



Back to

SCHOOL

OPEN PAGE

Back to school

Rajaraman Krishnan


MARCH 14, 2021 00:04 IST

UPDATED: MARCH 13, 2021 14:45 IST**Primary and middle schools too should be opened to prevent any gap in learning**

Schools all over India closed down by mid-March last year. They have now reopened for higher classes on the assumption that education of senior students, especially those preparing for their board exams, is more important. The thought is that a year of lost education at a younger class can be easily made up – not just officials but the public at large also seem to hold this true.

We have as a society confused education with the process that certifies people as educated. Education is about learning and is fundamental to a society's or nation's progress. And the certification process of board exams and degrees is at best a necessary evil.

When you forget for a moment about the certification process and look at the school system as a vehicle for learning, the mistakes we are making as a society become obvious.



**Honest journalism redefined
with changing times.**

Subscribe for just ₹83/month

Offer ends soon

[View Offer](#)

A year of learning at the age of five or six is much more critical than a year of learning at say, 15. Developing language, social and other skills are much more difficult as children grow older. Studies have also found that younger children forget much more of what they learn than older children during a break from studies.

Therefore, the governments should have focused on resuming primary and middle school classes. Even from the point of view of safety, this would have been a good idea. Studies show that younger children are less susceptible to COVID-19. Further, even if infected, they are less likely to become seriously ill. Studies in the U.S. have also found that reopening of schools has not caused any major outbreaks (unlike colleges which do cause outbreaks).

Pratham's ASER survey provides details of the impact school closures have on education. Technology-driven education with videoconferencing and digital sharing of assignments is not reaching more than 20% of the schoolchildren. In my personal interactions with children who are receiving such education, they narrate the difficulties they face. With just an hour and a half of instruction typically, a patchy network connection and the challenges imposed by the medium itself, they find it difficult to understand what the teachers are teaching. This is a disruption of education of devastating proportions.

While this is a problem for all children in India, it particularly affects the poor and widens the already vast disparity that exists between them and the privileged. Educated parents will find ways to continue engaging their children and stimulate their minds. Elite schools will find ways to engage the students through online classes, assignments, and a wide variety of online content. These are non-starters for the underprivileged as they do not have access to a smartphone or computer.

Social evils

One of the spin-offs of compulsory free education for children is that many social evils such as child labour and child marriages are prevented. But these evils seem to be once again on the increase now. As the children are not in school, many of them are being engaged in informal labour. Children are once again working with their parents in household industries such as matchbox making.

They are working in the neighbourhood mechanic shops and groceries. Girls are being engaged in household chores and taking care of the younger ones in the family. Minor girls are being married off.

Our handling of education during this crisis has been wrong. We should have kept these above factors in mind while dealing with education. Even now, I would urge that the primary schools are opened immediately. Opening them doesn't add much risk whereas closure entails an incalculable loss to society and is a disservice to the younger generation.

rajaram@solnet.in



**Honest journalism redefined
with changing times.**

Printable version | Mar 16, 2021 6:23:33 PM | <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page/back-to-school/article34059873.ece>

© THG PUBLISHING PVT LTD.