

Investigating the Problems and Status of Education of Street Children during COVID-19 in India

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Abstract:

This paper explores the educational dimension of street children during COVID-19 in a theoretical perspective. The introduction of COVID-19 in India projects major challenges in the field of education and a rush on ICT enabled education has been started to maintain the educational status among students. This surprised and drastic change brought major obstacles in the front of several fields of education including education for homeless children. As their teaching-learning process and composition contains location-wise deviation, so, variation and flexibility in plans could be required to administer properly. Unfortunately, India was not entirely ready to apply the absolute ICT Enabled education but the pandemic forced to do so. Also, ICT qualified education among street children is another wider aspect of the institutional field. So, the accomplishment of the plans for mainstream or regular students could not be comprehensive for street children too. The principal motto of this paper is to identify the status and issues facing by the street children for their education and to provide the strategies and approaches to solve the challenges.

Keywords: COVID-19, Street Children, ICT

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I. INTRODUCTION

The term 'street children' is widely related to those children who are living in the street with complex and challenging circumstances and homeless due to internal conflicts or any internal reason. In India, there is no distinct age limit is specified for them, though different agencies and institutions consider the age limit of 04-14. UNICEF classifies the street children among two parts; 'on the street' and 'of the street' and the provision of both the category exists with a diverse meaning. "Some children 'of the street' may have been abandoned and rejected by their families while others may have left their families due to prevailing circumstances." It is quite difficult to calculate the accurate number of street children in India, hence, the variation in estimated data could be detected in different organizations. In 1993, UNHCHR states that India is the hub of homeless children since it contains the highest number of street children in the world. Although the common range is between 4 million to 8 million and the next issue is how many of them are getting proper education? And again, we can find the same abnormality in data. There is no accurate or authentic number in the public domain which can satisfy the data of different organizations. Researches state that a maximum of street children belongs to the very extreme rather critical location where the literacy rate is extremely negligible. Hence, it might be possible that a street child may involve in prejudicial and antisocial activities. The government and multiple NGOs must bring the homeless children into the mainstream education system so that they can reidentify their own culture and identity in an upgraded and incomparably more beneficial way. And certainly, education plays a significant role in their

development. But unfortunately, the COVID-19 suspends all the ongoing applications of teaching and learning on and by street children, and frequent uses of ICT among 'regular students' pushed back the street children again to their previous educational rank. Since the street-connected children or students are used to access the social components more than other students and the UNICEF also suggests to prepare their aims and objectives of learning according to their experience. But the COVID-19 policies forced us to maintain physical distance and being social. Another area of concern is related to the identity, that COVID-19 causes the increment of domestic exploitation and violence which is an influential reason for children for being homeless. Increment in domestic disturbance may alter the number of street children but when a roof is necessary during lockdown and pandemic, then how we will redetermine the representation of street children where no one is permitted to remain in street. It is a challenging period for the street children and the continuation of their teaching-learning process.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- 1) To identify the factors which became obstacle for street children for their effective learning during pandemic.
- 2) Whether the defined teaching learning methods as well as process during COVID-19 are comfortable and suitable for them or not.
- 3) Outline the strategies and recommendation to overcome the issues.

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III. ONGOING TRADITION OF TEACHING-LEARNING

As mentioned earlier, the process and methods of teaching-learning for street children are not centralized, since every child has a diverse setting and conditions for surviving. There are numerous NGOs and Government agencies that are continuously operating standards on their proper education to make them 'civilized'. We can find a blended acknowledgment against inclusive education concerning street children. UNESCO recommends several teaching-learning models and manuals, but scholars find an enormous dropout of street children because a job is further essential for them to survive. Although the bridge courses, 'to educate and bring at par children with their age-relative academic levels,' are delivered positive consequences in several locations. Bridges courses are like a link between children and comprehensive learning. It cannot be expected that after finishing a bridge course, a street child should drive for inclusive learning. The Special Learning Support Materials (SLSM) are also developed by incorporating many perspectives to accomplish the aims & objectives. An overall composition reflects that NCERT proposed very practical teaching-learning suggestions for the children living in the street. Contrasting to the 'regular students', the street children involved in community and society earlier but it takes equal effort to make them social rather quick-mature. Hence, their curriculums are formulated of an equal weightage on learning through class and learning through training based on their daily experiences and observations. Scholar Carlos Bilich finds that ICT can be used to improve street children's plight by executing the concepts in an adequate manner and method. But we cannot find any intended instructions on ICT for homeless children. In 2010, R. Kyama published an article that ICT is transforming the lives of street children rapidly in Kenya. But in India, ICT is a supportive tool for teachers and instructors who use to teach and shape the street children. This means, here the ICT doesn't establish a reciprocal relationship between teacher and street children. The street children have very less and limited access to technology.

IV. COVID-19 & STREET CHILDREN

The pathetic status of street children during COVID-19 in India is another important challenge. In a project 'Spotlight on the Invisibles', in collaboration with the NCPCR, 'Save The Children' NGO carried out a census of street children in 2019 which has been successfully capable to associate 2,29,262 street children with legal identity document across the country. During COVID-19, the NCPCR, including this information, is recreating a new database of street children to link them for advantages from multiple government schemes and policies and be prevented from coming out of the streets. At the same time, few NGOs are still operating on street children to pass the lockdown without any difficulty. They are teaching common practices to prevent the coronavirus from striking.

The catchword 'Stay Home & Stay Safe' could not be compromised on street children since they do not have any individual shelter. They left their duty which used to provide meals twice a day. So, they are, somehow, now bound with

limitations and availing food from donations or any other government/NGO resources. We can find that as accustomed pandemic made people think more about food and shelter and education is a member of the additional frame which is more in street children cases. To move the sequence in the mainstream, we need to pull the education in the faculty of food and shelter for street students as a primary constraint.

Reports alarming that street children are being hit hard physically by coronavirus and economically by lockdown since many of them do not have any facility of clean water, hygienic food and health care. An article by reporter Monica on streetchildren.org states "However, the main health threat for anyone who catches COVID-19 is poor immune systems and underlying health conditions, and we all know that street-connected children and homeless youth are vulnerable. For instance, one of CSC's Network Members, Safe Society operating in India, expressed their fear that as a respiratory disease, COVID-19 will heavily impact street-connected children and their families, whose health is already compromised by lung and other chronic diseases."

V. STATUS OF EDUCATION AND STRATEGIES

It is considerably transparent that the status of education of street children asks for a drastic upliftment. It may necessitate opportunities for organizations to bring back on track the status of education of street children.

- i) Nutrition and Education: The demand and accumulation of hygienic food increased to peak due to COVID-19. As reviewed earlier, the supply of food and education should be delivered at a time. Since the street children do not have any job to earn right now due to the lockdown, the NGOs can prepare and involve them as a volunteer to expand awareness in multiple locations.
- ii) ICT Enabled Education: The use of ICT should not be restricted to teachers or instructors. In India, various institutions, who are committed to teaching street children, use ICT as a one-sided tool. The draft of the New Education Policy promotes the line 'Smartphone in every hand' to accomplish the teaching-learning process in a bold and modern way. Distribution of educational accessories and instruments among street children will boost the learning engagement and enthusiasm. Once the culture of e-Learning becomes prevalent, the utilization of the internet also becomes for positive determinations. To execute the plan properly, organizations or government require to afford the assessments of internet data packs.
- iii) Temporary Curriculum: Hawes (1982) argues that no society can escape the responsibility of planning the education of the children who grow up in it. The general and suggested curriculum is based on a blended pattern containing theoretical and training components so the street children could bring the changes in their behaviour from what they acquire. The MHRD is launching refreshed curriculums and academic calendars in a regular interval during pandemic having completely negligible space for street children. So, a new curriculum for street children is needed to launch as soon as possible.

- iv) **Teaching Methods:** The WHO proposes the basic methods like Group Discussion, Demonstration, Field Visit, Role Play, and appropriate Games are sufficient for their development of knowledge and skills. Now following these in COVID 19 index, the Group Discussion and Field Visits are completely encountered. The GD is only possible when every street child has a smartphone in hand. The teacher could suggest the most desirable ideas for demonstration where the apprentice needs not to perform outside the shelter. The appropriate induction of new games will assist to comprehend more about contemporary difficulties and strategies and at the same time, it will help to improve their skills. While determining the methods, the aspirations should be realized by focusing on the current pandemic and crisis. The accessible resources and references could accommodate more further to develop the methods in a compatible way.
- v) **Developing a Lesson:** The development of lesson has also an affiliation with the background of the child. It is also essential to ascertain the need of the street children through interviews, observation, and assessment, are the best potential approach to trace the requirements of a student. To construct the lessons, we must satisfy the multiple aspects like will it interfere with their activity, the relation between the lesion and the experience of the children during the pandemic, and so on. Methods, Objectives, Content, Teaching Aids, and the process of Assessment should be redeveloped to achieve the proper knowledge.
- vi) **Development of Skills:** Unlike regular students, street children require to acquire more abilities because they need to work on the street to survive. So, it is completely challenging to stream all the ingredients of skills within their learning activities. In August 2017, former home minister Mr. Rajnath Singh launched the program 'Yuva' a Delhi Police initiative aimed at imparting skills to street children and youth living in JJ Clusters. This project brought positive changes to the experiences of street children. Although, nowadays the notion and formation of programs require a replacement. By focusing on the context of coronavirus in the community, the development of creativity, adaptability, management, teamwork, and all the four areas i.e. LRSW should be projected more relevantly.

VI. EDUCATION OF STREET CHILDREN AND POST COVID-19 ERA

No one can specifically predict the accurate scenario and circumstances of the society in the post-COVID-19 era. However, specialists are expecting a scanty alteration in the established equilibrium of the socio-economic class. The knocking commercial crisis may influence the international trade and production community which affects directly the consumptions and accommodation of goods and products. This economic downfall will also settle its tragic consequences on the field of education like the distribution of accessories, ICT tools, and instruments, and other facilities provided to the children. Here it is to be noticed how much investment will be made during COVID-19 on street children

and their education for their upliftment. We do not know the duration of 'temporariness' concerning the pandemic. So perhaps, it might be possible that we need to strengthen our daily routine as we use to do before the COVID-19 attack. So, the flexibility in educational plans for street-connected children is a significant part to be observed.

There is also a potentiality that we may have to continue with Coronavirus by acknowledging it as a segment of our society. In that case, we have to manifest the plans in a long-term manner. We cannot deny that what we are learning and executing during this pandemic, will not be utilized in the future. So here we should rethink about 'Temporary Curriculum' and 'Temporary Content or Calendar' concerning homeless children.

VII. CONCLUSION

The traditional status of education of homeless children is still in configuration mode. At this stage of transition between regular and pandemic life, the preparation and execution of educational aspirations is a call of time. Proper nutrition, education, and awareness would encourage them to fight against the pandemic. It is considerably clear that the development of objectives is not the achievement of the target rather it is on the way to the destination. To face the COVID-19 and post COVID-19 phase, a comprehensive curriculum should be prepared and apply to a massive system. Every street child has own story and experience to learn things, so a decentralized teaching-learning process and curriculum would be more effective for them to accommodate the knowledge and improve the skills. One street child experiences society and social practices more closely than a regular student, but more effort need to put to make them socialize. A perfect plan is expected to execute on a huge platform as soon as possible.

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