

# From Academic Success to Mental Health Everything is at Cost

ANIL KUMAR TEOTIA\*

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## Abstract

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*The school closure's adverse effects are more visible on the younger children than elders, each day of school closure results in a slight loss in reading and mathematical learning outcomes. Further, school closure may delay the kids' cognitive, social, and emotional development, and it can have a spiral impact on future developmental tasks. In this article, the researcher has tried to present various school closure and related concerns. School closure automatically means the complete absence of school tours, visits, training, and other general things. The idea of online classes seems to be unfit for Delhi's children. This is also impacting the immigrants and first-generation children disproportionately as learning language and mathematics are limited to them. Different feelings at home were found to be nothing new—anxiety, stress, restlessness, etc. Students responded to reopen schools as soon as possible. We have to be aware of the learning loss and the potential learning crisis immediately after school reopening.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The spread of novel coronavirus is still uncontrolled in India. The cases of infected persons and the number of persons deceased are high and continuously rising. The SARS-CoV2 virus is new to the family of

coronavirus, which has resulted in this disease. SARS-CoV2 spread out first in Wuhan, China and then reach out to other parts of the world very quickly. World Health Organization (WHO) accepted human transmission through the droplets or discharge of nose, mouth, and eyes. WHO

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\* Principal, District Institute of Education and Training, SCERT, Dilshad Garden, New Delhi.

declared COVID-19 a pandemic, and asked all the nations to stay at home. When writing this article, the average per day new confirmed cases of coronavirus in India is over one lakh. This shows the level of uncontrolled spread of the deadly virus. To protect our kids from this virus, India closed its schools in the month of March 2020. It was not expected that this is going to last for such a long time. The schools are still closed across the entire nation causing academic, social, and mental pain.

Research about the coronavirus reveals that the transmission of the virus is higher in densely closed, indoor spaces and in public spaces where more and more people use the same facilities. The schools in India are over-crowded, and almost all students share almost all the schools' facilities, from drinking water to the restroom. This is seriously a gamble to let schools reopen with this known fact.

The school closed creates tension, restlessness, anxiety, psychological crisis, etc., among young children of the school (Thakur and Jain, 2020; WHO, 2020). This was evident from many types of research of western countries. The coronavirus effect is more severe in school children's lives and causes mental and academic losses. However, no study was done to determine the impact of this corona crisis on children's minds in Delhi.

This inspired the researcher to study Corona's impact on children's academic, emotional, and mental domains in Delhi's government schools.

## **METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

For this study, 110 students of the Delhi government schools, in North-East District of Delhi, were taken as the sample population. These students were of Classes 6–10 of different schools. The selection of these students was made based on reach, i.e., the easily reached students were made the sample population. Care was taken to include the variety of sections of the society (socio-economic level). This study's primary data collection includes online interviews through Google Meet and telephonic surveys, along with research literature. A questionnaire was used to collect data. It included many questions for open-ended responses. The questions mainly focused on the effects of corona pandemic on learning. Some of the parents were also interviewed. The methodology for the current study was reflective. The data collected were analysed for making all possible connections.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Pandemic: A Crisis for Children**

The most visible effects of this corona pandemic on the children's lives include the schools' closure for a long time. Perhaps, it is for the first time in history when schools are closed for such a prolonged duration and at the national level. Every one of us will and are returning to normalcy expect children. The next few months will be very disappointing for some children, especially those

living in quarantine centres, and whose parents were tested positive because they will be hesitating to come to schools. The school closure may delay the kids' cognitive, social, and emotional development, and it can have a spiral impact on future developmental tasks (Ritchie and Tucker-Drob, 2018). The evidence of previous short-term school closure due to floods or any other natural calamities states that the school's negative effects are more visible on the younger children, each day of school closure result in a slight loss in reading and mathematical learning outcomes. Now, it has been almost six months of school closure; the effects on the attainment level will only be determined when children reach school. They will be drastic because the absence of valuable instructional time is the problem; the forgetting of already learned material will also be a severe concern. It will be tough for teachers to compensate for the loss incurred during this closure. Another research of United States tells that "In the United States, about 25 per cent of what is gained during the academic year is lost throughout the summer (Atteberry and McEachin, 2016; Kraft and Monti-Nussbaum, 2017) the effects in India will be more severe because Indians have low resources at home as compared to resources available to every American on an average.

Each passing week of school closer is reducing the learning outcomes of children, especially in primary grades.

Advocating the importance of remote learning and online schooling can be considered acceptable this time, but this can never replace regular schooling. Students responded that it is easy for them to make connections, learn better, and focus on the content taught when they are in face-to-face mode and doing some activity under direct observation of teachers. School trips—visiting Delhi's museums and monuments, school camps—NCC or Cubs and Bulbuls, and other pleasant activities such as (co-curricular) activities of music, arts and culture, etc., are also on a break; this is going to impact the general knowledge of children about the nation and the world. The long-term effect of this time can be understood by a single statement, "The time spent in Education is positively correlated with intelligence scores (IQ) (Ritchie and Tucker-Drob, 2018)". It means that the adult IQ of our country is now at risk. Why? Since there is a complete absence of school hours and important instructional days, children are deprived of comprehensible input for proper development. This will impact the learning ability and cognitive ability of children in the long run because the critical learning period is on the edge of vanishing.

Moreover, the worst part of this situation is that we do not have a definite plan for reopening schools. Our planning is insufficient; the standard operating protocols are inadequate to meet the learning level

of students. Why? Let us understand the Standard Operating Protocol for reopening schools. Health Ministry of India has issued some guidelines for the partial reopening of schools only for Classes IX to XII. The schools outside the containment zones are allowed to reopen from 21 September. However, online learning shall be permitted as usual. The schools will be reopened voluntarily after the written consent of the parents, what does this mean? Are all students allowed to come to schools or a group of students? How will teachers assess the need of attending schools by specific learners? There are 'n' numbers of questions to be answered. If the schools will be opened voluntarily and all students will not attend school on a particular day, does it mean reopening them or just widening the gap again? Another problem in reopening schools from a different perspective is "The majority of the schools' students in the urban and rural area are difficult to be distanced socially. The spread of the disease will be accelerated by the proximity of the teachers and the children".

### **The Poorest are the Hardest Hit**

Not all children are on the same edge. This will widen the already high inequalities in learners' attainment tests (LAT)—It is a test used for measuring the learning level of students each month in Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan. Research on the relation between school closer and attainment level states that "The learning loss depends mainly

on children's socio-economic status" children belonging to the relatively wealthy family will have better learning opportunities at home. A recent study (Sevilla et al., 2020) found that "children from richer families are spending about 30 per cent more time on home learning than those from poorer families". Again, the learning of poor kids will be at risk. While talking with government school students about the satisfaction of learning, they were found to be disappointed. "*My parents cannot afford adequate internet access for online classes;*" another child added, "*I cannot learn from online classes. The teachers teach with intelligent students' speed, earlier we used to ask something during the face-to-face discussion, but now we are supposed to mute our mic in the classes. It leaves no space for us for better understanding*", Sarita Class IX.

Another girl said, "*the educational resources are inadequate; we are not at par with our rich counterparts in schools. My home background is visible in the live class, and it makes me feel embrace in front of the class, children tease me after the class. This pandemic is a total loss*". When I asked a child to divert his mind from the pandemic crisis, "*what do you want to become in your life?*" He said, "*I do not want to be poor; I will do anything for becoming anything. Being poor is uncomfortable*".

Further, online schooling requires a good and reliable internet connection, a separate room for

studying, well-educated parents (with enough time), and many other things. So, the idea of online classes seems to be unfit for Delhi's children. This is also impacting the immigrants and first-generation children disproportionately as learning language and mathematics are limited to them. The dialogues with some of the parents of lower socio-economic status help us find their opinion about it. It is evident from parents' attitude to a poorer socio-economic status that they are unwilling to resend their children to school. They want them to put on the workforce to have economic support to already suffered family.

They have no money for taking specialised medical facilities in case the child is tested positive. Hence, this is a concern among low households for not sending kids to school. The marginalised poor sections will pay the most significant price. They will fall behind farthest. They will have the least resources to overcome this crisis. *"At last, the greatest price will be paid by us"*—Amit, a student. The children belonging to families of absolute poverty will be the most challenging reach after this pandemic gets over. Due to the loss of the daily bread or any personal loss, the child will be playing the role of bread earner in the family. The pandemic's economic effect is long term, and we have no readymade solution for skipping the economic slowdown. The child, who will be playing a crucial role in the family, will no longer be available to attend the schools anymore.

### **Different Feels at Home: A Dialogue with Delhi Government School's Students**

Interviews with the students were made to find out the impacts of the school closed on the academic and personal lives of students at home. More than 97 per cent of the students interviewed told us that they miss school very much. When we asked them to share what they do at home all day, they responded almost in similar ways. *"We watch television from morning to evening; we watch the corona updates and the news for vaccines. Sometimes we play ludo or carom board."* The responses were not new at all. We are classifying our discussion into two parts based on the significance and the ideology we found. In the first part, we discuss the interactions with the students who wanted to return school, and in the second section, we discuss the interactions with the students who did not want the school reopening.

While discussing the feel at home, it was found that the students are feeling less enthusiastic at home; they are not doing any particular work and are spending hours just idling away. The questions about children's daily routine helped us know the things they are doing in this crisis. *"I wake up late in the morning and then lie down in my bed until it is too late; I often skip breakfast and snacks. My mom does not let my play outside (except in my one neighbourhood house). I spent most of my daily time watching a cartoon on television. I feel all alone*

*all day long. I am eagerly waiting for schools to reopen. I am missing my friends and teachers a lot*", these were the wordings of some children of government school in Seelampur, Delhi. Many students agreed and had one thing in common, that is to say, the reopening of the schools. A larger share of the group interviewed showed a missing feeling for school.

Another group of the students shared many funny things; they nodded that they do not want schools to reopen, although this group was a minuscule minority. They thought they feel better at home with siblings; they play together and do not feel bored. *"We get up early in the morning to play with all our cousins and siblings; we eat together and dance together. We have the option of not taking online classes; we cannot be caught, we just say-internet problem. We watch television together and watch all the cartoons available. We play ludo, snake and ladder, carom board, chess, cards, video games, etc. We also play many outdoor games within the family on the rooftop/terrace and in the verandas of our house. We do not want schools to reopen. However, we miss our school friends, by the way."* These were the experiences of some children. Although they are not afraid of coming to school but do not want schools to reopen, they enjoy themselves at home. They are not missing school because of the company available at home. When we deliberately asked them about the lockdown and the stay-at-home

orders, they said, *"We want to visit our relatives and friends now, we do not want to live this way."*

These poor kids are unable to predict the academic losses due to school closure. They will realise it soon. After returning to school, it will be tough for them to accommodate in the regular classroom and learn the appropriate outcomes at different stages. Teachers' experiences in online classes and remote teaching are evident that forgetting all the learned material is a significant concern. Students are not able to grasp the new concepts quickly because they have forgotten the previously learned material. A learning crisis is on its way! Let's be aware!

Another less concerned and more severe problem is drug abuse or the use of toxic substances by the children. This online culture, restriction on the social gathering, restriction on sports and games may result in use of tobacco and other toxic products by children. *"More people are using drugs, and more illicit drugs are available than ever (Drug Abuse amidst Pandemic—The Hindu, n.d.).—A newspaper report"*. This corona crisis could make our children more exposed to the negative side of drug abuse. Anxiety and ongoing tensions are the main reason behind it. The economic recession may lead our poor kids on the wrong path of drug dealing too. We have many children having mental health issues, and they do not have the help they needed. Parents reported that earlier

they had help available from school counsellor and teachers, which is not available now. There are numerous reports of adolescent children using alcohols during the lockdown in India (*Lockdown Blues Driving Kids to Suicide?*— *The New Indian Express*, n.d.)— A newspaper report.

It is a situation of a pandemic within a pandemic. There is a great need for motivating children and caring for their mental health. Adolescents should be encouraged to do new things, play outdoor games (with precautionary measures), have local visits, and spend much time in family and talk with friends. Teachers should help them in feeling happy. Family too can help in this regard.

## FINDINGS

The main findings of the research are the following—

- This COVID pandemic is a learning crisis for children. The absence of proper instructions in specified situations is going to impact learning outcomes negatively. Teachers, be prepared!
- The vanishing of co-curricular activity is reducing the chances of learning general things. Along with the main syllabus, general knowledge is also suffering.
- There is a correlation between time spent in education and intelligence scores; thus, adult IQ of the nation is at risk.
- There is a strong urge to think to reopen of schools as soon as possible.

- There is the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on peoples of different socio-economic levels. Special efforts for reaching the unreached are required.
- All children are not at par. There is wide diversity in the availability of resources available to them. Think before planning any move.
- Children are losing all the patience they are having. They are distress and are not happy. This is going to impact their return to school.
- Almost all children want to return to school.
- The risk of drug abuse is increasing. We need to make specific arrangements for the counselling of adolescents.
- The idea of online classes is unfit for Delhi's kids. Online classes should not replace regular schooling.

## CONCLUSION

The corona crisis was unprecedented. WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic and asked all the nations to followed stay at-home orders. To protect our kids form this virus, India closed its schools in March, 2020. The schools are still closed in the entire nation causing academic, social, and mental pain.

In this present article, the researcher tried to analyse the different aspects of children's lives at home. This pandemic is a crisis for the majority of children. The school closure is delaying the developmental

tasks. The children may delay their different developmental domains during the corona crisis because of the absence of the instructional time and school hours. The impact will be drastic because the absence of valuable instructional time is the problem, but the forgetting of already learned material will also be a severe concern. We think that online classes can be considered acceptable for now,

but these can never replace regular schooling.

The parents' attitude told us that some of them would not resend them to schools easily, and thus the negative impact of the pandemic will be disproportionate. In the last section of the paper, we have shared some of the children's opinions regarding the reopening of schools. Almost all children demand the reopening of schools.

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