



## IS ONLINE EDUCATION REALLY HELPING CHILDREN WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY DURING CORONAVIRUS DISEASE PANDEMIC

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**ABSTRACT** From the time coronavirus has marked its presence everyone is facing global shutdown and educational institutions are no different. Shut schools have kept students sitting at home and learn through online mode of education. Home works, assignments activities and evaluation are being done online and from past two years this process has got itself mainstreamed. Parents are paying fees in paid schools and are spending extra amount to ensure availability of technology and broadband for their child. Although some have accepted this mode, while other are not in favour of this. But the pandemic has left parents with no other options, as sitting home is at least keeping their child safe from the virus. The education of general students can be seen manageable through this mode, but when it comes to the education of children with disabilities and specifically children with intellectual disability (CwID), the question arises how this section of society is managing their education. Are Moderately or Sever intellectual disabled students getting help from online world? What are the various challenges and potentials online education have on CwID? Hence, the investigator conducted a review based study and draw the conclusion.

**KEYWORDS :** Challenges, Children with Intellectual disability, Online Education, Pandemic, and Potentials.

### INTRODUCTION:

In this time of pandemic due to Coronavirus disease, the education system has shifted itself from traditional mode of imparting knowledge to the online mode of delivering the education to the learners. From the time this virus had hit the spike, schools are being shut for the safety of the children. Hence, the schools are operating through online mode, where the learners are provided with online schedule of classes followed by online home work submission, online evaluation, online competitions and so on. Government, Private, Semi-Government, Special Schools and all other forms of educational institutions are working online and delivering their best. Teachers were provided with the guidelines to follow the time table and with increased relaxations in lock down some schools are also calling their teachers to school and take classes online or call students to school, only if necessary. Education system has entered a new era of delivery method during this pandemic, where some parents have forcefully bought smartphones to get connected to the school or others are still trying to give time to help their children in learning through online mode and understanding the operation of technological device being used nowadays for learning. According to a study conducted by Rajaraman K. and Krishna N. (2021), on *Inclusive education for children with disabilities during COVID-19*, it was investigated that "Half of the parents interviewed reported that their child is completely dependent on them for accessing online education." This finding has its positive impact also as the participation of parents in their child's education has increased. Parents are now taking out time and sitting with their child during the online session and keeping a watch on what's being taught and what's expected from their child. But on the other side, it has increased the stress and anxiety among the parents who couldn't arrange such devices for education, couldn't operate or take out time from their schedule for their child. This doesn't end here only, this technological based education has its own geographical perspective which also needs to be considered as in the same study conducted it was propounded that "The penetration of online learning for children with Neurodevelopmental disabilities is lower in rural than urban areas". Children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities finds it difficult to understand the concept through online mode of learning as they need concrete objects to get to the concept and understand it, synthesize it and generalize the same. Digital Incompetence among students, parents and even teachers has impacted the quality of education. P. Plichta (2018), founded that "there is digital inequalities in the social group of learners with disabilities" and during the time of pandemic as online education became a necessity this digital inequality has lead to educational inequalities as all doesn't have access to broad bands, smartphones and other required equipments. S. Burgstahler (2015), propounded that "people with disabilities who have access to digital technologies are unable to reap all the benefits which this technology provides to other people".

### Need of the Study:

The shift of educational system from offline to online mode without any transitional planning has affected the education of general students. Children in past two years have got promotions to next classes but their level of learning is not as it was in classrooms.

As we are aware that even children with mild intellectual disability need scaffolding in one way or the other from the teacher in order to complete the given task and physical reinforcements are the driving forces that make them perform activities more actively. Physical classroom environment make these children socially active and behaviourally adaptable. But all this had lost from the time education delivery system became online and the classroom begin on computers, mobiles or other devices.

Hence, the investigator felt the need to conduct study on this topic to understand the degree of impact this new compulsion has brought on education of children with intellectual disability.

### Online Education:

Online mode of education is not a new concept. It is a flexible instructional delivery system that encompasses any kind of learning that takes place over internet or with the use of internet supported technological equipments. It provides an opportunity to the learners as well as educators to interact and provide those learners with the knowledge who due to any of the reasons couldn't come to the school physically but has a zeal to learn. This system of education is effective specially to those who find schools or educational institutes in accessible or out of their physical reach. The concept of online education was there from long in the society and from the time the technological development and globalisation has taken place. Interaction, delivering homework, watching online lessons in case a student misses the class etc. Everything was taking place in a parallel universe along with traditional classroom learning. Hence it was less bothering for those who doesn't have digital literacy or doesn't have high tech devices with them or even smartphones. Dhull and Sakshi (2017) stated that "Online Learning encompasses a range of technologies such as the worldwide web, email, chat, new groups and texts, audio and video conferencing delivered over computer networks to impart education. It helps the learner to learn at their own pace, according to their own convenience." Online mode of education requires different type of resources and proper planning, where teacher is a facilitator and provide enhanced learning experience to the learner. This mode also helps learner to understand the abstract concept better by providing them suitable and age appropriate multi dimensional images of the concept and also different mode of learning, which could be visual, audio or both.

### Online Education and Children with Intellectual Disability:

Relating online education to children with intellectual disability is necessary to understand its potential and challenges on the education. The investigator figured some challenges and potentials which are as follow:

### Challenges:

Children with Intellectual Disability while learning in traditional classroom mode need support from the educator to get ready for the task, understand the task, execute the task and finishes it as per his/her

capability. While in classroom, the educator can keep an eye on the performance of CwID and can help them in case they get mislead while doing the task. Educating CwID in classroom is sometimes not an easy task, as it takes an extra effort to keep the classroom focused and engaged in the classroom and given tasks during school hours, where the environment itself is a motivation for learning. However, this is not the case when we talk about the online education for these students. Like other students, these children sometimes couldn't understand the need to attend class and to sit during whole session in front of a computer with educator instructing them to perform the task. This is somewhat vague for them or one can say an abstract thing that is hard to digest. The home environment doesn't set any motivation for some CwID and various distractions can act as a barrier for them in completing the given task. Buehler, Easley, Poole and Hust (2016) propounded that "For students with intellectual disability, completing technology dependent tasks may pose unique challenges that are not always addressed by disability support services". Kohli, Wampole and Kohli (2021) stated that major challenges faced by students are: a) struggle with online education, (b) difficulty connecting with instructors, (c) lack of motivation, (d) losses, (e) difficulty accessing other learning resources, and (f) unsafe/inaccessible home environment.

Considering this, some of challenges faced by CwID and their parents are as:

- **Poor digital Literacy:**

In the starting period of school shut, CwID who doesn't have operated computers or smartphones earlier find it difficult to join meetings, follow link, search homework, upload homework, search download files and perform other digital tasks. Even the parents or caregivers who doesn't have much knowledge couldn't help their child in completing the task, which sometimes is frustrating for the educator as he/she has to repeat the instructions again and again to perform the simple operation of computer. Even after two years of online mode of teaching, some parents still find it difficult to cope up with the online mode of learning.

- **Lack of Resources:**

Most of CwID belongs to average or below average group of families who doesn't have access to basic facilities and in this time of online learning buying smartphone specially for the education of their child is not economically sound for them and the family. Buying a computer and having a paid broadband connection for online class can put the family in financial strain which sometimes get unaffordable for the family. The resources doesn't only contain having a technological equipments. It also include the Teacher Learning Material specifically tailored as per the needs of CwID by the educator. Dispensing material to each and every child before practising task or teaching is not feasible for teachers.

- **Lack of Drive:**

The School, classroom and environment provides a driving force to the child to learn, behave and follow the decorum of the school. This drive motivates the child as he/she observes other classmates performing the task and learning. The atmosphere established by the educator during classroom teaching couldn't be same during online session. The pat given on back after successful completion of task can't be replaced with verbal reinforcement. Sitting with child and prompting the child can't replace sitting on computer and helping the child. All these are hidden driving forces that prepares the child for the task he/she learns within the classroom. Similarly, sitting, discussing and completing the tasks with peers can't be replaced and such natural driving forces can't be replicated in online sessions by any means.

- **Presenting and Understanding the task:**

CwID need to be taught about a task in multiple ways using various techniques. Teaching scribbling, art and craft, Activities of Daily living etc. is tough during online sessions as it sometimes requires the learner and the teacher to be together where teacher can assist the child and rectify the mistakes and also use different methods to teach the same task. It is not as easy as giving homework and expecting the child to do it by his own. Parents also sometimes couldn't help their child in such tasks as most of them have never done it before and are not interested even.

- **Delivering Support Services:**

Some CwID have associated conditions which need to be taken care of by providing therapy sessions to them. Some required therapies may include behavioural therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy,

speech therapy, language therapy, counselling session to adults with Intellectual disabilities and other related therapies. These therapies help CwID manage themselves in the classroom and learn more effectively than if they learn without such therapies. Some therapies session require one to one attention and couldn't be done online and hence disrupts child education.

**Advantages:**

- **Convenient access and Flexibility:**

Online mode of education is more convenient and flexible for CwID in specific and Children with Disabilities in general. Here CwID can learn at their own pace without any burden and can access the task in multiple way available other than physical. They doesn't face any infrastructural barrier that obstruct them from learning. Hence it is more convenient and flexible. Online Courses can be developed on "Universal Design for Learning" and multiple way of accessing, interpreting and understanding the course can be provided to the learner with intellectual disabilities, which further make learning accessible and convenient.

- **An equalizing agent:**

Online education is acting as a bridge for the education of children with disabilities in today's time. As said "Something is better than nothing". This saying goes well in today's situation specially for children with severe disabilities because if they were kept unattended then this will make their situation worse. Erickson (2016), stated that "technology has the ability to serve as an equalizing agent and online education create a bridge to help children with special needs to pursue bachelor's and graduate course"

- **Variability in producing, presenting and evaluation:**

The concept of smart classes was brought into the picture to help students understand the concepts that are abstract in nature in easy, better and multiple ways and to make learning more enjoyable. Bringing technology to the classrooms is the idea on which country is still working. Such tool provide assistance to the teachers in explaining the content in better way. For children with Intellectual disability presentation of content is of utmost importance as they might not understand it if presented either verbally or physically. Multi-sensory approach and Montessori method talks about presenting content uniquely and in different style to make learning easy. Online learning also in some way help teacher prepare innovative content and present among CwID which make it easier for them to understand and answer. Even the evaluation of learning has become easy with this as now multiple choice questions can be asked and home assignment can be given which allow child to perform at his own pace. Axioms of teaching in special education can easily be followed through online mode with out any hassle.

**CONCLUSION:**

Every idea has two facets or cause a social divide. Some follows it and praises it, while others stand against it and criticize it. But both the groups have a rationale to support or criticize it and it need to be considered to make the idea execute effectively and reap better results. Similarly, the concept of online education has also been seen as a *boon or bane*. Hence, discussing both the facets is important for the investigator to arrive at better conclusion. The investigator after reviewing literatures leads to the conclusion, that online education is a substitute to traditional mode in today's era of pandemic, where every institute is facing shutdown globally and no other provision is available, and this provision of imparting knowledge is definitely keeping the children on track and helping them learn to some extent, but it couldn't provide the same impact on their learning and many students couldn't have access to this education due to various reasons and specifically teaching CwID through this mode makes it tough for them to understand and perform to their best as there could be many distractions that can affect their potential. Murphy, Malenczak and Mina (2019), also propounded that students with a Psychiatric Disorder (PD) endorsed the challenges of time management, difficulty concentrating, and difficulty navigating the course website at a higher rate than students without a PD. The investigator however couldn't find any study on intellectual disability and hence feels that conclusion drawn in this paper will definitely help further researchers to pursue research on this conclusion.

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