
- State Governments shall ensure that a required number of teachers are also made available for teaching the children in various CCIs.
- Extra classes, if necessary, should also be taken for the children to help them in preparing for the final examinations to be held next year.
- The DCPU are directed to enquire about the financial position of parents/guardians of children and if it is found that children are not being sent to school in view of the financial difficulty of parents/guardians, recommend to the state to give financial aid to ensure that the children attend schools. In response to this, the concerned authorities of the state are directed to release Rs 2000 per month to parents/guardians of children in distress, which shall be used only for the purpose of education of children.
- DCPU are also directed to ascertain the number of children who are restored to the families during the lockdown in a particular geographical locality and organize a guide/teacher for a group of 25 children.



GR (Government Resolution) by Maharashtra government of department of education and sports mentioned guidelines for teachers to continue teaching children through online mode where teachers were requested to use online portals to teach children however keeping children's safety in mind.

The government is providing various ways for teachers to connect students and students to continue their education even in the lockdown. The government has given access to an app called 'Diksha' which offers teachers, students and parents engaging learning material relevant to the prescribed school material. Also, be it private and government schools, teachers are sharing lesson plans on WhatsApp groups and conducting to children via Zoom calls. This has been a medium for teaching through this pandemic.

This has given the opportunity to teachers and students to access and learn about an alternative that is helping them to continue teaching and learning.

This seems so possible and very sorted however, does this give us a clear picture of whether this is reaching everyone? Whether all children are able to access education online? This throws light on the digital divide in India. Children from remote districts or poor backgrounds are not getting benefitted.

Miracle Foundations' approach and intervention in remote education:

As this current pandemic affected the children in society, it is also affected children who are staying in the Child Care Institutions. Children have gone back to their families during this COVID-19 lockdown. There has been the uncertainty of when school will reopen and what will be the next steps taken by the government. A lot of NGOs working in the educational field identified ways to reach out to their students/children to provide quality education remotely.

From all the 11 CCIs that Miracle Foundation is working with almost 250+ children have gone back to their families during this pandemic. These children are in schools and some of them are pursuing their higher education.

Due to the unavailability of a device and internet connection, these children were unable to stay in touch with the respective CCI team. Some of the major downsides of this situation could have led to:

- Losing interest in studies and not continuing the education
- Possibility of children dropped out
- Child labour
- Child marriage

Based on the information collected by connecting with various NGOs in all regions, Miracle Foundation's education COVID-19 response plan consists of the below strategies.

Approach and intervention during a pandemic:

All of the children who went back to their families due to pandemics were supported with a tablet to continue their education. The total number of children supported to date are 232 and we aim to support more 500+ children in the coming days.

1. Children in Families (Sent due to COVID-19/unplanned reunification): Remote Education + Blended Education:

The aim of this initiative was to provide academic support remotely for the children who have gone back to their families. Giving them access to the school curriculum and education materials related to school subjects in the interim while schools are shut and also once the schools are open.

Miracle and the CCI team have continued supporting children in the CCI and also children who have gone back to the families through remote sessions that are conducted by the coaching teachers appointed. These children are continuing their education and thriving, however, reaching out to the children who do not have access to a device and internet had become a challenge hence we provided tablets to these children.

Blended learning is an approach to education that combines online educational materials and opportunities for interaction online with traditional place-based classroom methods. Blended education is a strategy that we will continue even after the lockdown for our children in the families. Here the child will be eventually going to the school and also be accessing online material/classes.

2. Children in the CCI: Strengthening the existing resources + Blended Education:

Mentored and educated our CCI coaching teachers to conduct virtual classes (Through Zoom/Skype, prepare videos and share it on WhatsApp, share lessons and get homework on WhatsApp etc.) with children in CCIs as teachers were not visiting the CCI and teaching in person. Blended education is a strategy that we continued even after the lockdown for our children in the CCI as well where children will access online material/classes but also attend coaching classes in person.

We continue to support children even after school reopen, children will be provided support through connecting with coaching and school teachers. Apart from the device (a tablet) support, stationery and material support will be provided as schools reopen. With the help of a device, teachers are connected with children to guide them virtually via applications like zoom, skype or google meet. Children will continue accessing the applications like PraDiGi, DIKSHA, Edu Mitra, e-Pathashala, educational games and so on.

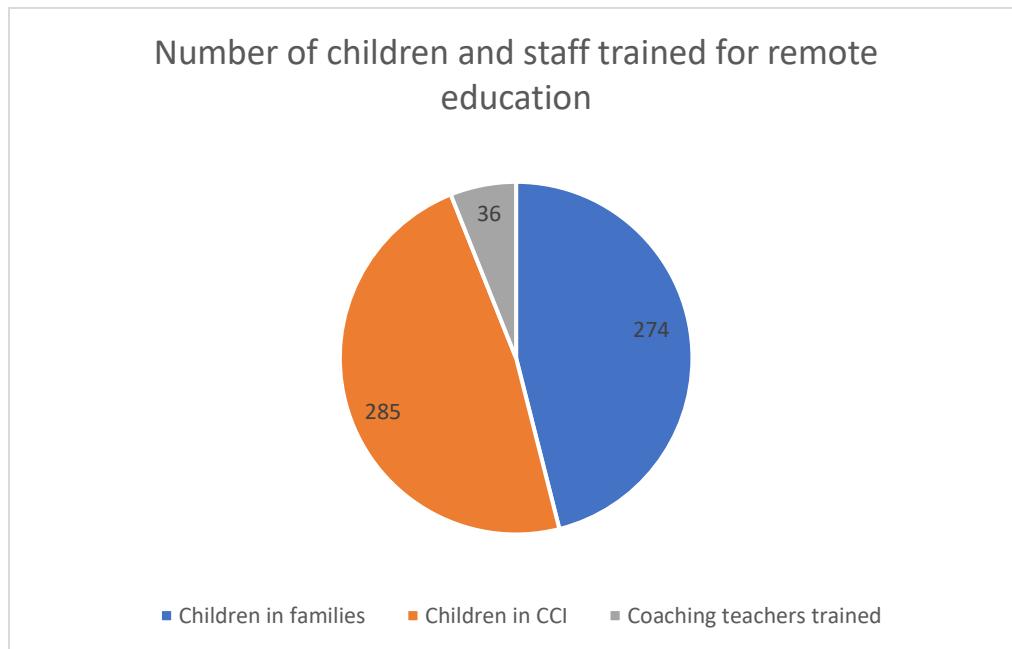
Remote Education initiative: This is an example from one of the partners CCIs of how remote education is going on in the CCIs based on the availability of devices and requirements:

29 Children went back to families due to COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020. Among 29 children there were 18 children in the 1st to 10th class. To avoid the learning loss of the children we decided to start connecting with the children for online education.

We had teleconference (CTs, SW and EC); shared ideas and came up with the plan. 18 Children divided among 3 coaching teachers and asked them to connect with the respective group of children to catch up. CTs got to know more about children's educational needs. SW shared a list of need assessments with EC. CTs were guided by EC on online education/e-learning for an example how to record videos, create content, how to format a video, TLM in the video, interaction with the children after publishing videos on the WhatsApp group and so on. On the basis of need assessment, we planned the content, presentation style/methodology, the review process of the video before posting it on children's WhatsApp group. One video per week was posted by each teacher. Two different WhatsApp groups created by SW; first one is for CTs, EC, SW & In-charge to discuss the topics and finalise the content and videos; the second one for the Children, CTs, EC, SW & In-charge where final videos were posted and also where children can interact, ask queries, share their feedback, etc. After proper review of the videos posted on the children's group, children gave wonderful responses to the initiative, they loved to see the teacher talking to them and teaching them.

Some of the challenges that we faced were the internet connectivity issues in remote places so children sometimes were unable to get on the online sessions, as online/remote learning was new for children some of these children lost interest in the study and also keeping teachers motivated throughout this time to be consistent and adapt to new way of teaching.

To mitigate these challenges, we tried to develop children's interest in the activity and study and maintain teachers' engagement by asking children to record their videos on what they like or want to share with us. Most of them recorded their videos and posted in groups we all enjoyed the activity.





Post pandemic way forward Interventions:

LSE Google classroom

Miracle Foundation's pilot of making Life Skills Education available through technology for children ages 13+ as a self-guided Google Classroom tool so children can access LSE activities on their tablets.

Easy to understand, practical, and fun activities covering a range of topics like stress management and expressing emotions are being shared with children each week on Monday during this 6-week pilot program. As children go through the activities, they will have a chance to reflect on their learning and share their thoughts with their peers.

104 children who are either in families or in the CCIs were selected for the pilot based on their interest to be part of.

CCI staff were oriented on the tool and to guide children and make them acquainted with the tool demo sessions were conducted.

New educational initiatives so children are able to learn various new things like coding, Vedic maths, abacus and so on.

Testimonials:

Coaching teacher (from one of the CCIs we work with):

It was a new way of teaching for all of us. It gave me an opportunity to learn new ways to teach. I struggled initially however with training provided on remote education helped me understand how to conduct classes. Pandemic has definitely has made us stretch our horizons and understand a new way of teaching.

Challenges: In conducting online classes, not all students are able to learn with the same type of teaching method and due to time constraints and other reasons, it is difficult to teach different teaching methods and conduct co-curricular activities. Due to the unavailability of the internet, many children are not able to join online classes.

Child (from one of the CCIs we work with):

During the Covid- 19 pandemic situation when the government closed all the schools, I started learning through online learning techniques, it was a completely new experience and, in the beginning, I don't even like it because I'm used to going to school, meet up with friends, learn & play, but when I realized that it will go longer for some more time, then I become habitual and started taking interest in online education our teachers help us a lot in this process.

At the time of online classes, many times the network did not work properly so our teachers used to complete the chapter by giving more time. Also, to keep our interest in the session they add some fun-filled activities so that session will not be boring.



During this period, I realize that how much these devices are useful for us, I learned about many new things such as google classroom, google meet, zoom etc. Along with this I also learned coding on YouTube channel & 3D Animation from the prisma3d Mob app. I also realized that if there was no phone or internet, then in such a situation how much we would have fallen behind in studies. With the help of this phone, I not only attend my online classes but also completed my google classroom LSE session, created my own YouTube channel.

Conclusion:

In 2021, the government declared the start of the new academic year for state board schools with online classes and allowed the physical reopening of schools from July onwards in rural pockets and those located at a distance from cities that haven't had a single COVID-19 case for over a month. The State has also come up with Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for schools that will reopen asking them to consider two shifts every day and scheduling different classes for different days based on odd-even format. "Since we cannot play with the health of students, actual schools can be reopened in rural areas and areas that are away from cities, which are not infected by COVID-19. Also, online and digital platforms should be used on a pilot basis immediately," said Mr Uddhav Thackeray (Chief Minister of Maharashtra).

Continue distance learning modalities when schools reopen. Distance learning modalities ideally continue to run even when schools reopen.

This is important for four reasons:

1. to provide learning opportunities to children and youth who will remain out of school, even when schools have reopened,
2. to complement teaching at school with support for learning at home (e.g., through radio, TV and mobile learning programs),
3. for planning and preparedness in the eventuality of future school closures, and
4. to maintain and enhance digital literacy and blended learning skills for teachers and learners alike.

Miracle Foundation continues to support children, parents and CCI staff with the help of strategies introduced during the pandemic to enhance education for each and every child. Guiding the CCI teams so they provide guidance and support to the families and children to thrive even in this uncertain situation so much so there is no learning loss.

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