

The Changed Role of CRC | BRC | DIET

Suchi Dubay

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the entire human race, including children, severely. They have been impacted in many ways with regard to their family and social life, but their education has suffered the most. According to UNESCO, the education of 90 percent of school-going children around the world has been disrupted by the pandemic.

A *Human Rights Watch* reportⁱ documents how COVID-19-related school closures have affected children unequally, as not all children had the opportunities, tools or the access needed to continue learning during the pandemic. The report found that the heavy reliance on online learning has exacerbated the already existing unequal distribution of support for education. Many governments did not have the policies, resources, or infrastructure to roll out online learning in a way that ensured that all children could participate equally.

Background

The decades-long, slow, though steady, pace of educating children came to a sudden halt in March 2020. By April, large numbers of students across the country had to stop going to their pre-primary, primary and secondary schools to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus. Later, schools reopened for some students in some parts of the country, while in the rest, students have still not been able to return to school. During school closures, in most places, education was provided either online or by other remote methods, but there is a huge gap in the success and quality of these methods. Several issues, including internet access, connectivity, accessibility, physical preparedness, teacher training and home conditions, have largely affected the viability of distance education.

Elin Martinez, Senior Education Researcher, Human Rights Watch, said, 'With millions of children deprived of education during the pandemic, now is the time to strengthen protection of the right to education by rebuilding

better and more equitable and robust education systems. The aim should not be just to return to how things were before the pandemic, but to fix the flaws in systems that have long prevented schools from being open and welcoming to all children.'

But both government and non-governmental institutions could not do much to address this issue. There were some immediate efforts, but they were not very successful due to a lack of cohesion. Many states in India also tried to start online education as part of the government efforts and sought many other ways to keep children connected with education, but these efforts could not reach the children of deprived and rural families because they could not afford the devices or the internet access. Schools with fewer resources, whose students were already facing learning barriers, particularly faced difficulties in teaching their students due to digital limitations. In addition, education systems have often failed to provide digital literacy training to students and teachers to ensure that they can use these technologies safely and confidently.

In such critical times, the responsibility of government and non-government educational organisations working in the area of education and its management, has increased. Academicians, students and parents are looking at these institutions with a lot of hope. Institutions like NCERT, SCERT, DIET, BRC and CRCⁱⁱ are trying to update their roles in the present circumstances. But innumerable children who have been promoted to the next classes for the last two consecutive years (2020-21, 2021-22) without getting formal education are facing the problem of gaps in learning. Nothing can be predicted about how long they will have to continue facing this problem. It is the responsibility of the districts and the schools to plan and make education simple, authentic and practical for every village. The people or organisations who are regularly working with the children of a particular area should keep in mind the conditions of that area while planning and implementation and review it

from time to time.

From the government's side, SCERT has adopted online methods of educating children at the state level. Efforts were made to prepare worksheets, videos, quizzes, etc, and send them to children through *WhatsApp*. To some extent, these efforts were effective, but apart from the problems already mentioned, there were others, such as teaching material not being as per the level of the children as there was no assessment of the children's academic levels before the preparation of the material. Also, the teaching material was prepared without the help of teachers. Regional conditions were not kept in mind. This was done at the SCERT level, without the direct intervention of other educational institutions. So, like other such schemes, when this reached the ground, it was found to be uninteresting and alien to the context and, therefore, could not be implemented systematically.

Many government and non-governmental organisations have been continuously working in the education domain for many decades now, but in the present circumstances, their endeavours proved ineffective. They should have planned and worked for the children in the changed circumstances according to their district/region.

Governmental institutes

District Institutes of Educational Training

District Institutes of Educational Training (DIETs) have been established as centres of guidance for educational institutes and schools within a district. Established by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, the DIET is a lighthouse in the field of education. The DIETs are entrusted with the work of creating and providing teaching-learning resources, promoting action research, providing activity-based learning, arranging need-based programmes and facilitating teachers. Their responsibilities also include introducing educational technology in teaching and introducing modern methods of evaluation.

In the current circumstances, if a DIET plans to work at the grassroots level with teachers and children by further enriching its role, then efforts can be made to reduce the learning gap of those children who do not have the facilities of online learning.

To achieve this, the DIETs can take the following steps:

- Identify the entire district on a geographical, social, economic basis

- Form a group of teachers working in the identified areas to assess the educational needs of the children
- On the basis of this assessment, conduct short-duration courses that can meet the basic subject-related needs of the children. Teachers should work online with those who have online resources and reach out to the rest.
- Have continuous discussions with teachers through training, workshops, meetings, etc., so that the plans can be reviewed from time to time, and changes can be made as per requirements.
- Arrange for effective and time-bound evaluation of the plan for every child, so as to know which learning outcomes are yet to be worked out with each child.
- Prepare worksheets, etc., for children according to their level with the help of teachers.
- Worksheets, teaching-learning materials, library books, etc., will have to be given adequate space in the entire plan so that children can use these as effective learning resources.
- In the whole process, parents and other qualified people of the community will also have to be identified as volunteers and given simple and practical training to enable them to work with the children of their family, neighbourhood or locality.

Thus, the DIETs will now have to act as lighthouses in reality. For this to happen, it is necessary that the DIETs coordinate with teachers, BRCs, CRCs and other educational organisations so that the required cooperation of everyone can be obtained in this work.

Block Resource Centres

At the block level, BRCs work with the District Education Officer (DEOs) and in coordination with the Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs) to ensure that various government schemes reach the school, such as:

1. Approval for developing physical infrastructure of schools, such as classrooms, boundary walls, toilets, etc.
2. Transport voucher scheme approved for the children whose homes are far away from school.
3. Provide equipment and educational material for children with special needs.

Each BRC consists of five to six members who constantly supervise and monitor the schools in their block. Their observations are shared with the

CRCs and based on these, the design for quality improvement in planning, training and education is devised.

The functions of the BRCs include:

- Organising in-service training for elementary school teachers
- Cooperating with the CRCs for streamlining and improving the functioning of schools
- Collaborating with NGOs and local administration to implement provisions of the Right to Education (RTE) Act.

The BRC has an important role in a block. Children benefit when the BRC can channelise its members and other resources into their work for children. For example, at present, when the schools are closed, the BRC can use the human resources at their disposal to start community classes, train community volunteers to prepare the material for these community classes as per the level and requirement of the children, teach and assess the children from time to time.

In the present circumstances, BRCs can update their roles and try to bridge the learning gaps of children by coordinating with the DIETs. This may, to some extent, be successful in maintaining at least the grade-level learning that the children were at when schools were closed.

To achieve this, the BRCs will have to do the following:

- Coordinate with the DIETs and other institutions
- Discuss with teachers how to work with children in situations arising due to COVID-19 and organise online workshops and training by preparing modules based on the experience of teachers
- Initiate school-wise planning to ensure that teachers have access to all children
- Create worksheets and other learning materials based on local conditions
- Give constructive feedback by listening to teachers' experiences/problems during school inspection
- Ensure that children's learning is properly assessed
- Organise short trainings for volunteers in villages. The educated youth of the village or those who are studying at +2 level, can be asked to teach elementary language and mathematics to the children of their neighbourhood or locality

Cluster Resource Centres

Directly affiliated with all educational institutions that organise the programmes for schools, the CRCs work closely with the DEO and the Block Education Officer (BEO). The High School of the *panchayat* headquarters is used as the centre and all the schools of that *panchayat* are included under that particular CRC.

The functions of the CRC are:

- Observing classes and provide support to teachers in classroom teaching
- Ensuring enrolment and retention in schools
- Conducting monthly teachers' meetings and teacher training sessions
- Coordinating with school management committees, parents and other institutions

In these changed circumstances, the CRC, in consultation with the school management committee, parents and departmental officials can organise community classes for children with the help of teachers and volunteers at three-four places in the village. This can be planned by conducting a pre-test for each child. In consultation with the teachers, it can be decided what to teach the children and what the process of evaluation should be.

The CRC can also discuss with the teachers what learning opportunities can be provided to the children with the help of the available resources, so that they can learn the basic skills of language and maths in interesting ways and the continuity of their learning can be ensured. The CRC must coordinate with the DIETs and other educational institutions to prepare text materials, like short poems, story charts and booklets in the local language and make these available to the children.

Some important points

In this process, care should be taken that teachers are not neglected. For some time now, the practice has been that one or two institutions of the state create the textbooks and worksheets. The prepared material is delivered to the teachers, and they are instructed to implement these within the stipulated time. Teachers have no interest in this, and they carry it out merely as a government directive. If teachers are given freedom in creating worksheets and methods of teaching children, then perhaps the results would be better and more effective. For this, workshops can be organised from time to time to train teachers.

In the present circumstances, all the people and institutions working in the field of education should think about their roles. We should do some research on how we can work with children in different situations, especially after the COVID-19 experience.

Along with the DIETs, BRCs and CRCs, the schools should also analyse how many and who among the students have left school – who came back and who did not. It should be ensured that the school-return programme traces all dropouts so that every child who is facing the problem of lagging behind in studies can reach age-appropriate levels. We need to think about the children whose financial condition has been impacted due to the pandemic and they are

unable to come to school, or children whose parents are not sending them to school because of the fear of COVID-19 infection.

The following can be done with such children and their guardians:

1. Counselling of children and parents should be done by SMC/doctors/teachers and influential people like the village sarpanch and public representatives so that children can return to school.
2. On the basis of a baseline assessment, a bridge course should be designed to fill the gap between the actual class-level of the children and the prescribed class level.

Endnotes

- i Years Don't Wait for Them: Increased Inequalities in Children's Right to Education Due to the COVID-19 Pandem-ic. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/05/17/years-dont-wait-them/increased-inequalities-childrens-right-education-due-covid>
- ii NCERT: National Council of Educational Research and Training
SCERT: State Council of Educational Research and Training
DIET: District Institute of Educational Training
BRC: Block Resource Centre
CRC: Cluster Resource Centre



Suchi Dubay holds an engineering degree in Digital Instrumentation from Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, Indore. She joined the Fellowship programme of the Azim Premji Foundation in 2014 and worked with the Rajasthan team in Bali block, Pali district. After completing the Fellowship, she worked as a resource person with the teachers in Banswara till 2020 to build an understanding of mathematics. Since March 2021, she is working in the field of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) with the District Institute, Azim Premji Foundation, Sirohi. She loves drawing and telling stories to children and may be contacted at suchi.dubay@azimpremjifoundation.org