

Life of Children in Early Childhood Years During COVID-19: An India - Based Study

MONICA JAIRAM*¹ AND GEETA CHOPRA²

¹Assistant Professor and ²Retd. Professor

¹Department of Home Science, Lakshmbai College, University of Delhi, New Delhi (India)

²Department of Human Development and Childhood Studies, Institute of Home Economics
University of Delhi, New Delhi (India)

*Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

Pandemic time restricted 147 million children globally in attending preschools as 188 countries imposed country wide closure (UNICEF, 2022). These children missed developmental opportunities which they receive from stimulating and learning environment at early childhood education centres. This led to alternate ways of providing education and care to children of early years during COVID-19. Therefore, the genesis of current study took place to understand the practices that took place with children of early years during covid times. The objective of current study were: (i) To investigate the daily life of early childhood year children during COVID-19, (ii) To find out the ways and characteristics of early childhood education being provided during the COVID-19, (iii) To explore the role of parents in life of children of early years during the COVID-19. The study adopted qualitative research design and exploratory descriptive qualitative research approach. The sample size of the study was 20 parents of children between the age of 3 – 6 years. The sampling technique was combination of purposive and snowballing technique. Semi – structured interview method was used to collect data using zoom online platform as the data was collected during the pandemic time of social restrictions. The results of the study found that almost all the children of 20 parents were given early childhood education using zoom platforms (expect 1); the online classes followed a particular schedule. Efforts were made to keep classes interesting using methods like asking several questions in between. Parents teacher meetings were happening in online mode and oral assessments of children were done during the COVID-19 times. Parents took several efforts to keep children in touch with outside world. Parents became the focal point to provide early childhood education to children during pandemic. Children during covid-19 were found to be following a particular routine at home with limited screen time access. Father got time to get involved in children's development during COVID-19.

Keywords: Early childhood years, Qualitative research design, Exploratory descriptive qualitative approach, COVID-19, Online classes

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood year has a utmost significant place in the entire life span. Effective communication with children of early childhood years facilitates better understanding of concepts, ideas, viewpoints and doubt clarification. Children during this life stage when involved in playful activities, generates feeling of pleasure, contentment, increment in motivation, concentration and learning within children. Adequate diet, nutrition, hygiene,

infrastructure, care and stimulation during this life stage makes growth and development easier and achievable for children (Kapur, 2025). Quality experiences during early childhood years affects the quality of brain structuring which becomes the foundation of future learning, health and behaviour. During the early years, neural connections in brain are formed every second. Sensory pathways like basic vision, hearing, early language and cognitive skills are developed during the

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early years. The architecture of brain also depends upon the gestural interaction between child of early years and caregiver around them. Brain is more plastic during these years of life that is, it is more easier to influence the developing brain (Centre on the developing child). Accessibility to care and education during this life stage enhances language and communication skills, five senses, emotional maturity, independence, creativity, muscular coordination, sound physique, good health habits, cognitive skills, control over feelings and emotions (Chopra, 2015). Loades and Mastroyannopoulou (2010) found that children who did not attend preschools miss out on opportunities of social skills and display symptoms of emotional and behavioural problems (as cited in Fabian *et al.*, 2024). Various research provide evidence of a negative long term effect of missing preschool education (Estes, 2015). Outcomes other than basic achievement and cognitive test scores are affected when children do not attend early childhood education (Hogrebe and Strietholt, 2016).

On 30th January' 2020 World Health Organization declared outbreak of Public Health Emergency due to COVID-19 (as cited in Lv *et al.*, 2020). This declaration led for temporary school closures as a community based public health measure. By April 2020 the world's 199 countries had school closures (as cited in Timmons, Cooper, Bozek & Braund, 2021). UNICEF (2021) in their reports stated that more than 42 million children in East Asia and Pacific region were unable to reach to their developmental potential before COVID-19. While, it is assumed that the developmental plight of early age children worsen during the COVID times. During this time, many schools moved to digital formats. Children were seen learning to use digital platforms with fewer opportunities of reading and writing. Children suffered developmental delays, learning issues and behavioural problems during COVID-19 (Mulkey, Bearer & Molloy, 2023). Chemtob *et al.* (2010) stated that historically, disruption in children's educational environment have been understudied in the context of disaster such as weather incidents (as cited in Miller *et al.*, 2025).

Significance of the study:

The current study is relevant and will carry a significant place in the existing literature. As pandemic COVID-19 happened for the first time in history of contemporary world. The alternatives which took place during that time could not be overlooked. Rather it require

a systematic documentation of that phase. Such documentation will serve as a guideline for such disasters or well prepared back up plan for such crisis. It will be able to guide the community/ stakeholders who deals with children of early years.

Review of the Literature:

Impact of COVID-19 on children:

UNESCO (2021), in the Asia-Pacific survey and Sub-Saharan Africa survey, found that education during pandemic was provided through mobile messages, online methods, physical distribution of learning materials and mobile texts. UNSDG, 2020a, estimated that between 42 to 66 million or even more children would fall into extreme poverty because of COVID-19 (as cited in World Bank Group, 2020-2021). United Nations (2020) estimated that approximately 24 million learners from early childhood education to university level were at risk of not returning to school (as cited in World Bank Group, 2020-2021). World Bank Group (2020-2021), stated learning crisis for children during early years. Children from vulnerable groups faced multiple challenges in accessing schools regarding alternative forms of learning during COVID-19. Zengin, Papadakis and Kalogiannakis (2023) concluded significant learning losses in early childhood education during the pandemic. Behavioural problems were reported amongst children along with parental mental health issues. Schuurman *et al.*, 2023 found that due to school closure, there was decline in the academic performances of children and a learning loss of 2.47 months in mathematics and 2.35 months in reading comprehensions (as cited in Zengin *et al.*, 2023). There were increased feelings of depression due to the loss of socialization with others. Children had severe disruption of normal routine life. Online teaching could have a long-term impact on young children. Babu (2021) concluded that children in their early years must use their senses as they learn by touching, observing, and handling the materials. These manipulations impacts psychological learning of children. However, during the pandemic, these were replaced by mobile phones and electronic screens, which put them under intellectual pressure and could deteriorate logical and thinking development.

Relevance of Early years in Brain Development:

Brain development in human beings starts at the 2nd week of conception that happens under genetic control. Postnatally, brain development rely on one's experiences

and gene-environment interaction. Early experiences becomes bedrock for further development – on which higher order thinking/skills are developed. By the time child is in her first year of life, 70% of the child's brain is already developed (Gilmore *et al.*, 2007). Early brain development happens through process of: neurulation – formation of neural tubes that further develops into forebrain, midbrain and hindbrain. Proliferation - proliferation of neural tubes to form ventricular zone which multiplies to form marginal zone that contains axons and dendrites. Cell migration leads to formation of six layers of cortex at about 25th week of conception. Differentiation, involves differentiation of neurons into a matured neuron. The matured neuron has fully developed axon and dendrite. During the 23rd week of gestation two neurons contact one another called as synapses. The production or reduction of synapses is depended on child's experiences. This process is known as synaptogenesis. Final process involved in brain development is myelination – that is axons of the neurons are wrapped in a fatty cells which help them to communicate by sending electrical signals to other axons. Process of synaptogenesis and myelination becomes responsible for speed and precision of coordinated movement, cognitive development, speech sounds and face recognition during early years. Foundations in brain that are responsible for language, social behaviours, emotions are formed during early years and are highly influenced by experiences during early years. Till the time child reaches to 6 months she can discriminate between different sounds. The basic structure of brain development is laid down during prenatal and early years of life. Structures required for the abilities like sensation, perception, memory, decision making and emotions develop during early years of child's life (Tierney and Nelson III, 2009). Approximately 100 billion neurons are formed before the child's birth. The formation of synaptic connections are maximum during the 8 months to 2 years of child's life. Brain area that is responsible for intelligence and higher level of cognitive development is maximum at the age of 3.5 years of child's life (Neville and Bavelier, 2002). Early years is the stage in which most of the brain development is already done.

“Early Childhood Education”- A Golden Opportunity for Development:

Children who attend early childhood education centres have better cognitive, verbal, and social

development. Children display higher IQs and are better prepared for higher learning. Studies in which children who were attending early childhood care and education programmes performed better in school concerning numeracy, literacy, and school retention. Participation of children in early childhood care and education was found to have enhanced emotional, behavioural, and social development (Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2018). Children who attend quality early childhood education demonstrate better cognitive skills that prepare them for later success in school and have better vocabulary, mathematical reasoning and academic achievement. They have improved social and emotional development, stronger self-regulation and reduced behavioural problems (Schoch *et al.*, 2023). Play that supports mental stimulation supports children's insights, discoveries and creativity. They allow children to manipulate and rehearse which enhances their learning and memory (Spelke *et al.*, 2022). Bredekamp and Copple (1997) mention that developmentally appropriate education during early years can have better educational outcomes (as cited in Ma *et al.*, 2016). A study by Li *et al.* (2016) stated that the quality of early childhood education, teaching and interactions were positively linked to children's language, early mathematics, and social development (as cited in Bago *et al.*, 2019).

Research Questions:

During the review of existing literature, some of the major research questions were aroused, that are as follows:

1. How was the life of early childhood year children during COVID-19?
2. What were the alternatives and characteristics of early childhood education being provided during COVID-19?
3. What was the role of parents during COVID-19 with early age children?

Research Objectives:

1. To investigate the daily life of early childhood year's children during COVID-19.
2. To find out the ways and characteristics of early childhood education being provided during the COVID-19.
3. To explore the role of parents in life of children of early years during the COVID-19.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: Qualitative Study

Current study uses qualitative research design, which aims to explore the meaning and insights of the given situation (Corbin and Strauss, 2008 as cited in Mohajan, 2018). Qualitative study provides detailed account of processes happening in the naturalistic setting using non-numerical data, rather it focuses on words (Creswell, 2009; Punch, 2013; Walia and Saini, 2015). In the current study, data collection was ensured in the natural settings of the participants during the COVID-19 times. As data collection was done, during the COVID-19 phase itself. Qualitative study is exploratory in its nature and explains the “how” and “why” of the situation and uses flexible strategies (Polkinghorne, 2005; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). During the COVID-19 period, there was unsurety regarding the research methodology due to social restrictions which restricted human interactions and therefore required flexible approach to use research methods to gain insights into life, early childhood education practices and parental involvement during the COVID-19.

Research Approach: Exploratory Descriptive Qualitative Research

The current study used “exploratory descriptive qualitative” (EDQ) research, as this approach is used to uncover the little-understood phenomenon and explore the topic with limited literature coverage (Polit and Beck, 2012; Searl and Happell, 2012). A global pandemic like COVID-19 was new and unknown to the world. World was unaware regarding its characteristics, impact on humans and response it required from the society, which would also affect the research approaches and methods in this domain. There was no point of reference in the recent several years of research for such health disaster. Hence this approach suited the best to understand the unknown early childhood year practices which would have emerged during the COVID-19. In the current study, various interpretations and analyses of collected data were done using qualitative and descriptive framework.

Sampling Process, Size and Technique:

Marshall (1996) stated that determining sample size of a qualitative study has been matter of debate from several years, there is no fixed criteria or formula to calculate sample size of a qualitative study (as cited in

Sarfo, 2021). In the current study a prefix number of participants were no decided before date collection. Initially, parents from close network having children between age of 3 – 6 years were contacted for collecting data. These parents helped connect with further more parents of same characteristics. Hence, making sampling technique as combination of purposive and snowballing techniques. Purposive sampling is when samples are selected due to its ability to provide rich information for that particular study. While, Patton (1990) defined snowballing technique as when researcher identifies one case with rich information from known people who further helps them to connect with more sample (as cited in Friday and Leah, 2024).

During data collection of the study, at one point it was realized that participants were providing repetitive information. Hence, the data collection was stopped. This led to stopping the data collection on 20th participant. Hence, the sample size of the study became 20 parents of children with age group between 3 to 6 years. Bryant and Charmaz (2007) defined this process as “saturation” which means to reach upto a point in data collection where gathering more information does not extract any new information (as cited in Hennink and Kaiser, 2022). “Saturation” is also one of the guiding principle for determining sample size in qualitative research study. Several research found that qualitative study works with small sample size. Sandelowski (1995) said “*small is beautiful*” (as cited in Mocanasu, 2020).

Tools and Techniques of collecting data:

In the present study, semi structured interviews were used to collect data from participants, as they are exploratory in their nature (Magaldi and Berler, 2020). This quality of interview method, allowed the researcher to study about various dimensions of newly arrived issues in early childhood education during COVID-19, which was not studied before. The semi structured interviews are flexible and it allows to bring forward new questions during the interview process (Ruslin, Mashuri, Rasak, Alhabsyi & Syam, 2022).

Since, the face to face interactions were not possible during the COVID-19. Therefore, the interviews were conducted in an online mode using the Zoom platforms. To maintain the confidentiality, participants were provided with choice to interact using camera or not. The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 2 hours of durations. Participants were often probed during the process. If

any new information was emerged during the interview, that was further questioned for deeper information and clarity.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Alternative early childhood year classes during COVID-19:

All the sampled parents stated that during COVID-19, classes for early years were conducted in an online mode, using platforms like Zoom or google classrooms. Only, one parent reported that her child was provided with home tasks which were to be duly submitted to teacher after completion.

The duration of online classes lasted from 1 to 3 hours. During the online classes, children were provided with several breaks. The classes followed two-way interactional method of teaching. Teachers were found to be asking several questions during the session from children. And were found to be using blackboards on cameras. Children were narrated stories in between the sessions, also posed questions related to those stories. During the session, activities like arts and crafts, finger paintings and drawings were also conducted. Children were involved in activities related to numeracy, alphabets, rhymes, arts and crafts. While some of the parents reported that their children were not involved in any kind such activities because their centres followed play way method of teaching.

Some of the ECE centres followed a fixed schedule during the online classes. This included morning prayers, exercises, and yoga sessions. In between of these activities introductory sessions were held in which each child was asked to talk about themselves one by one, facing the cameras. Children were taught about alphabet using various methods, like by tracing, drawing pictures from that alphabet and learning words using those alphabets. There were instances which states that parents were provided with a week's schedule beforehand. One of the centre involved children in activities related to only numeracy and literacy for the whole week. While once a week in one of the special class, activities related to drawing, cutting and pasting was held.

Parents reported that few of the centres used to provide them with study material or worksheets which were to be used during online classes. To keep children involved in the classes they were asked frequent questions during ongoing sessions like asking one's name,

introducing one's family or asking about colors/ shapes/ weekdays. Children were taught about numbers and alphabets using slate, and in succeeding days, books were introduced during online classes in one case. One parent said that they were provided with tasks, which had to be completed by children and submitted to teachers using WhatsApp on the same evening.

“Conversation 1: Researcher – How are the children taking the classes in the pandemic? Parents – There are online classes happening; we have 2-3 hours of online classes daily, we have daily worksheets, and we are given what we have to do. Researcher – Please share the details of online classes like when the class starts, and what you do in the class. Parent – classes start from 8:25 till 11 “o” clock and sometimes even till 11:30, during online classes, they give a break of 15 mins.....” **“Parent - My child is given 3 breaks in 2 hrs of online class, each of 10 – 10 minutes. The activities are done, in about 40 mins. The activities covered are drawing, joining dots, colouring, and fingerprinting. Sometimes they show stories or movies on YouTube to children, but he doesn't get interested because there is such a small screen. Teachers also ask questions like What have you seen in your stories,....”**

“Conversation 2: Researcher – how does your daughter take class these days in COVID-19? Parent – They take classes online mode from 9 a.m. onwards till 12:30, even on vacations also their summer camp was conducted in online mode....”

“Conversation 3: Researcher – how is the preschool conducting classes for your child? Parent – they are taking online classes, on a daily basis for 2-3 hours.....”

“Conversation 4: Researcher – how does the child attend classes during the pandemic? Parent – online”

Providing home tasks for children during COVID-19:

During COVID-19, children were given home engagements by their ECE centres to keep them involved after classes also. Home engagements were short and simple in their nature. As part of home engagements parents were asked by teachers to encourage children

to watch videos of stories in the ECE centre's online portals. Parents were given worksheets of the activities conducted during online classes to practice at home. Pattern making was also one of the home engagements activities given to children. Along with this, parents were also advised to revisit the topics at home with children that were covered during the online classes like rhymes, poems and tasks related to numeracy or alphabets. Some other home engagements given to children were drawing, craft work, thumb painting, sticking, leaf printing, and colouring, story reading. During the long vacations like summer vacation were not given any home engagements. Children were involved in drawing pictures related to the alphabets they had learnt during the online classes. Half of the sampled parents reported that their children were not given any formal home engagement.

“Conversation 1: Researcher – so, is your child also given homework to do? If yes, then what?

Parent – yes, he is given homework. It is not much, it is more related to colouring, writing in the book, crafts, thumb printing, watercolour, we have to make butterflies or flowers....”

“Conversation 2: Researcher – is the child given any homework? **Parent** – yes but not much it is more activity-based and not writing work. In activity, there is craft, paper sticking, water colour, making drawings, some activities which creates interest in children....”

Meeting of parents and teachers during COVID-19:

Parents and teachers meeting was one of the essential aspects of early childhood education during COVID-19, as reported by the most of the sampled parents. These meetings were organized in the online mode. Few parents stated that they were provided with the option of attending parents' teacher meeting either in an online or offline mode. While very few parents attended the meeting in an offline mode. During the parents and teacher meetings, one session used to have 2 - 4 parents at a time. While few centers provided the opportunity of having one-to-one online meeting. The frequency of parents' teachers' meetings was a minimum of once a year to maximum of four times a year. The purpose of parents and teachers meeting were to understand children's involvement in activities at home during COVID-19, issues parents used to face to teach their children during COVID-19, and to provide parental

guidelines to deal with children during COVID-19, for example, ways of creating a comfortable home environment during COVID. The other things discussed during meeting were children's performance in classes, skills learnt by children, areas of improvement, and display of children's results. Very few parents reported for not having parent-teacher meetings by their centres.

“Conversation 1: Researcher – till now is PTM done in COVID-19? Please elaborate. **Parent** – yes PTM is done, twice a year. Once we also went to school to take the result and meet the teacher. Also, it happens online and when there is any problem we take it to the teacher in online mode only at any time. When PTM happened in online mode it was on the Zoom platform, there were 5 parents together with 1 teacher. She asked us how is the child doing at home, can a child do his own work at home...”

Understanding ways of children's assessment during the COVID-19:

Children's assessment was the essential component as part of children's early education during COVID-19. Assessment was performed at regular intervals. The oral assessment was the major form of evaluation used during COVID-19. Oral assessments involved, singing of rhymes by children, reciting alphabets, counting numbers, and recognition of pictures. In some instances, children were provided with specific topics on which they had to speak during the online classes. At times, parents were required to record videos of their children on various sessions like introducing themselves or singing rhymes, which were send to the teacher for assessment. Written assessments were also used as a form of assessments during COVID-19. As part of written assessment, parents were provided with worksheets, which had to be completed by children and sent to the teacher for assessment. Another method was in which children had to write alphabets or numbers, pictures of these were captured and sent to teachers for assessment. Children's assessment was done primarily to understand children's current level of functioning. Assessment reports were shared with parents by very few of the ECE centres only.

“Conversation 1: Researcher – are they taking children's assessment in any form?

Parent 1 – yes, they take tests, both handwritten and oral. Sometimes they tell us what questions

to ask the child. We ask them and send them the children's responses..."

Parent 2 – *No there is no such assessment. They do the revision of what they have already done, and in between that, they ask certain things from children. Then they also share the report of the child what she knows, attendance and areas of improvement according to the child's age. They do this twice every 6 months...."*

Parent 3 – *there is oral assessment of children, like they give one topic to each and child and children have to speak on that topic one by one"*

Daily routine of children during COVID-19:

Majority of the children during COVID-19 systematically followed a specific routine on daily basis. This involved getting up in the morning, freshening up, bathing, having breakfast and getting ready to attend online classes. Sometimes, children took breaks during online classes to have mini breakfasts. Once online classes used to get over children involved themselves in play at home, had lunch and took afternoon naps. Parents reported that children were also involved in taking rides in cars, played with blocks and revised the activities that were done in online classes. Parents taught children once in a day besides children's online classes. Children who were staying in joint families could spend their time while playing with cousins. Besides, this parent made sure to keep children involved in various activities like writing, reading or playing. One of the parents stated that her child only played for the whole day during COVID-19, besides taking one hour of online class.

“Conversation: Researcher – *Besides classes, what the daily routine of your child?*

Parent 1 – *she wakes up at 7 a.m. then she plays little bit, afterwards she takes the breakfast, bathing and then takes the classes. Then she has lunch and takes a nap. In the evening, I sit make her study for some time and she plays with toys like puzzle. Then she sleeps in night at 10-10:30 p.m onwards...."*

Parent 2 – *wakes up 8 a.m, then takes bath, then from 9 a.m onwards he has its classes, then he watches TV and eat lunch and then he sleeps. Then she plays, do exercises, eats and sleeps at night..."*

Parent 3 – *wakes up 8-8:30 a.m, then has his*

class from 11:30 onwards till 1. After that sometimes he sleeps, or plays the whole day on his own, he keeps himself busy in some or the other activity the whole day like he plays with shape toys"

Outside exposure of children during the COVID-19:

COVID-19 was the phase to stay at home to restrict further spreading of the corona virus. In the provided situation it was difficult for parents to bind children in the four walls of home for years together. To provide children with most conducive, stimulating, learning and experimenting environment parents found certain ways to expose children to outer world while pertaining to the governmental pandemic guidelines. Parents purchased toys for children related to outdoor activities to play inside the house like inflatable swimming pool and small plastic slider. Some parents took children for outdoor visit in their home vicinity after every alternative day with masks put up on their faces. At times, parents took children for walk at night. Children were made to perform activities that involved body movements like Zumba at home. Parents and children played together with bat, balls, swings, sand at terrace. Children were made to stand in balcony to expose them to outer world. Children were involved in online hobby classes also.

“Parent 1 – *from few days we have started him taking rounds in car. Besides this we try our level best to spend time with him to keep his mind diverted ..."*

Parent 2 – *I have purchased certain outdoor toys for him from which he can play inside only like sand play, swimming...."*

Description of children's screen time during COVID-19:

All the children of the sampled parents were not involved in extra screen time besides online classes. Parents were successful in engaging children in several activities during COVID-19. Online classes consumed 1-2 hours per day only. Parents reported that they purposely used to ask children to watch screens, as this broke monotony of home stays. A parent mentioned that her children were *“physically very active”*, hence did not watched screens unnecessarily. A parent taught her child about the side effects of watching excessive screen through a short video. The video showed how children

developed worms in their eyes by watching excessive screens. Parents managed children's screen time by making children watch a show of their choice at a particular time.

“Conversation: Researcher – *How do you manage screen time? Probe - Is the screen time of your child increased?*

Parent 1 – *no not really, very much of this depends on parents also, so when we ask him to switch off the TV he listens to us. We keep him involved in games with us, with play with the ball in lobby...”*

Parent 2 – *we do not like to give access to mobile phones to our children. My children are physically very much active so they keep themselves involve in physical activities more like they jump here and there in whole house. They do not watch TV much, when get tired they open you tube on their own but only for 1 hour (hardly) that too they both share it...”*

Parental role during COVID-19 for children of early childhood years:

During COVID-19, parents were the major source to make early childhood education available for children of early years. During COVID-19, children stayed at home for almost 1.5 years with family. Parents were the major link between children and ECE centre. They were the ones whom children observed every day, they were creating learning environment for children at home or teaching their children the way instructed by ECE centres. Parents used to get children ready for their online classes. This involved waking up children, feeding children, bathing and getting them ready. Teachers used to share home engagement or classroom activities with parents. Sometimes, parents were asked by ECE centres to assess their children at home. Parents were involved in preparing videos of children performing activities/tasks at home, which were to be send to the teachers. Parents ensured health, hygiene and nutritional needs of children, which was essential during the pandemic time. Parents used to revise the preventive measures of COVID-19 to children at home, which were taught to them during their online classes. As part of health and hygiene, parents ensured daily bathing of children and eating healthy food together. Parents created stimulating and learning environment for children at home during COVID-19. As preventive measures, children were restricted at home, social

distancing was also made. This added to children's boredom, anxiety and monotony. To bring children out of this, parents reported that they had purchased extra home-based toys and play material for children. Toys like swings, swimming pools, puzzles, blocks, balls, cricket kits, cycles were purchased. Along with this, parents also taught their children.

Father's involvement with children during COVID-19:

During COVID-19, fathers were positively involved with children and family, expect one of the samples. It was found that before COVID-19 fathers remained outside for the whole day due to which they were less involved in their homes. Father involved themselves with children through play or to manage their outdoor visits like night walks or terrace visits. Father taught their children specially numeracy or alphabets. COVID-19 helped fathers develop better bonds with their children by involving themselves in child care practices like feeding or managing daily routines.

“Conversation: Researcher – *what is their father's involvement with them? Probe – with them or in family during pandemic. Is there any difference pre and during pandemic?*

Parent 1 – *before pandemic their father never got much time to spend with them. Now he spends more time with them like he does yoga, exercise with them, he feeds them at times and play games with them....”*

Parent 2 – *Earlier, only I used to take care of him as he used to go to office and come at night but now, he is at home so he is equally balancing work and kid. When I am busy, he takes care of kid when I am taking care of kid then he takes care household work....”*

Parent 3 – *yes he gives more attention during covid-19 because now he is less burdened. Now he spends good amount of time with children, sometimes he takes dinner with children, right now Rudra cannot eat on his own so his father helps him to eat. He talks to him, takes him to terrace, plays catch and run, cricket and jumping with him....”*

Early childhood years are relevant for enhancing developmental domains of children that are cognitive, physical, social and emotional development. Early childhood care and education prepares children to face

future situations and teaches them social, problem-solving, reading and counting skills. It helps children grow and develop according to the developmental levels, that prepares them to enter school life. It provides children with care and guidance, identifies irregularities so that interventions can be given, and allows children to develop their potential (Budiharjo, 2017). While understanding the relevance and place of early childhood years and education in children's life, the findings of current study ensure that efforts were made during COVID-19 by early childhood education centres to make early childhood education available to children. All the sampled parents agreed (expect one) that their children were taught through online classes. Dong, Cao & Li' (2020) in their study having 3275 parents as sample size found that 92.7% reported that their children had online learning experiences. In the current study, it was found that the online classes during COVID-19 were following a specific timetable. The activities seemed to be pre-planned with specific duration of time. The activities that were taught included concept learning, early numeracy, alphabets, phonics and early literacy. Children were involved in art and craft activities, story narrations, exercises and yoga sessions.

Plotka and Guirguis (2022) in their study found that children were taught online activities during COVID-19 that were story time, games and social activities, sing along, one on one time with teachers, hands on activities with adult assisting, art activities. In these activities, sing along, one on one time with teachers, hands on activities with adult assisting and art activities were found to be effective activities in the online mode.

In the current study, several ways were used by teachers to keep children involved during the online sessions that included providing children with several breaks, asking questions from children and providing introductory session in which children spoke about themselves. Children during COVID-19 were given home engagements, however the purpose was to keep children involved at home. These were very short and simple in their nature. Assessment during COVID-19 was done using oral assessment method. The purpose was not to evaluate the child but to understand how more child can be helped for better learning. Tumusabe *et al.* (2022) stated that assessments are not limited to evaluate children's learning but it allows educators to use informed and enhanced teaching practices (as cited in Moses and Prudence, 2024). Guven, Seker, Erbil & Ozgunlu (2025)

studies 323 parents of children between age group 4-12 years of Turkiye. The findings of study stated that children during COVID-19 were involved 11 kinds of activities at home that were: play with parents; watch screens; play games and watch TV; involve in free play alone; socialize with family in online mode; involve in house hold activities like baking or tidying.

In the current study children were involved in physical activities like playing with toys at home; moving on terrace; taking rides in closed vehicles; going outside home areas alone at times. Strauss *et al.* (2002) stated relevance of physical activity in children as it helps them improve physical condition, social skills and self-esteem in children (as cited in Maria and Masfufah, 2025). In the current study children were not found to be involved in extra screen time. Parents were main source of providing early childhood education to children during the COVID-19 times. They were contact between children and early childhood education centres. They ensured that children attended online classes regularly. Parents provided children with learning environment at home during COVID-19 times. Parents were seen taking efforts to involve children in developmental tasks as asked by educators. Onchwari and Keengwe (2025) studied 83 parents who were involved in their preschool aged children's learning activities during COVID-19. Their study found that parents were majorly involved in artwork, watching TV, playing video games and doing science activities with their children. Other activities in which parents were involved in but less then formerly stated were: reading; watching videos, playing indoor, teaching letters and mathematical activities. Senin and Halim (2021) stated that parental engagement during the pandemic was necessary and they were seen in the role of a teacher. Davis *et al.* (2020) mentioned parents as "proxy educators" during the pandemic for their children (as cited in Dereli and Kurtca, 2022). Hapsari, Sugito & Fauziah (2020) in their study found that among 40 kindergarten parents, 85% of parents were involved in their children's education during the pandemic.

In the present study, it was found that father involved more with their children during the COVID-19 times than usual days. As COVID-19 provided them with extra time which they never got before.

Conclusion:

The pandemic, COVID-19 became a major event in the history of mankind. World came to a halt, due to

the social distancing countries were following in its response. Young years children exposure to the world was also restricted. Early childhood education centres in the world got closed. Children got closed in their homes for approximately for 1.5 years without any human interactions. The study became important to study about the daily life of early childhood year's children during COVID-19; ways and characteristics of early childhood education being provided during the COVID-19 and role of parents in life of children of early years during the COVID-19. The study concluded that alternate ways were adopted by early childhood education centre to deliver early childhood education to children using online platforms. The online classes were found to be following fixed schedules and planned activities. Activities were holistic in their nature by providing exposure of early mathematics, early literacy, language skills, playful activities. Efforts were made to create interesting classes for children. Centres were found to be managing to provide home tasks, parents teacher meeting and children assessment. Parents were found to be the important link between ECE centres and children. Parents were instructed by centres to provide early childhood education to children at home in various form like by showing videos, narrating stories, revising online classes topics. They tried to keep their children in touch with outside world by taking small steps of going outside, with precautionary measures. Parents also ensured to have learning, playful and screen restricted environment at homes.

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