SCHOOL CLOSURE AND EDUCATION

Experiences of Teachers and Parents from Maharashtra

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 'School Closure and Education' report would not have been possible without the efforts and support from many of our team members, collaborators, and stakeholders from the Pune, Nashik, Satara, Akola, Ahmednagar, and Solapur districts of Maharashtra. We would like to express our immense gratitude to all those who have brought us this far.

We would first and foremost like to acknowledge and thank all the government officials and teachers from all the participant districts who helped connect with participants for the study. Without their invaluable help, we would not have been able to meet the wonderful parents, teachers, and other participants who have contributed richly to this study.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the team at Leadership for Equity. Without the hard work that they put into meeting participants and gathering data, the report would have been impossible to complete. We appreciate all the efforts of the Advisory, OPD, PMC/PCMC, Nashik, and cross-vertical team members.

This study was conducted in the hopes to shed light on the ground realities of education in times of school closure due to lockdown announced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study aims to present challenges and future pain points of our stakeholders, particularly parents and teachers, understanding of which will help the LFE team and the sector at large to reorient some of the program strategies. We are grateful for having had the opportunity to conduct this study. We hope it will be useful and inspire the present and future stakeholders in Maharashtra and India who hold the key to providing better education for all.

ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19	CoronaVirus Disease 2019
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
LFE	Leadership for Equity
ZP	Zilla Parishad
DIET	District Institute for Education and Training
CRG	Cluster Resource Group
BRG	Block Resource Group
DIKSHA	Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing
UDISE	Unified District Information System for Education
FGD	Focussed Group Discussion
PMC	Pune Municipal Corporation
PCMC	Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation
OPD	Officer Professional Development
SP	Shikshan Parishad
SEL	Social and Emotional Learning
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
APU	Azim Premji University
MH	Maharashtra

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic swept India with full force, leading to a nationwide lockdown[1] from 25 March 2020. For the entire year, the schools in the country remained shut and compelled stakeholders[2] of education institutions, such as officers, school leaders, teachers, parents, and students, to shift teaching and learning practices to remote mediums, with particular stress on the use of technology. Given this context, LFE undertook a research study in December 2020 with two major objectives: (1) To understand the challenges faced by stakeholders (teachers and parents) due to closure of schools and shifting to alternate[3] teaching and learning formats; and (2) to understand the actual traction of educational programs and initiatives on the ground.

PANDEMIC AND THE DIGITAL INEQUITY

A major area for examination was the availability of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for student learning among stakeholders.

- At least 2 students per teacher are out of reach [4](out of contact) even after 10 months since lockdown.
- Parents in tribal areas are more disadvantaged compared to those from rural and urban areas. Less than half of tribal households possess any digital device such as smartphone, TV or computer. Urban households, forming the lowest proportion (19.2%) of households in the survey boasts the highest availability of all digital devices.
- Only 58.2 % of teachers own a personal smartphone that do not face the challenge of competing use (shared or used by more than one person) whereas the remaining 42 % either face challenges of competing use or they do not use a smartphone. Similarly, 19 % of teachers possess personal laptops.
- The availability of resources with parents does not necessarily mean access to resources for students. While 76% of parents possess smartphones, almost 85% of them face problems of competing use whereas 80% of parents face challenges of unavailability of a phone during a child's learning time.

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[1]**Lockdown:** described as the period from the announcement of the first country shut down on March 24th until unlock 2.0 (refer to the chart above). The followed up events include shutting down of schools

[2]**Stakeholders/Community:** Specifically refers to parents and teachers of children studying the Zilla Parishad, Municipal Corporation or Municipality schools in either of the chosen districts of the study.

[3] **Alternate format of education**: refers to an alternate and temporary form of education structure created due to closure of schools.

[4] **Reach**: refers to the numbers of students with whom teachers have been able to maintain touchpoints of varying frequencies through phone calls, text messages or in-person visits, since the announcement of the lockdown.

- 78% of parents have irregular or no internet access, and 70% of parents are challenged by limited internet bandwidth.

HOW STUDENTS HAVE BEEN LEARNING?

Despite the presence of digital inequity, students have been learning through programs, learning materials, and teacher instruction.

Medium of interaction
The parent survey reported that 64.7% of parents interact with teachers through Whatsapp, and 91.3% of teachers reported that they use Whatsapp to interact with their students.

Prevalence of programs
The study observed 14 different programs, each implemented in diverse ways. Overall, the program reach has been low in all districts, though marginally better in intervention[5] districts.

Availability of learning materials
- A lot of learning materials such as textbooks, worksheets, assessments and learning audio/videos have reached children in virtual and printed format at various frequencies.
- 93.7 % of parents said that they received textbooks in the last six months (June-December). Textbooks and printed materials were preferred more by parents than[5] digital worksheets
- Teacher instructions and guidance was realised as a necessity for students.

Teachers have been conducting live classes as well as in-person teaching through home visits or through community spaces.

Synchronous[6] teaching
- 45% of teacher respondents did not take a live class of children in the reference week. The 55 % of teachers who conducted live classes spent, on average, less than 2 hours per day teaching.
- On average, 10 students per teacher (close to 40 %) attended a live class on a particular day given the average class strength is 25 students per teacher
- The frequency of teaching through phone calls or in-person visits also remained low (only up to 1-2 hours a week) on average. Even with the low frequency of in-person instruction, it was highlighted as the most preferred mode of instruction by both parents and teachers.

Student progress
- While 57.1 % of teachers could take some assessment of their students to understand their learning progress, any assessment conducted by teachers mostly remained ad hoc, unstructured and non-standardized compared to formal assessments at school.
- The initiatives have reached the students, they have engaged with learning materials to some extent, there were instructions given by the teacher but there is very little evidence to suggest that all these activities have actually helped children learn as per their grade levels

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[5] Pune, Satara, Nashik, and Akola are LFE intervention districts where LFE has co-worked/co-implemented educational initiatives with the government

[6] Synchronous modes of teaching are those that happen at the same time , like live teaching in a classroom or over video call. While Asynchronous teaching does not happen at the same time

Teacher efforts[7] and teaching challenges

Teachers have been engaged in multiple roles since the lockdown. Apart from using remote mediums of teaching, teachers have been conducting home visits, additional duties and in some cases going out of their way to ensure student learning.

- On average, 1 in 3 teachers were busy with COVID-19 duty to some extent.
- 86.5% of parents reported that they are satisfied with overall teacher efforts in ensuring their child's learning in the scenario of school closure.
- More teachers in intervention districts participated in training on topics related to remote teaching, SEL and content pedagogy (on average 50%) compared to non-intervention districts of Ahmednagar and Solapur (on average 20 %). About 12.1 % of teachers reported no training happened on remote teaching.
- About 57.7 % of teachers reported that they are "somewhat satisfied" with training related to remote teaching.
- Although training has been conducted to enable teachers on various skills, many teachers reported that they figured out most things themselves.

Disrupted child wellbeing[8] and learning loss

The two major deprivations levied on children due to closure of schools have been the loss of child wellbeing as well as the loss of learning.

- While there are many instances that show an increase in parent involvement in a child's learning, field observers also noted that parents have a limited understanding of their child's learning needs. Teachers too reported that education is not a top priority for many parents.
- In FGD, a high number of parents reported that the closure of schools has disturbed the daily routine of children. 91% of parents reported their children have become restless at home. 14% of parents reported that their children do not have any one of the same age to interact with.
- Loss of learning is a major fear highlighted by both parents and teachers.
- To address the loss of learning, both parents and teachers feel that reopening of school could improve things. About 95% of parents are willing to send children to schools if schools are opened.

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[7]**Teacher efforts:** Teachers have been conducting home visits, reaching out to students and parents through phone calls, WhatsApp as well as undertaking activities to ensure their learning even before the official directive given to them in October 2020, as reported by one of the LFE team members. Such instances of ownership showcased by teachers are described as teacher efforts. Teacher efforts include all the actions taken by teachers beyond their expected job role or official directive to ensure student learning and wellbeing.

[8]**Child Wellbeing:** refers to the social, physical and emotional upkeep of children at home in the current scenario.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused severe disruption in all walks of life, one of them being education. Starting in the early months of 2020, Governments across the world have temporarily closed all educational institutions as a preventive measure to contain the spread of the virus. The mass closure of schools has compelled stakeholders of education institutions, namely, officers, school leaders, teachers, parents and students, to shift teaching and learning practices to remote mediums particularly with a stress on the use of technology. This has been the most untested and unprecedented move in the recent history of education systems. This study is an attempt to investigate challenges faced by teachers and parents to cope with the remote format of teaching and learning, and to understand the reach and satisfaction of major programs launched. The data in this study was collected by Leadership For Equity's program teams themselves and focused on the experiences of teachers and parents in six districts in Maharashtra.

Leadership for Equity (LFE) a non-profit (NGO) - is a systems change and research organization. In our two-fold approach to change, we build the capacity of government system leaders and we influence system processes. In partnership with the local and state education bodies, we co-create programs that shift teaching-learning practices and improve student learning and well-being. This work coupled with our research and advisory support to influence policies, we hope to create effective public education systems in India.

At LFE, the fundamental belief is that Public Education Systems are by definition 'gatekeepers' of equity; and effective and sensitive public education systems will ensure that quality education is provided to every child. Keeping this theme at the center of our work our program teams have been closely working with 8 State and district level public education bodies to ensure maximum support for teachers and complete access to students since school shutdowns. Given the positioning of LFE's work and the mandate of any development sector organization to ensure that we tailor our efforts to the needs of the stakeholders, a community survey was initiated to investigate COVID-19 response programs culminating in this report.

OBJECTIVES

1. To identify challenges faced by parents and teachers due to the closure of schools and shifting to alternate teaching and learning formats

2. To gain a close understanding of actual traction educational programs on the ground in LFE intervention and non-intervention districts of Maharashtra
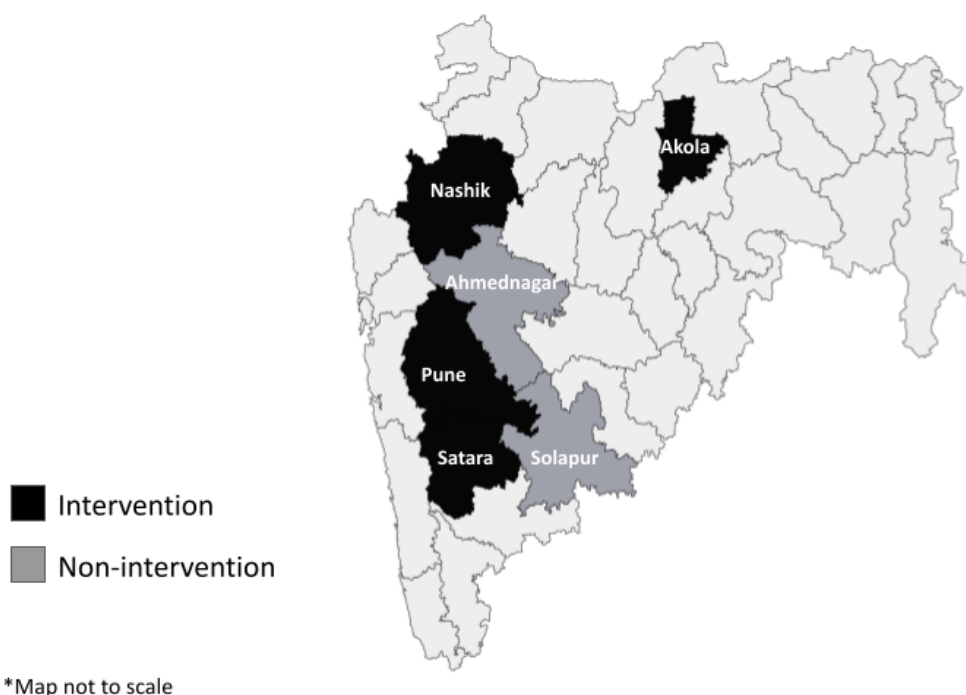
Fig1: Sample districts, School Closure and Education study

A total of 6 districts were selected for the study of which **Pune, Satara, Nashik, and Akola** are LFE intervention districts whereas **Ahmednagar** and **Solapur** are non-intervention districts. Within each districts, specific blocks regarded as most remote/challenging or as per community classification were selected for data collection.

Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

A total of **20 parent FGD and 24 teachers FGDs** were conducted across 6 districts of Maharashtra namely, Pune, Satara, Nashik, Akola, Ahmednagar, and Solapur. Areas of inquiry through FGDs include parent involvement in education, availability of learning resources, perception of remote teaching, child well-being, household environment, program awareness, and future challenges.

Observation notes

Observation notes captured during field visits by enumerators have also been used in this study.

Surveys

A total of **391 parent** surveys and **380 teacher** surveys questionnaire conducted through in-person and remote mediums. The survey covered similar themes to that of FGD.

KEY FINDINGS

PANDEMIC AND THE DIGITAL INEQUITY

Education through remote medium seems to be inadequate because of the inequitable access of learning opportunities by students. This includes availability of digital devices such as smartphones, computers and TV as well as pattern of use of devices at home.

At least 2 students are out of contact per teacher since lockdown

Since lockdown, teachers have been able to maintain touchpoints of varying frequencies with their students through phone calls, text messages, or in-person visits. The survey wanted to understand the extent to which students were reached by teachers and quantify the number of students who are in no

contact whatsoever with teachers since the lockdown.

On average at least 2 students are out of reach per teacher for Akola, Ahmednagar, Nashik whereas, at least 3 students on average are out of reach per teacher in Pune and Solapur. However, **41% of the teachers respondents said that they could reach all children in their classrooms.**

In-equitable distribution of digital resources

The survey noted that smartphones are available among 76 % of households followed by TV at 59.3 %. Parents in tribal areas are more disadvantaged compared to those from rural and urban areas. Less than half of tribal households possess any digital device such as smartphone, TV or computer. Urban households, forming the lowest proportion (19.2%) of households in the survey boasts the highest availability of all digital devices.
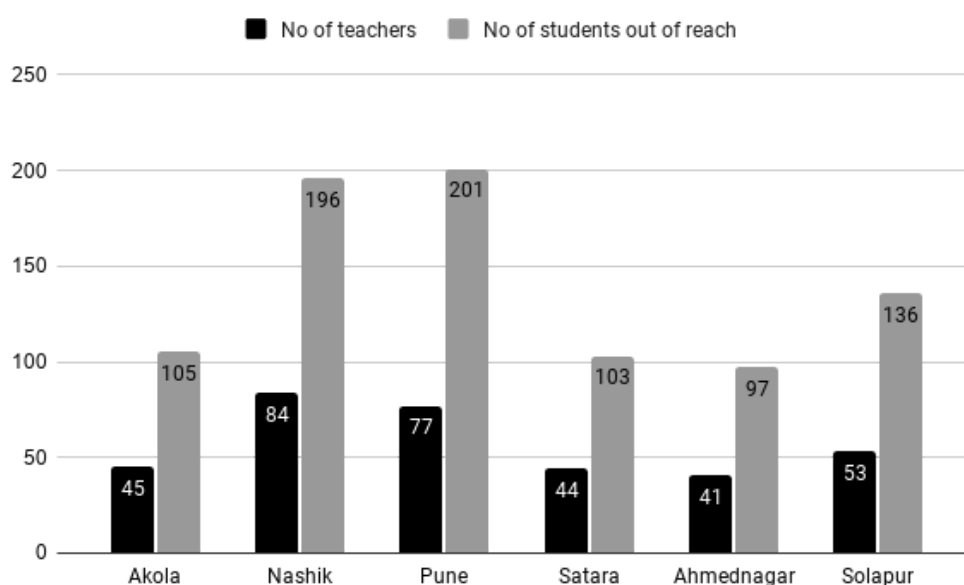

Fig 2: Number of students out of teacher reach (Teacher Survey)

Fig 3: Parent survey

Connectivity challenges faced by parents
The prerequisite of online education is possessing a personalized device to consume content. However, along with the struggle of lack of devices, 61 % of parents reported network issues while 64.5 % of parents reported internet connectivity as a hindrance to learning.

Cost of remote learning
According to the parent survey, 47.4 % of parents reported that they bought a smartphone for the education of their children. On the contrary, a teacher survey suggested that almost 212 teachers out of 392 (54%) bought smartphones to teach students since lockdown. Expenses have also been incurred by teachers on printing material, mobile recharges of their students and home visits.
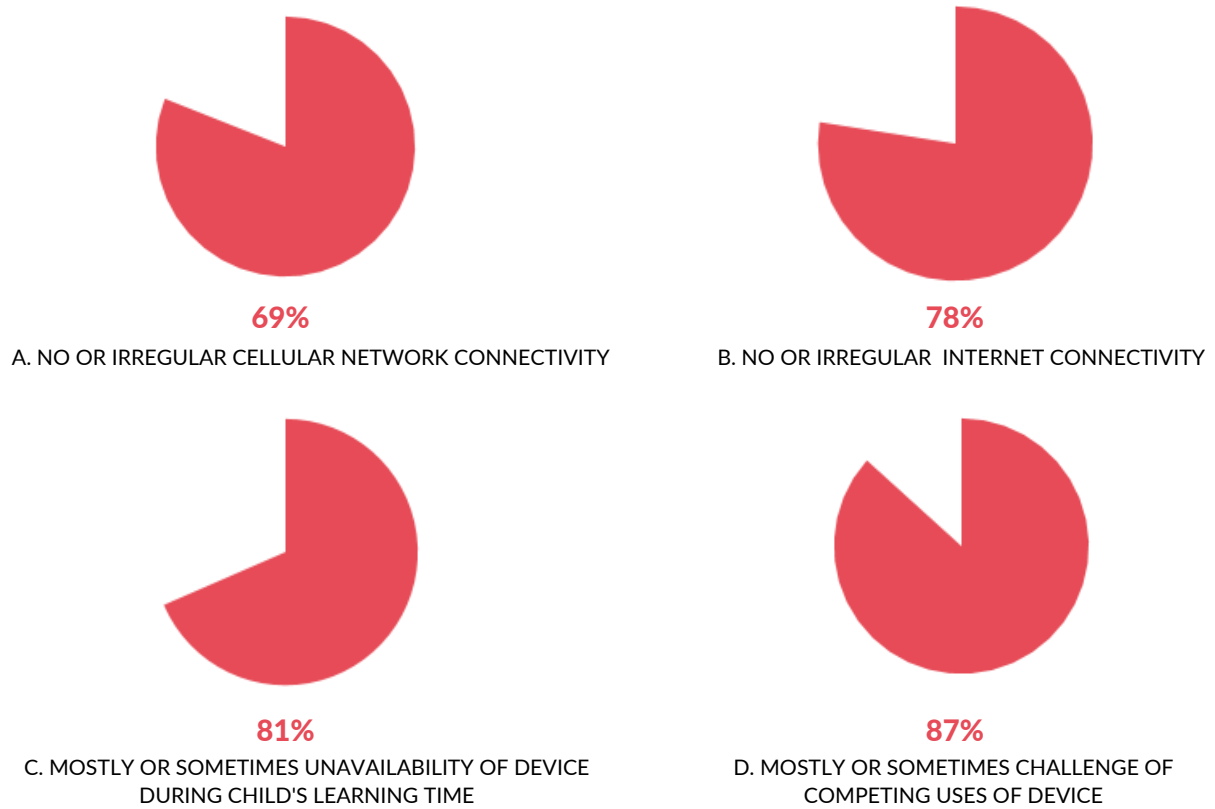
69%
A. NO OR IRREGULAR CELLULAR NETWORK CONNECTIVITY

78%
B. NO OR IRREGULAR INTERNET CONNECTIVITY

81%
C. MOSTLY OR SOMETIMES UNAVAILABILITY OF DEVICE
DURING CHILD'S LEARNING TIME

87%
D. MOSTLY OR SOMETIMES CHALLENGE OF
COMPETING USES OF DEVICE

Fig 4: Challenges faced by parents with devices and connectivity (Parent Survey)
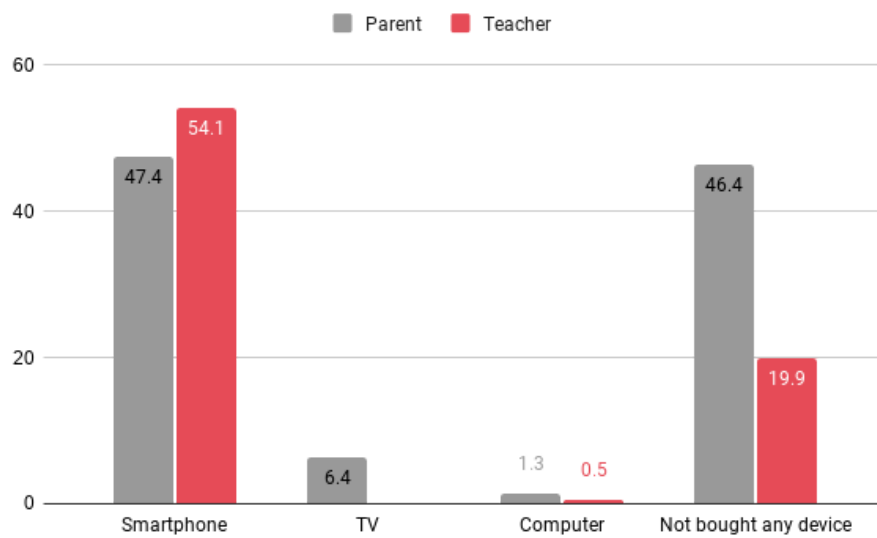

Fig 5: Devices bought for educational purposes since March 2020 (Parent and Teacher survey)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

First, the startling takeaway from the study is that there are still at least 2 students per teacher out of reach (out of contact) even after almost 10 months have been passed since lockdown. Though out of reach students do not imply dropouts but if the situation continues, it may result in the same.

Second, most parents and teachers bought a smartphone for educational purposes. Internet recharge is reported to be a fixed financial expense by many parents and network connectivity is a major issue in both remote and urban geography.

Third, the availability of resources does not translate to access to resources. While 76% of parents seem to possess smartphones, it is noted that almost 85% of parents face problems of competing use and 80% of parents face challenges of unavailability of a phone during child's learning time.

The presence of digital inequity is also a reflection of the status of education in the last few months. In the current scenario, though education has resorted to online and remote mediums of instruction, the status of digital inadequacy among both parents and teachers highlights that not all children were able to receive adequate learning. It is important to understand what and how students have been learning given the status of digital inequity. The next section highlights some of the ways through which students have been learning in the current scenario

HOW STUDENTS HAVE BEEN LEARNING?

Since the lockdown governments along with NGOs, private institutions and individuals have been making enormous efforts to ensure learning continues for students through various programs and initiatives. They are:
1. Through programs and initiatives launched by the government;
2. Through learning materials accessed online or in-person;
3. Through remote teaching efforts of teachers; and
4. Through in-person teaching.

PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

Too many programs with too little impact

Since the lockdown, various initiatives have been launched by the government and various Non- profit agencies like LFE to keep the learning of students. For instance, 'Tili Mili' was an educational program broadcasted on Television whereas the 'Jio Savan' program was transmitted through radio. 'Abhyasmala' was a DIKSHA driven initiative whereas 'Swadhyay' is a Whatsapp bot program. Across six districts,14 such programs were noted from the field. The objectives of various programs do reflect a positive intent of the policymakers, however intent may not always translate into impact. The data presented here finds that programs largely remained insufficient to address the needs of students at scale.
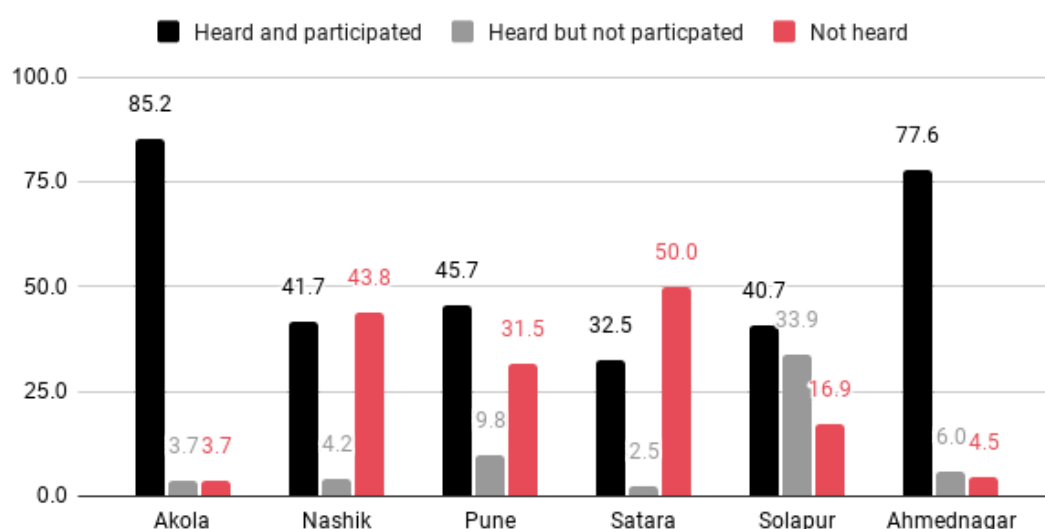

Fig 6: Abhyasmala [9] (Parents Survey)

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[9] **Abhyasmala**: MSCERT in collaboration with LFE started the Abhyasmala campaign on 13th April 2020 in order to ensure student learning. The objective of Abhyasmala was to provide students with academic and co-curricular content. For this, DIKSHA core teams (content and outreach) were established at the state level to coordinate the work. A structure was created where a WhatsApp message containing the link of digital content used to be shared among the teacher and student network.
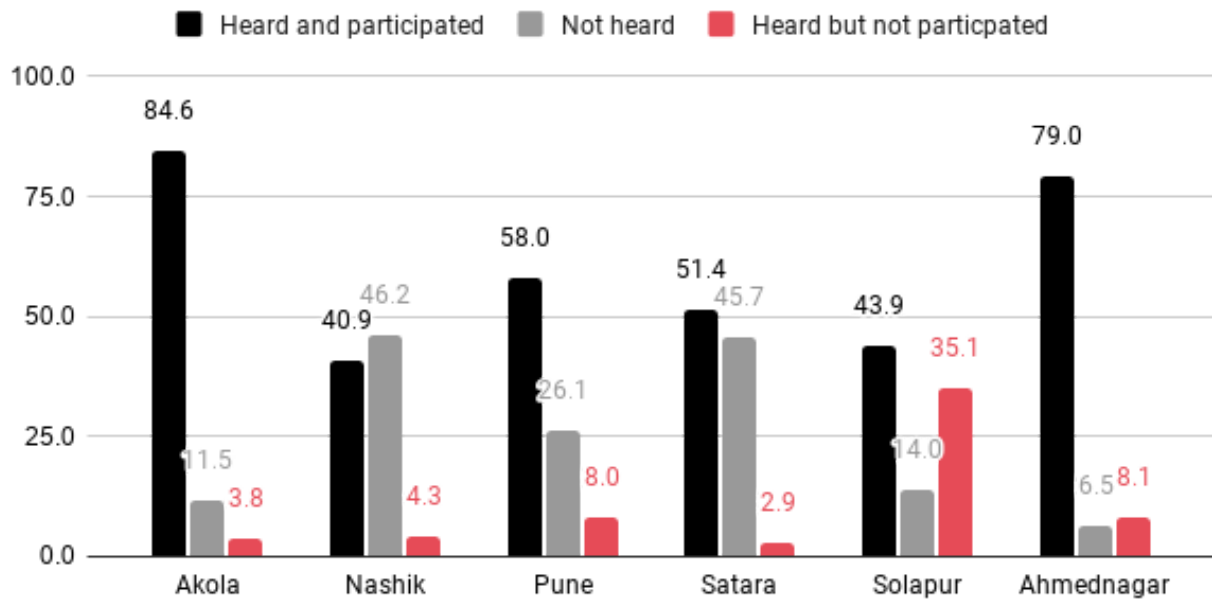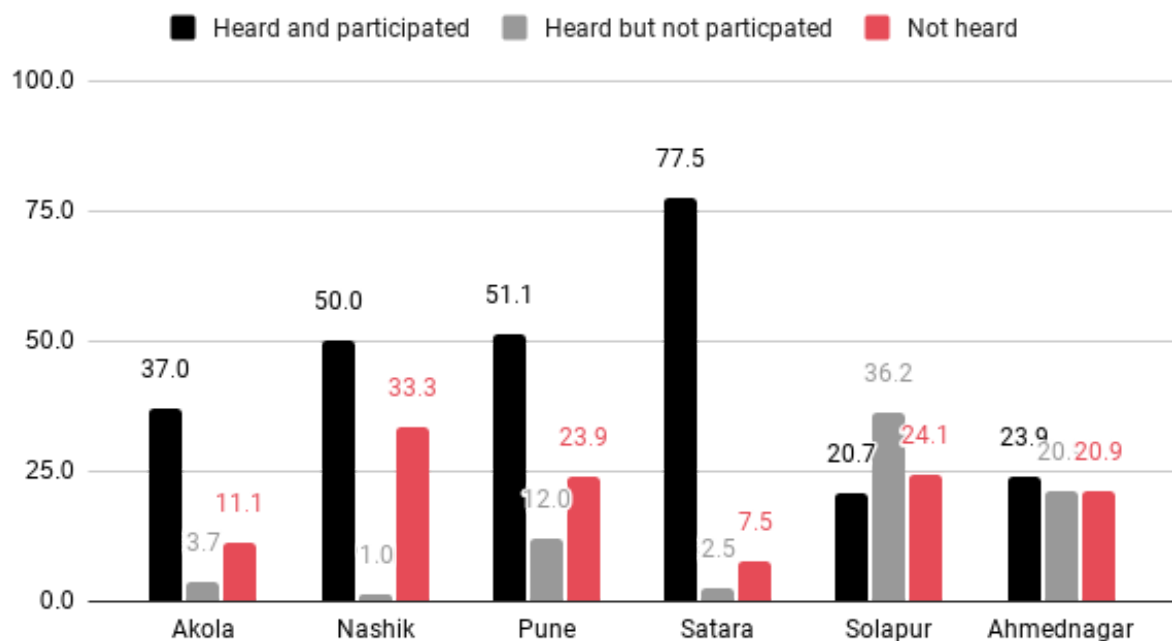
Fig 7: Swadhyay[10] (Parent Survey)

Fig 8: Tili Mili[11] (Parent Survey)

[10] **Swadhyay:** Maharashtra government launched a WhatsApp initiative named 'Swadhyay', an acronym for **S**tudent **W**hatsapp based **D**igital **H**ome **A**ssessment **Y**ojana in partnership with LFE and ConveGenius. The program is intended to support students from government schools through Artificial Intelligence (AI) technique. Whatsapp accounts are linked on Swadhyay where students could take a series of assessments for Math and Science along with the detailed feedback and explanation. Currently, around 11 Lakh students across grades 1-10 in Maharashtra have taken advantage of the program.

[11] **Tili Mili:** Maharashtra government in partnership with Maharashtra Knowledge Corporation Ltd (MKCL), designed and broadcasted an educational television program named Tili Mili. The program had an interactive format wherein the facilitator engaged with students named 'Tili' and 'Mili'. The 30 minute Doordarshan run program delivered lessons on various educational topics from various grades. The first run of the program started on July 1 and ended on 28th, September 2020.

Program reach among parents remained average

When three statewide programs such as Abhyasmala, Swadhyay and Tili Mili were compared for awareness and participation among parents, the survey noted that program reach was observed to be highest for Abhyasmala in Akola at 85.2 % and Ahmednagar district at 77.6 %, for other districts the reach is significantly low at less than 50 %. The reach of Swadhyay recorded at 58 % in the Pune district. The program reached a record low at less than 50% in other districts. In the case of Tili Mili, the highest reach is observed in Nashik and Pune at 48 % and Pune at 47 % respectively. Satara reported 30 % of the reach while all other districts reported less than 20 % of the program reach.

Students found program related content difficult or lengthy

With Swadhyay, teachers said that the questions were too tough for students to answer. Teachers also reported that Swadhayay only covered English, Math and Marathi and that the questions under Math were significantly at a higher difficulty level. Tili Mili engaged students but it was too lengthy. Further, it was also realized from the conversation with teachers that the content provided through programs was not aligned with the syllabus.

"तिली मिली हा कार्यक्रम मुलांना आवडायचा पण तो खूप वेळासाठी होता, गोष्टीचा शनिवार या उपक्रमात विद्यार्थ्यांनी सहभाग घेतला. त्याचा अवांतर वाचनाच्या दृष्टीने फायदा झाला" - Teacher FGD, Nashik[12]

While programs have been useful, parents do not see any significant impact on student's learning

In Nashik District, Donate a device program helped many parents without any tech device. Many parents reported that they received smartphones under the initiative. There was also the mention of 'Sahyadri program' and 'Vadyavar School' initiative which have been helpful in the district. However, many parents also reported that none of these initiatives could make a significant impact on a child's learning. Even programs awareness was low as many parents said that they have never even heard of any of the mentioned programs. Swadhyay and Tili Mili are by far the most talked-about initiatives among parents

Parent involvement as a significant prerequisite is emerging as a challenge for student learning

A challenge identified with all the initiatives was that it required a sincere participation of parents. It includes reaching out to teachers to link Whatsapp accounts to Swadhyay, maintaining teacher touchpoints for collection of learning materials and being active to expose children to learning programs on TV/ radio. It also includes efforts of parents who had to first understand the program content themselves and have to explain that to their children.

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[12] The children loved Tili Mili program but it was too long. Children participated actively in 'Goshtincha Shanivar' that helped them improve their reading skills

Administrative factors and challenges in program design and implementation

- **Better implementation and monitoring to increase program reach:** From the conversation with LFE teams members, it was noted that the start and closure of many programs were ad hoc and unplanned. Many of the program aspects and messages of the government have not reached its key stakeholders. Proper planning and monitoring of the program could have improved implementation.

- **Improved communication and need for a shared meaning of program objectives among stakeholders:** Many programs were described differently by stakeholders on the ground during the field study. For instance, when asked about the 'Palak Mitra' program, one of the teachers responded that it is about encouraging educated parents in the community to teach students while in reality it was designed as a program where parents act as a friend to their children to address their social and emotional needs. Thus, clarity of the objectives of the program was observed to be missing. Concepts were found to be vague at the teacher level and the matter is lost till it reached parents. It was felt that teachers and parents are participating in the programs because they were being told to do so.

- **In-person programs are accepted over online programs:** It was noted during field observations that programs that have an aspect of physical or in-person presence are largely accepted and appreciated.

- **Multiple programs and no alignment:** There are multiple programs started by many agencies. In 6 districts alone, at least 14 different programs were reported in the survey. The programs were parallelly being operated through phone, TV, radio and in-person mediums, and appeared to have no alignment with each other whatsoever.

- **Abrupt closure of some programs:** It was difficult for both implementers and receivers to keep up with the pace of the programs. Many programs suffered from implementation fatigue, meaning implementers lost interest and motivation to continue programs leading to the abrupt closure. This includes programs such as Abhyasmala and Tili Mili that abruptly got shut down.

- **Programs replaced teachers:** One of the significant drawbacks of most programs was that no role of teacher was designed in the programs. Teachers became mere implementers of the programs.

LEARNING MATERIAL

Textbooks as the most widely received learning material

As per the data collected for this study, in Maharashtra textbooks were distributed in hard copies from June to August either through home visits by teachers or parents collected from schools. The parent survey data reveals that textbooks were the most common learning material that reached students since the lockdown. 93.7 % of parents say they received textbooks in the last six months (June-December).

Problems with learning materials

- Teachers stated that videos are a good learning source but it cannot replace a teacher. Parents feel sharing material alone did not help them as teachers are required to explain the material to them.

- Parents faced challenges with accessing learning materials like technical difficulties with virtual learning materials as many of the links were broken or could not be accessed.
- While some did not receive any material online or offline from the teacher, many parents said that there were too many materials sent to them that they could not keep track of.

All in all, teacher FGDs highlighted that worksheets are useful to check for understanding after a particular topic is taught. Parents also reported that materials distributed in the printed format have been most useful for their child's learning compared to other initiatives.
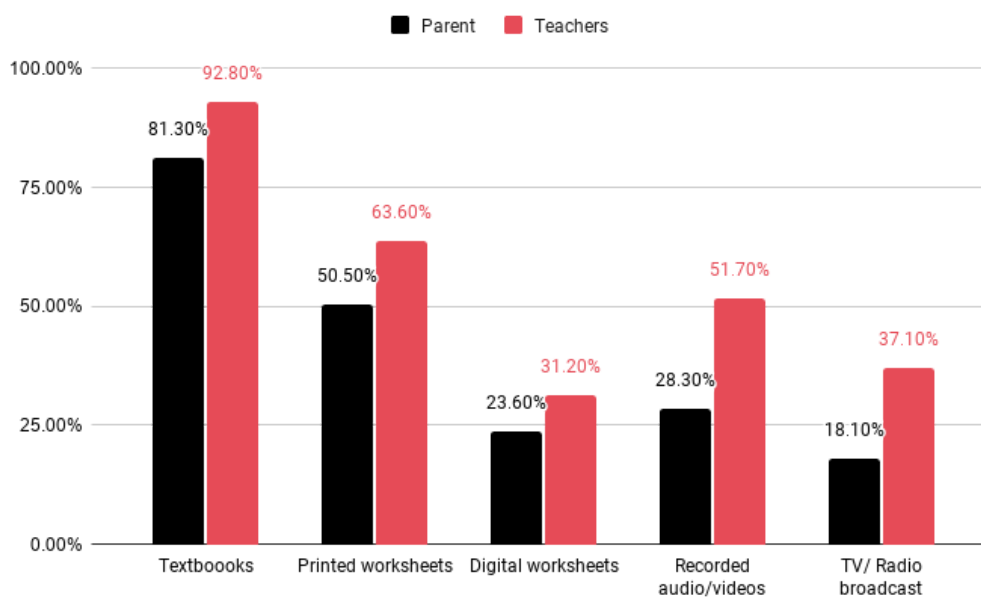

Fig 9: Most useful learning material (Parent survey & Teacher survey)
Most useful learning material as rated by parent's & teachers (Percentages)

Fig 10: Teacher FGD

IN-PERSON TEACHING

In the current scenario, in-person teaching took place in two ways, either teachers conducted home visits or taught students at schools. 38% of teachers taught for 1-2 hours in-person in the reference week. Even with the low frequency of in-person instruction, it was realized from FGD that it remained the most preferred method of teaching for both parents and teachers.

In person teaching was found to be most useful by parents and teachers
The teacher FGD data reported that the in-person format of teaching has worked for the teachers the best in the last six months. There is a similar reaction from parents as well. Parents feel teachers visiting homes and teaching in-person have been the only effective medium of learning since lockdown.

REMOTE TEACHING

Frequency of a majority of live classes have been low and for short duration
While the teacher survey reported that 45 % teacher respondents did not take live class of children in the reference week, the parent survey too showed a similar result. Of 55 % teachers who conducted live class on average spent less than 2 hours of teaching in a day. On average 10 students per teacher attended a live class on a particular day. The chart below shows the frequency of live classes through video conferencing apps as reported by parents and teachers.
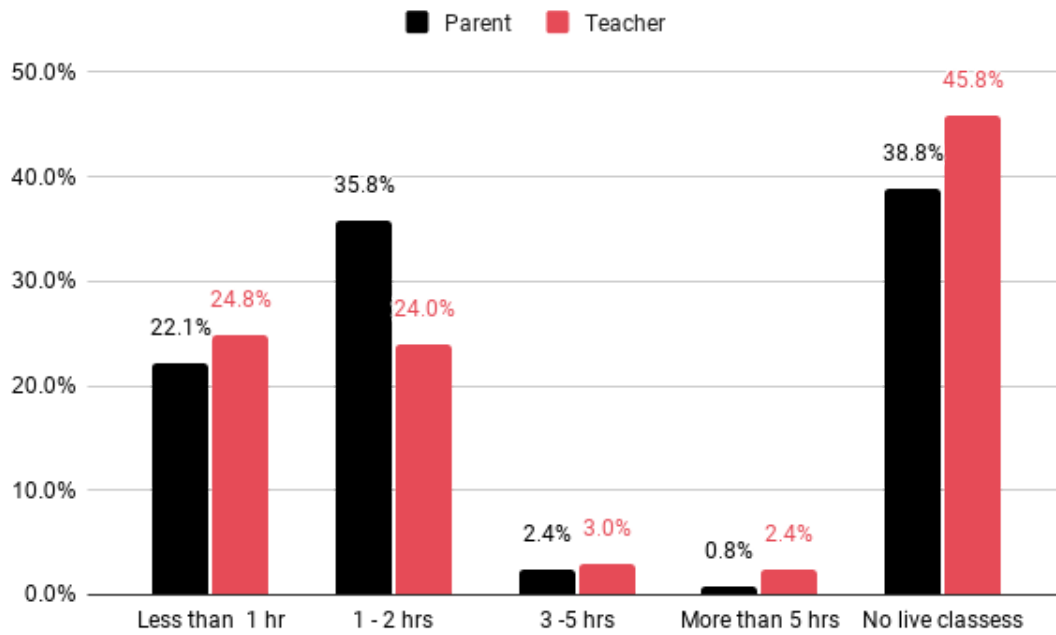
Fig 11: Hours of live class happened per day in reference week (Teacher Survey)
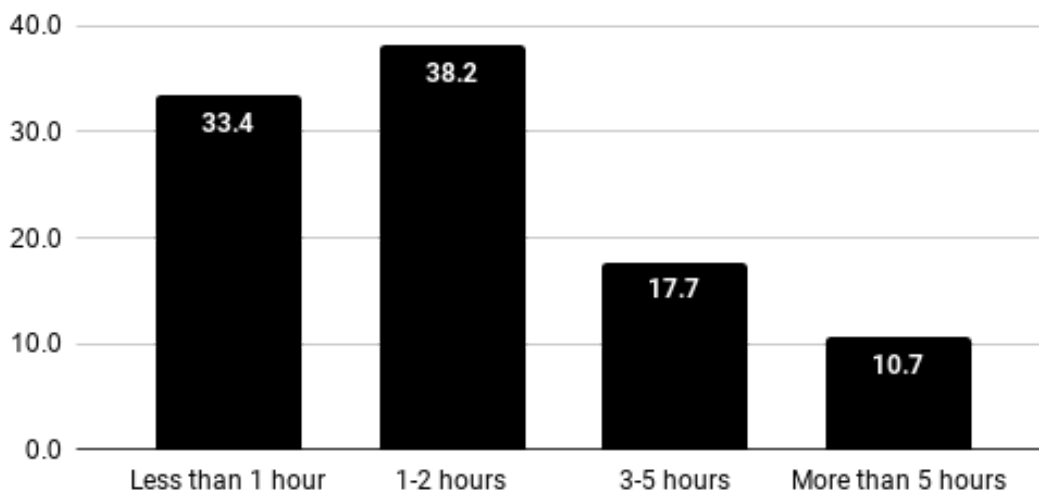Frequency of Live Classes reported by Parent's & Teacher's

Chart 12: Hours of in-person teaching in reference week
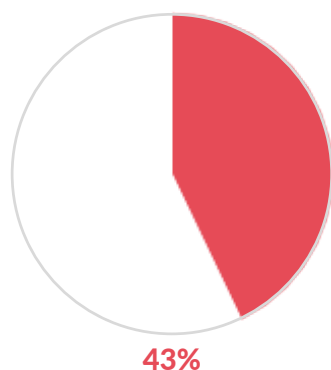Hours of In-person Teaching (percentage)

43%

Fig 13: Percentage of teachers who did not conduct assessments

Teachers could not assess student learning
According to the APU study, 90 % of teachers (base 634) reported that they could not do any meaningful assessment with their children. Remaining 10 % reported that conducting

the assessment was very difficult given the current scenario. In this study, the teacher survey reported that 45.9 % of teachers were able to address the individual learning needs of their students and 57.1% of teachers reported that they could take some assessment with students to understand their learning progress.

Teachers have taken assessments of their students to some extent, though the coverage of subjects, rigour and reach of assessments is still unknown. With no communication on any formal assessments by the state, the assessments mostly remained non-standardized, suiting the context of the teacher. Thus, no standardized student scores were recorded from the last academic year, suggesting limited evidence of student learning.

Fig 14: Parent FGD

KEY TAKEAWAYS

One, there were a range of programs launched to bridge different gaps in the system. The diverse objectives of programs does reflect a positive intent of the policy makers however, intent may not suffice the usefulness of programs. Overall, the program reach has been low in all districts though marginally better in intervention districts.

Two, the coverage of virtual and printed learning materials has been high.

Three, teacher instructions and guidance was realised as a necessity to ensure children understand the content. It is strongly observed in the study that no program or learning content alone ensured student learning at scale. However, the frequency of live classes remained significantly low. Almost 45.8 % of teachers reported that no live classes were conducted in the reference week (chart 11). The frequency of teaching through phone calls or in-person visits also remained low for (1-2 hours a week).

Overall, the section provides insights on different methods through which the students seem to have been learning and the associated challenges with the same. The critical aspect to examine is if these activities have actually helped students learn. Due to the absence of any standardized scores, it could only be assumed that initiatives have reached the students, they have engaged with learning materials to some extent, there were instructions given by the teacher but there is very little evidence to suggest that all these activities have actually helped children learn as per grade-level expectations.

TEACHER EFFORTS AND TEACHING CHALLENGES

Teacher roles remained largely complex throughout the duration of the school shutdown and the process of adopting alternate mediums of education. Teachers performed the role of learning facilitators, community mobilizers, and program implementors in multiple capacities. The section highlights various efforts taken by teachers to reach students and ensure their learning.

Range of teaching practices adopted

Some of the teacher activities noted through observation and teacher interactions are explained below. These were challenging for teachers on their own, due to the change in nature of work from in-person to online.

- **Phone calls:** When there was a complete lockdown, phone calls were the only medium to reach students, and hence was the most common practice among teachers. Teachers in FGD reported that on average they would touch base with students through phone calls at least once a week. Reaching students through parents increased the time of followup for teachers. Accessing students was also challenging through phone calls as most of the times parents are unreachable or numbers are out of service.

- **Home visits:** The low penetration and feasibility of live classes through video conferencing apps compelled teachers to conduct home visits of their students. Home visits were conducted by teachers to keep a check on the progress and wellbeing of students along with the distribution of learning materials.

- **Community Involvement:** In order to widen the student reach, teachers took efforts to involve community members such as SMC parents, senior school students and other educated parents to help students with learning. Leveraging the communities where the students live, teachers identified spaces where they gather students together to teach for 2-3 hours every day. This strategy has also been used in multiple programs discussed in the section above. Community groups were created by the way of 'Vidhyarthi mitra', 'Shejar mitra', ' Otyavarchi shala', 'Mohalla school' to provide space to attend live class by teachers, solve a worksheet or learn together in-person.

- **Evening classes:** As mobile devices were not available to many students in the daytime, teachers conducted evening classes (post 6 pm) for the convenience of their students and parents.

- **Content creation:** Teachers created various worksheets, learning videos as part of their interest or skill. Many teachers came together on their own to create groups of content creators. A large number of content pieces is created by teachers on YouTube and DIKSHA since lockdown.

- **SEL activities with students:** In order to keep their students motivated and ensure well being in the process of remote learning, teachers conducted various SEL activities with students. These activities were also shared through WhatsApp messages through Abhyasmala campaign and 'Swadhyay Pustika'. The activities aimed to keep students engaged in the learning process as well as address the SEL needs of students during the lockdown.
- **Whatsapp groups:** Whatsapp groups are still the most common mediums to share and receive learning content for both teachers and parents. Teachers created various grade-wise, subject-wise groups and shared various digital learning materials with their students.
- **Sharing printed learning material:** As digital materials were shared through WhatsApp, teachers also printed digital materials for students without digital devices. Printed materials were distributed through home visits or through school.
- **Continuous follow-up:** While doing all the above activities, teachers spent a lot of time inquiring with each student

Fig 15: Stakeholder meeting

regarding learning material, program-related benefits, classwork, learning, doubts and their wellbeing. These follow-ups, teachers stated, took the most amount of their time in a day.Follow-ups were conducted through phone calls, WhatsApp or home visits.

- **Administrative work:** Teachers reported that administrative work is a significant part of their job role. This includes work related to student enrollment, attendance, maintenance of mid-day meal distribution, maintenance of monthly muster and other activities asked by the officers. Shikshan Parishad has a dedicated time slot to discuss the administrative work of teachers.
- **Attending training sessions:** While doing all the above tasks, teachers also attended monthly training programs such as Shikshan Parishads as well as other training programs organised by NGOs such as LFE. A training program can be one hour to eight hours long. Training also includes workshops, webinars and online sessions that teachers were part of.

Pedagogical challenges faced by teachers
Apart from the above-mentioned challenges, there are some particular challenges related to the pedagogy that the current education format has created. Some of these challenges are:

- **Subject suitability to remote and online teaching:** Education in the current scenario is skewed towards comprehension and language. Subjects like Math are minimally taught. Many teachers and parents reported that Math is a complicated subject that could only be taught in-person. There is no mention of learning on subjects like Science and Social Studies.
- **Limitation to use activity-based lessons:** Teachers say that in the current scenario they are unable to take activity-based lessons with students. Classrooms make it easier for teachers to take learning activities with children and hence are better suited for learning
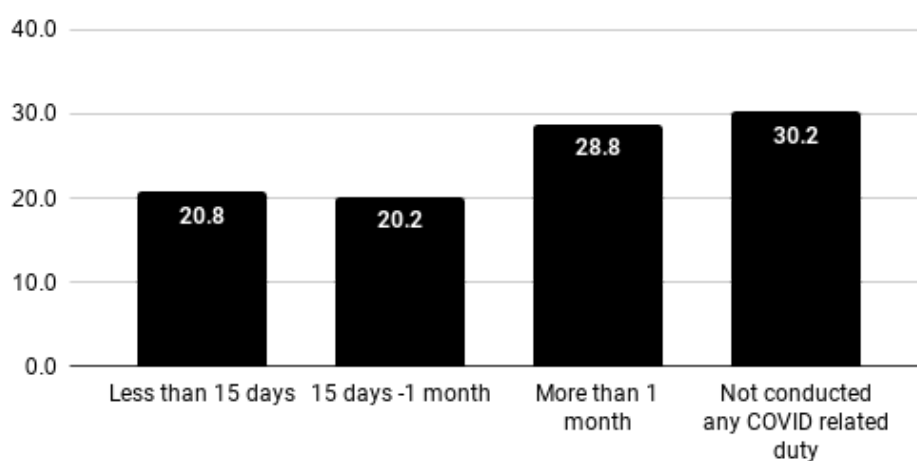

Fig 16: No. of days spent by teachers on COVID duty

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[13]**Shikshan Parishad:** is a mandatory monthly meetings of teachers of a cluster conducted by Kendra Pramukh and DIET officials. Shikshan Parishad acts as both training as well as a peer learning platform. DIET refers to the District Institute for Education and Training is a district governing body to support the implementation and coordination of teacher training related policies of a particular district

- **Lack of skills required for online teaching:** Online education requires a different set of pedagogical skills in an online teaching format. Teachers seem to be less prepared for the same.
- **No human touch in the online mode of teaching:** It is generally the case with online classes that it does not provide a 'human touch' for teachers, as a result, there is no way to know if students are listening or understanding and engaging.
- **Difficulty teaching younger students:** Children below grade 5 constantly require parent assistance to learn or even be present in an online class, a major challenge faced by teachers.
- **Student distraction in online classes:** Teachers say that students are distracted in an online class and that there is no way to keep their attention.
- **Doubts not cleared properly:** Teachers feel that it is difficult to solve the doubts of children in an online class. Teaching remotely through mediums of a phone call or WhatsApp, also means a teacher has to solve the same doubt to multiple students
- **Challenges in managing student behaviour in online classes:** The classroom environment provides a disciplined environment that seems to be missing in an online class. While teachers in FGDs reported this as a challenge, parents too stated that the behaviour of children during online classes has deteriorated

Fig 17: Parent FGD

*Participation in teacher trainings high in LFE intervention districts*
The teacher survey focused on three crucial teacher training areas particularly in the context of school shutdowns - Remote teaching methods, SEL, and content and pedagogy related. The charts below examine data across LFE intervention and non-intervention districts. Higher teacher participation in training was observed in all LFE intervention districts as compared to non-intervention districts. Across all training areas, content and pedagogy training have been the most widespread. Overall, 37.9 % of teachers participated in remote teaching-related training, 27.4 % in content pedagogy and 26.6 % in SEL training. About 12.1 % of teachers did not take any mentioned training.

"शिक्षकांना व पालकांना वेगवेगळ्या विषयांमधे मुलांना कशी मदत करता येईल याबाबत मार्गदर्शन मिळावे" - Parent FGD, Satara [14]

*Unmet expectations of parents from teachers*
While many parents have shown an overall high level of satisfaction with teacher efforts, a deeper discussion in the FGD reveals some dissatisfaction or some unmet expectations. For instance, some parents reported that there was no guidance given to them or their children regarding education at home. There was only a brief interaction with the teacher very few times (Parent FGD, Ahmednagar). Additionally, parents in FGD (Pune district) stated that teachers are unable to provide individual attention to children in the current education format. Online education is dependent on the availability of resources hence teachers are able to teach only the ones who have smartphones to learn. In a few cases, parents feel teachers are not even putting efforts to reach children, forget about teaching them.

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[14] Teachers and parents need guidance on how to help children in different subjects
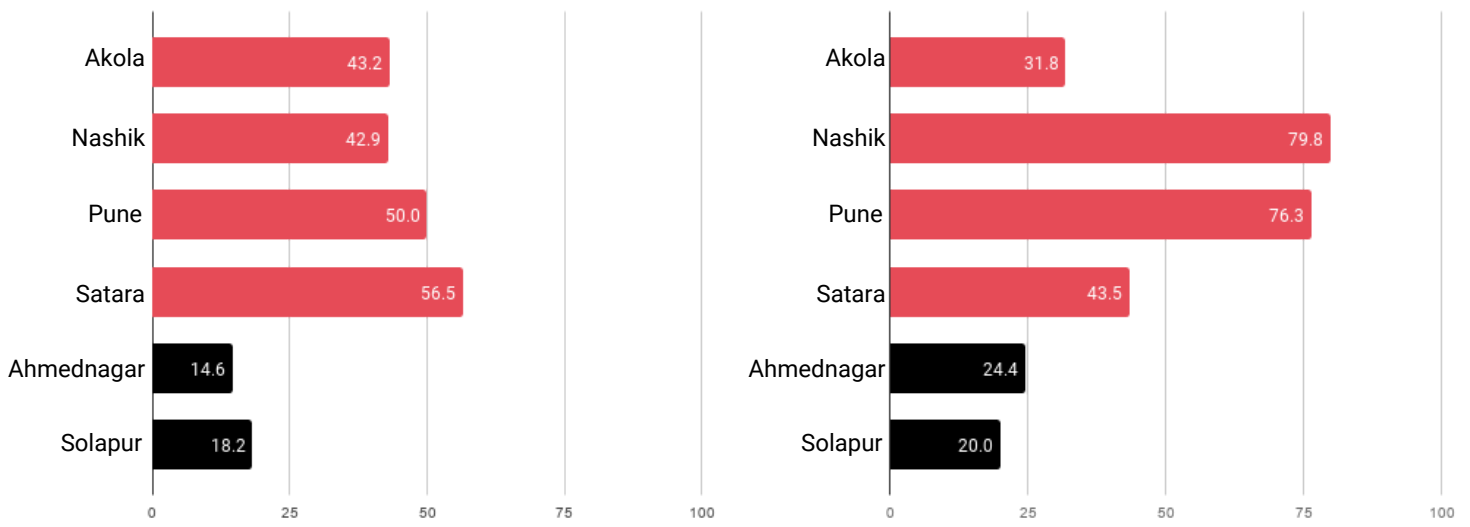
A. REMOTE TEACHING

B. SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING
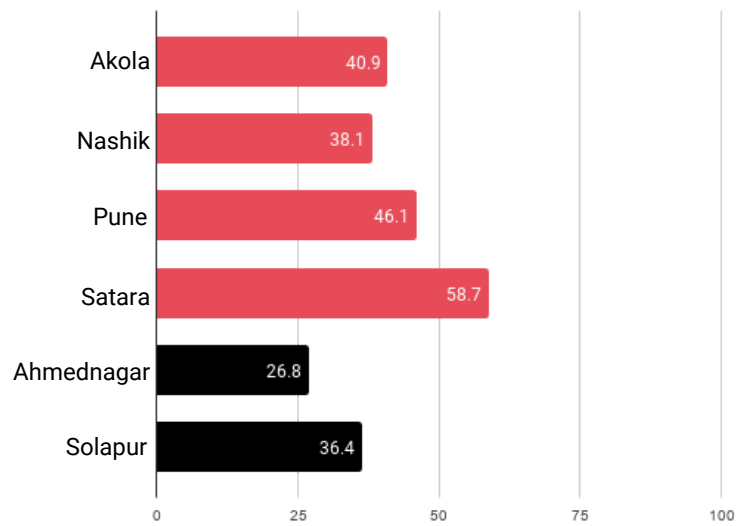
C. PEDAGOGY

Fig 18: Teacher participation in training (District wise)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

One, teachers have taken efforts to personally visit homes and reach out to students to ensure learning despite no official communication to do the same. It is observed from the FGD that teachers feel a social responsibility towards their students. Many responded that they treat their students as their children hence they have taken enormous efforts to not leave students to themselves during this phase.

Two, parents are highly satisfied with teacher efforts as we noted in the previous section. Although parents feel satisfied with teacher efforts, they disagree that their child has been able to learn in the current scenario.

Three, teachers seemed to be better supported in intervention districts compared to non-intervention districts on topics such as SEL, remote teaching and content pedagogy. Though training has been conducted to enable teachers on various skills, they were limited to monthly Shikshan Parishad. Many teachers reported that they figured out most things themselves.

The study attempts to highlight most of the teacher roles that have been played out by teachers since the closure of schools. Even after taking all the efforts, there is a high amount of dis-satisfaction noted among the teachers. While the section elaborately illustrated the role of the teacher in the current scenario, it is also important to understand the role played by parents to ensure the learning of their children. The next section highlights parent involvement in education and presents a picture of how children have been feeling at home.

DISRUPTED CHILD WELLBEING AND LEARNING LOSS

The two major deprivations levied on children due to closure of schools have been loss of child wellbeing as well as loss of learning. From the study, it is understood that being restricted at home for a long time has disturbed physical wellbeing of children. Additionally, fear of learning loss is the one of the most talked about concerns by both parents and teachers. Both feel that children have fallen way behind their grade levels and the situation would be worse if schools are not opened at earliest.

CHILD WELLBEING IS DISRUPTED

Child's routine and discipline
Parents reported that discipline is significantly missing from a student's schedule due to the lack of predetermined structured learning time that regular school would offer. Parents are facing challenges to impose the routine and discipline that earlier teachers would have at school.

"They don't take baths, eat, cut nails/hair on time which all used to be taken care of by teachers. It's difficult to get them to obey also. They never listen to parents the way they listen to teachers"
- Parent FGD, Ahmednagar

Children have become restless and inactive
School closure has taken a toll on a child's physical wellbeing. Parents largely reported issues regarding the frustration of children at home, deterioration of sleep hours, increased screen time on non-educational apps, and increased misbehaviour. Overall, 91% of parents reported their children have become restless at home to some extent due to school closure.

शिक्षकांच शिकवण वेगळ पडत. घरी जमत नाही. आता कंटाळा आला आहे आणि घरी मुलांची चिडचिड होत आहे. शाळेत मुले खेळतात. अभ्यास करतात. शाळेत उपक्रम असतात. घरी काही करत नाहीत- *Parent FGD, Akola*[15]

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[15] The teaching of the teacher is different. The same is not possible at home. Now the kids are getting bored and irritated at home. At school, children play, study. The school has activities and resources. At home, they do nothing
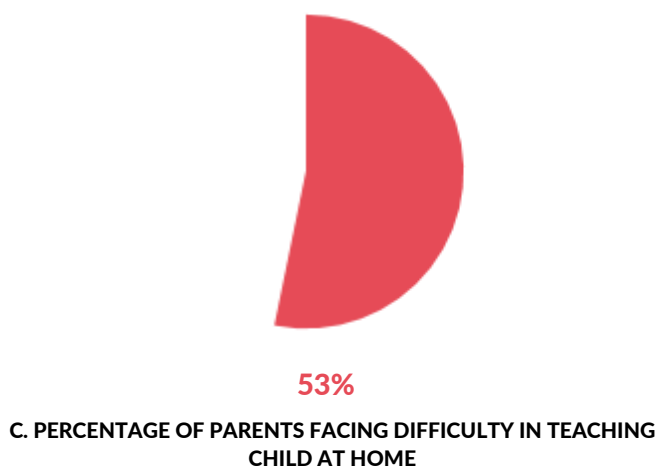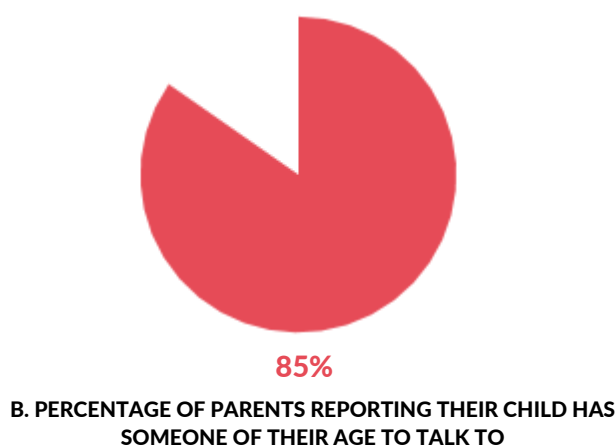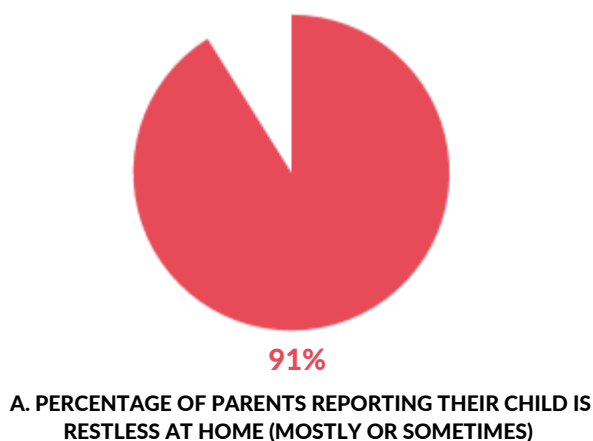
91%

A. PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS REPORTING THEIR CHILD IS RESTLESS AT HOME (MOSTLY OR SOMETIMES)

85%

B. PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS REPORTING THEIR CHILD HAS SOMEONE OF THEIR AGE TO TALK TO

53%

C. PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS FACING DIFFICULTY IN TEACHING CHILD AT HOME

Fig 19: Home environment and support

Most children have someone of the same age to talk to

The field observations suggested that the closure of schools has pushed students to work and support the family. Many parents report this as a positive change among children. They feel children are helping them on the field or at shops. One such instance was noted in Satara district that is mentioned below.

LOSS OF LEARNING[16]

Child's learning time has significantly reduced

From the data collected during the FGDs, parents have stated that children are sitting at home for the last 8 months and have lost the habit to study 5 hours a day. One of the parents in Solapur FGD reported that children's learning time has reduced to 2-2.5 hours a week.

Lack of ownership to self learn among children

One of the commonly reported problems identified in parent FGD was that children haven't accepted the alternate form of education. The current education format requires a lot of ownership among children to self learn. However, it is realized from the parent survey that only 9 % of children have been able to learn by themselves. The remaining 91 % of children require help from either of the family members or external support in the form of tuition.

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[16]**Loss of Learning:** As per the APU study loss of learning is defined as "overall loss of learning, loss (regression or forgetting) of what children have learnt in the present class as well as what they did not get an opportunity to learn in the present class – is going to lead to a cumulative loss over the years, impacting not only the academic performance of children in their school years but also their adult lives"

Teachers reported a lack of parent investment in child's learning

Teachers reported that parent involvement is a significant factor to determine student learning at home. While many parents showed an active involvement in the programs, accessing materials and following up with their children, many parents have also been dormant in the process. While teachers in Ahmednagar reported that parents do not share smartphones with their children, teachers in Nashik reported that parents ignore teacher phone calls. Teachers in Pune too reported that they struggle with parent response and co-operation. Due to the lack of investment of parents in child education, it is reported as a major challenge for teachers to ensure student learning.

"We try to tell them how to help students in studies at home but they do not give much focus on that. They are not that concerned"- Teacher FGD, Nashik.

Close to half family members supporting the child to learn at home face technical difficulties

The study noted that close to half of the family members who are helping students learn at home find it challenging to seamlessly operate tech devices. Though the survey does not note any particular challenge, it could be estimated from the study that most of the difficulties could be related to operational challenges such as navigating through applications and accessing digital content.

Fig 20: Stakeholder meeting

From one of the field observations in tribal regions of Pune district team members noted that In the Katkari Tribe, the children of the respondents in the FGD are first-generation learners. They don't know how to use smartphones and mainly have small phones. Do not understand anything sent on WhatsApp, they feel whatever learning was happening before the pandemic has now stopped. Education through technology has totally failed for them.

From the same graph, it is observed that 53% of parents reported do not face any difficulties in operating a device while teaching their child. In this regard, there have been some promising instances noted by the team. In the Nashik district, one of the mothers stated that she uses google assistant to teach her children. If there is a question, she asks google assistant and the answer comes, even though she herself was not highly educated.

However, these instances were few, while many other parents have stated their challenges in coping up with the demands of using technology for learning. Therefore the ability of family members to support students has also been an important factor in ensuring students learn even as schools remain shut.

Parents fear learning loss among their children
Learning has been a major area of concern for most parents who participated in the study.

Across jurisdictions, parents are aware and have been vocal about how little students have learnt throughout the year. Further, parents feel they themselves are not at all equipped to teach their children at home. Parents say that children have lost touch with reading and writing. The biggest loss is for primary grade children who need guidance from someone to learn.

"The lockdown period has initially resulted in educational losses for children. Fundamentals of students have weakened"- Parent FGD, Nashik.

"मुलांचे शैक्षणिक वर्ष घरीच गेल्यामुळे अभ्यासात मागे पडतील की काय अशी भीती वाटते." - Parent FGD, Satara[17]

Teachers feel responsible for bridging the gap of learning
One of the biggest stress points for teachers is to tackle the learning gap once the school reopens. Teachers feel most of their students are being left out of quality education. As has been clear from other reports and our own study, online education has created digital inequity between have and have nots. The efforts so far have largely catered to those who have the resources. Teachers have stated that the current remote teaching format is not at all helping their students learn and there is a strong consensus that primary children will be left with poor fundamentals.

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[17] I feared that the children will fall behind in their studies with students studying at home this academic year.

The administrative stance to reduce syllabus is futile

In response to the current administrative stance, it was observed that teachers do not support reducing 20% of the curriculum as teachers feel that learning of the remaining 75% is also not ensured in current format. Hence, the government's decision to cut the syllabus would not be helpful to students or teachers.

"Currently 20-30% students who come we have provided them with a timetable and teach accordingly that's it!" - Teacher FGD, Nashik.

Schools have partially opened

Despite any official guideline to re-open schools, schools have started to operate partially with 'No Objection Certificate' by parents. Almost all teachers surveyed stated that their school has been functioning partially. Schools are currently operating thrice a week with 50% teacher capacity for maximum 3 hours a day.

The school timings were noted from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. in most cases. It was also noted from observation that since lockdown, schools were converted to units of distribution of mid day meals to parents in the form of ration. Hence, the schools have been operating, though teaching in schools have begun only after lockdown and some after Diwali.

Teachers feel opening a school of 50% capacity is a better strategy than no school as there is some opportunity for in-person teaching. In many instances, it was noted that

teachers have stopped home visits where schools have opened. Parents are encouraged to send their children to school or collect learning materials directly from the school. Online activities also have stopped where schools have opened.

"मुले आता खूप मागे पडली आहेत, त्यांचे झालेले नुकसान भरून काढणे हे सर्वात मोठे आव्हान आहे" - Teacher FGD, Satara.[18]

Teachers want schools to open with precaution

In FGDs, it was realized that teachers too feel that schools should start soon but with necessary safety precautions, such as temperature check, masks and sanitizers or even priority vaccinations for teachers. Teachers feel that the kind of education a class environment provides to students is not possible through online or any informal in-person teaching. Teachers were not able to take any proper assessments of students and hence opening of school would make that easy.

"Virtual education is only an alternative that is accepted due to the current situation. It can never replace schools"- Teacher FGD, Pune.

One of the challenges also highlighted by teachers was that parents from marginalised communities would fall to marry off their girls if schools do not open soon. Closure of schools would have a negative impact on girl child education.

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[18] The children are far behind now. The biggest challenge is to make up for the loss

Parents are willing to send their children to schools

Parents feel in-person teaching is the best medium to teach children, hence schools are required to function like before. Parents feel school is a safe space to leave children for some time while they are at work. The teacher instructions and learning environment that schools provide is not provided by any other medium of education.

About 95% of parents are willing to send children to schools if schools are opened. Parents are strongly willing to send their children to school once the school reopens. Parents have complete trust in school administration and have no second thoughts on school reopening. There were hardly any parents unwilling to the idea of reopening the school. Parents feel it could be risky but they do not see any other option for their child's education.

"शिक्षकांनी मुलांना आधी शिकवले असल्यामुळे अडचणी येणार नाहीत, परंतू शाळा लवकर सुरू करायला हव्यात, अन्यथा मुलांचे खूप नुकसान होऊ शकते" - Parent FGD, Satara[19]

"I am not sure how safe it will be for my child to come to school daily but I would like the school to start"- Parent FGD, Pune (Urban).

"If the school starts, I will send my children to school because I am not able to do anything at home with them. School would be better"- Parent FGD, Pune urban.

Ambiguity about what comes next and government responsibilities

They are also upset with government bodies that are not able to set up proper internet and network facilities in villages in 2020. Due to this, they have to rely on private players that they cannot afford. Parents have vocally expressed how governments need to take responsibility for the current situation.

"If the government can do election rallies and open other things, why can they not think of a solution for schools?"- Parent FGD, Solapur

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[19] The children will not face any problem as they were taught by the teachers earlier, but the school should be started early otherwise the children may suffer a lot.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

One, the current education format has put large responsibilities on parents to involve in their child's education and on children to take responsibility to self-learn.

Two, almost one academic year has elapsed without any classroom instruction and both parents and teachers fear the tendency to forget the fundamentals. While parents fear loss of opportunities due to the widening of the learning gap, teachers feel highly responsible to bridge the gap.

Three, both parents and teachers feel that reopening of school could improve things. Throughout the findings of the study, it is observed that schools are a strong and reliable institution for various purposes along with learning. These manifest functions of schools provide a conducive peer learning environment, safety for students, social and emotional development and a flow of knowledge that is structured and continuous. In the absence of schools, the responsibilities were distributed among various stakeholders who were not prepared to take the same.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study is in alignment with other COVID-19 studies that highlight challenges of stakeholders with the adoption of technology, infrastructural challenges and remote learning education strategies. The study describes all major factors affecting communities, it includes challenges related to infrastructure, educational programs launched in response to the closure of schools and various other teacher and community efforts. Overall we find that communities are not equipped to educate children in the absence of schools. Remote format of learning distributes responsibilities at various levels. At the system level, resources need to be equitably distributed that provide uninterrupted access to learning opportunities. Teachers need to be equally skilled and enabled to support students remotely. Parents need to be involved in a child's education by participating actively in accessing learning material, teaching children at home, and bearing financial needs. A child should be motivated and be skilled to self learn. Based on the findings and the LFE's experience working with the system for the last 5 years, following are some recommendations for consideration by policymakers, and all other actors in the education sector.

1. Proactively engage families as collaborators in a child's learning and well-being

Engaging parents and families of children as active collaborators and contributors in the education and well-being of students has always been something that progressive educators have advocated for. This value has become even more pronounced during the pandemic where reaching children was primarily through parents.

The distance between parents and schools has also been further reduced when schools entered living rooms through online classes during the pandemic. Contextualising well researched international frameworks such as Dr. Karen Mapp's dual capacity building framework from Harvard University to India can be a good starting point towards a holistic approach and ushering in healthy family engagement to ensure equitable education for all children.

2. Prioritise Social Emotional Learning + Remedial Teaching for foundational literacy and numeracy to tackle learning loss

It is hard to dispute that this year, students across the country have faced developmental, emotional and learning setbacks. In order to address this, there has to be a contextualised and decentralised program to enable teachers to first tap into their own emotional development. Then hold spaces within the school culture to help children thrive emotionally, which will be necessary to reintegrate children joyfully into schools. Further, remedial teaching would be required to bridge the foundational skills that children have either forgotten or not yet developed. This is also aligned with the National Education Policy (2020) recommendations and will put the state on track to become a forerunner in implementing it.

3. Philanthropy and Government to urgently bridge the digital divide to unlock the potential of technology-enabled learning in the future

No pre-existing barrier has become more pronounced during the pandemic than the digital divide. Availability of a device in the family doesn't always translate into access to the child. So civil society and government need to come together and create a sustainable way to view technology devices not as a 'good-to-have' but as essential as textbooks or uniforms to enable children to learn effectively. Only this will form the effective foundation to leverage the increased adoption of technology among citizens, teachers and even the government to usher in accelerated progress and innovation in education.

4. Government to be more decisive and clearly communicate its decisions regarding school operations, ideally towards opening-up

A recurring theme throughout the study has been teachers and parents continuously stating the government must take responsibility and strong, yet sensitive decisions to ensure children's learning is not unnecessarily impacted even while other sectors of society have opened up. In addition to being decisive about the future generation's progress, similar to the way there was strong communication around covid safety measures, all important policy decisions must similarly be clearly communicated to all stakeholders in order to create shared understanding on these decisions and enable smooth implementation. This will help with all the uncertainty around syllabus completion, examinations, and everything that's on top of parents' and caregivers' minds.

5. Strengthen support and mentoring programs for teachers rather than training, and minimise time spent out of classrooms

Another resounding theme not just from this study but most teacher facing research is the frustration teachers face due to being constantly pulled out of classrooms for administrative work, repetitive data reporting and training. Given the need to maximise instructional time once schools reopen, it is essential to focus on in-classroom support given to teachers through CRG/BRG members, and even expert peers. Over the last 3 years, enough training has been done with 100% of teachers on foundational learning so all that is required is a refresher, and a strong emphasis on implementation and support to ensure the new practices become mainstream and positively impact learning outcomes.

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