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## SCHOOL EDUCATION AND PANDEMIC CRISIS: UNLOCKING AND OBSTRUCTION

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### Abstract

Unprecedented scenario in the history of mankind is witnessed in the last one year due to historic corona virus. The world has stuck into at a halt with the uncertain future. No one has predicted that one day each and every moment of world will be restricted. Concepts like social distancing and physical distancing are new to world but essentially mandatory for all. Every sector is adversely affected in long term including education. Numbers of questions are being asked, what should be the preparedness for post COVID school opening? is there any need to condense curriculum for post academic years? and how to measure COVID impact among the school children to assess their ability to cope up with offline school education ?. On the other side online education has left several impacts on schools. The situation raised all of sudden. No one was ready to counter this situation, however from teaching to learning there are many issues emerged during the pandemic period. Technological advances turned blessings for the online mode however there are several setbacks seen in last few days while conducting online classes. In the view of this reopening of schools has become concern for educators. This research paper has aimed to discuss and to assess the obstacles and preparedness for post COVID schooling.

**Key Words:** Pandemic, Education, unlock, Preparedness

The world will never be the same after 'Corona' regime. In the history of mankind numerous pandemic emerged and disappeared but Covid is unique disease which is perhaps going to stay for longest period of time. Corona not only spread rapidly worldwide but claimed thousands of life in shorter period. When almost each developed country failed to counter the virus and health machinery was unsuccessful to provide medical assistance, 'Lockdown' remained the only measure to prevent spreading corona virus in society. From most developed countries to the smallest nations of Africa, from well equipped cities to villages, millions of people were stuck into their homes for months and months. Industries were closed, transport was on hold, flights were banned and schools were shut down. Along with day to day life economy, transport, employment, agriculture, rural industry and education are the most affected sector. Whole world was together in the fight against corona virus. It was very obvious that economy were slow down to its lowest stage due to ban on all economic activities and movement. Almost all sectors, all activities was put on hold except health and education sector. To restore continuous educational activities, schools came up with the most contemporary tool, 'online teaching'. Use of information technology, use of audio video was not new to education field, but to replace all traditional coaching to online teaching was exceptional decision. Moreover it was the only choice left to the educators to continue their activities. Online teaching has come up with good options, however it have all good and bad aspects and impact. After completion of almost one year of corona regime many countries are trying to unlock the rules and standard operating procedure to restore normal life. Yet corona has not vanished completely, the mode of online teaching is still powerful option. However, offline teaching has its own merits and demerits, the overall development of students can only ensured in the premises of schools. Face to face and eye to eye contact makes offline teaching meaningful and more impactful. Post covid schooling will be hard task to educators and all stake holders. In the way to unlock the school education stake holders must be cautious because it is very sensitive issue for parents to send their ward to school in shadow of virus. Everyone knows how to follow the norms of precautions i.e. social distancing, use of mask and sanitizer but when it comes to school education its very difficult to regulate school going children in specific environment. It will be task for the school authorities and management. In last few days worldwide and in India too, unlocking is scheduled with specific restrictions. Schools are about to open, in some part of the world and India management is setting up for reopening. World health organization and Indian government is tirelessly working on the SOP (standard operative procedures) for state and union territories to develop guidelines for reopening the schools.



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## Explaining precautions before unlocking

Massive vaccination drives are on in the world and in India too, however, precautions like social distancing, use of sanitizer and wearing a mask is very important. With the unlocking and students arriving schools it is must to ensure that all should know the places where to enter and to get sanitized before entering the class. Schools must organize guiding tour for students and parents in the school premises. The common activities must be organized in the open spaces to avoid contacting. The manual for standard operation procedure must be prepared and must share with the stake holders. It is equally important to make the children understand the journey of virus, truth and facts of pandemic. To make it possible some videos shall be share as part of awareness. To extend this small workshop can make huge difference to increase the awareness. In such workshops various kinds of worksheets can be given to the children as well as parents. These worksheets may contain questions about pandemic and virus, which can increase knowledge and awareness regarding virus and prevention. One year is huge period for kids to be away the school; in many cases they have forgotten co existence of fellow kids. Losing confidence and mental health is crucial issue for small kids. The prime objective of unlocking schools must be building confidence among school children. It must be ensure that with new norms of school, they must feel freeness and lively atmosphere but not feel fear or uneasiness.

Last one year which is most crucial battle with corona virus which is not ended yet, has shown the power of human existence and resilience. In the fight against corona, humans have shown their strength and unity. Worldwide, this war has fought with conviction to help each other. Strong collaboration amongst all nations has been witnessed. Fight against corona must be painted like victory over pandemic before children while they will come back to schools. School administration must glorify this struggle in a unique way. This exercise will help to boost the confidence of kids and their energy will be turn into positivity. It is highly possible that some children have countered with psychological issues during the lockdown. Above gesture can make them stronger and positive about their comeback. To make it more possible children may ask to write stories and recall good memories during lockdown. They can ask to share their experiences of good moments while living with family in closed doors. Children can be asked to paint draw the pictures about our fighting against corona and school can be decorated with pictures of fighting moments during the corona period. Significant physical changes are essential in the view of unlocking schools in post covid period. With the strategic planning of placing sanitizer and temperature gun in appropriate place, it should be ensured that children must not be mingle together while entering and going back from schools. Separate entrance and exit or one way movement can avoid contacting and contamination. To avoid physical contact among student priorities must be changed. Sports hour and free time must be controlled to reduce physical contacting. Especially pre-primary section of the school usually has small equipment toys which can be turn instrumental in increasing contamination. To avoid touching equipments and toys disinfection of such things must ensured timely. Changing classrooms for distinguish subjects can bring children together so rotating classes should be hold for some time to avoid contacting.

## Preparedness of the educational institutions

Reopening of the schools cannot possible without taking all stake holders of school educations in to confidence. Especially parents have to play key role into identify and increase awareness about prevention measures. Most delicate issue is to plan new travelling policy for kids in post covid regime. Most of the school children travel to school in common transport which can increase risk of contact. Families of schools rely on school administration for safety of their ward however it will be in interest of all that the common traveling should be restricted to fifty percent to maintain physical distance. This can be possible only with the help of parents. To start building confidence amongst the parent, school may conduct several virtual meets with the parents. Schools may take help of parents to identify awareness strategy and norms. Suggestions can be asked from parents while conducting virtual parent meets. Such meetings will be help schools for explaining new measures and school efforts to stop spreading corona virus. With all strictness parents should be discouraged entering school premises unless it is absolutely necessary. It is very obvious that less number of people presences in school can only ensure safety of kids. School children spend lot of common timings and hangout before starting and ending school timings, to restrict kids to make hangouts school administration must be take parents into confidence. In various parts of the world schools are reopening with fifty percent attendance to avoid crowd in the school. It is essential for school to ensure the safety of the staff and their families too.



The unlocking is going to be largest exercise worldwide; the norms should ensure long term solutions and approach to protect the stakeholders. The schools are facing financial crunch during the pandemic. For the first time in near past schools are running short of fund due the failing of timely fee submission. There are many incidents of conflicts between the parents and school management over the submission of fees. It is time to create faith among the parents; they must ensure that schools are going to perform as they were doing before. On the other hand schools are facing financial crunches due the affected economic activities during the pandemic period. Schools have to work on this to bridge the financial gap without passing financial pressure to the parents. Obviously teachers are one who is the most badly affected sector in this period. Most of the teachers are lost their jobs and most of getting the cut in salaries. On this background all schools must create the faith amongst teachers and parents that they are going to work efficiently even after all the issues.

The other issue is whether the parents will be ready to send their wards to school after reopening the schools? Moreover they will more concern about the safety of the children. Families of the kids rely on the schools for their wards safety. School should prepare safety manual in accordance with the safety measures guidelines of salutary authorities. These manuals must indicate the school timings, break timings and schedule of the movement of students during the schools. New seating arrangements and rules of physical distance must describe in the manual especially made for parents. Virtual meeting can be arranged to understand the parents concern and they shall sensitize about the new norms to be followed. The pandemic period is crucial for kids, seating at home and spending unplanned timings. There is possibility of losing basic knowledge about certain portion or some basic concepts would have vanished. While reopening the schools the assessment of the children must be done with the help of different worksheets and assessment questionnaire. This can help the teacher to identify the kids to consider remedial coaching if required. Schools must understand that covid 19 may stay here for longer period, keeping this in mind schools must prepared their plan for longer period. This is unique situation to counter for school administration.

### **Restructuring syllabi and academic calendar**

There is strong possibility that kids would have lost connection and knowledge of basic concepts of their syllabi. Moreover the schools have to shrink and rescheduled their academic calendar to complete previous syllabus and forthcoming syllabi. The NCERT has already announce the cut off and reduction in the syllabi and has reduced syllabus for the class IX,X,XI, XII (30%) percent. This will ease the pressure of student. The eleven months of stress, anxiety has massive impact on children; many of them are distracted and even put out of mind many basic things concepts etc. Up to class eighth schools must form committees to reconsider the syllabus for reduction. The committee must consider the state of mind of the students. Before coming to conclusion committee shall assess the knowledge of the students and also identify the weak students who may have lost their attention in past few months. For this exercise the committee can conduct screening test of students as a pilot study to take appropriate decision. The committee can also suggest the new evaluation method to ease the pressure of students. Physical activity is something which is integral part of the school. But past few months the physical health of the kids has been in danger. Lot of kids already reported the complaint of gaining weight, back pain and blurry vision issues. Above all the mental health of the students is also at stake. To resolve this issue the physical activities must be started in the school. It is hard task for the school administration to start the physical activities as it was planned before. However the school administration has to consider the SOP and have to start the activities in the interest of students. Some of the suggestion has already coming up like yoga, meditation and game like badminton, which can ensure the physical distancing. With the reopening school has to reframe their policy regarding the physical activities for the student.

Skill development and various soft skill training is important aspect for the school education. Last few months these activities are completely stoooped and kids are lagging behind and interrupted in this regard. The schools have to come up with the new policy of soft skill development and training programme. The management must organize and invited the resource person either online or offline for the continuous training of the students. Co curricular activities, day celebrations, art and craft, debating competition, easy writing, science experiments etc are the most essential activities of overall development of the student. Schools have to fill the gap and to make extra efforts to reorganize these activities with the new covid guidelines. Another aspect of the school education is continues update of knowledge and refresher



courses of teaching faculty. From last one year teachers are away from their scheduled training and research programme in their respective field. This gap can be reflected in their teaching and can affect their classes. Continuous teachers training is essential for the knowledge update, above all the online class teaching needs special skill in information and technology. The uses of modern digital devices are new tools for teachers which required special guidance and training.

## Conclusion

Last few months this Covid 19 pandemic brought lot of changes in the human society. Each and every institution has forced to change its nature of working. Amongst all, education sector has also transformed into totally digital set up. In the view of unlocking there is urgent need of proactive strategy to ensure smooth transition of post covid schooling. It is found in some of the recent studies that online teaching has its own demerits. No one was ready to replace the traditional teaching to online teaching. Especially in the country like India where resources are not available as required, it was not easy task. Lack of training in digital devices and non availability of high-speed internet has interrupted online studies at some extent. In some of the experiences due to interrupted studies, unplanned academic activities, reduction in syllabus and mental stress has resulted in negative kind of impact amongst students. Moreover the concern of further studies, lack of on field training and skill acquisition, students are feeling stressed and frustrated. The urgent need of reopening is echoed and worldwide school reopening has been initiated. We must understand that education is different field than other like health, police or arm forces. It needs different handling. You can't apply the normal guidelines to the school reopening. The young age of the school going children is also cause of concern in some of the strains of virus. You can guide and advice to kids how to protect but you can't force them to do it. It is very delicate question how children will follow the standard operative procedure.

The school authority, management and teachers are not involved policy making of school reopening. The support staff has not considered in any decisions. They are in large in numbers in school and most exposed to the children in day activity. Like transport, dining and handling. The teaching and non teaching staff of the school must be considering as frontline workers. The corona situation is different place to place, like the gravity of the situation is really differing from town to town. There is pandemic act in existence but there is no detail education policy to be implemented in pandemic period. Like what will be nature of exams and evaluation. What will be the fee structure and time schedule of submission?, the nature of study and syllabus and so on, these are some of the issues need to define in the interest of long term. Government interventions needed for the school and all stakeholders. In last few days schools are really struggling to match their expenses. Government must provide financial assistance for such school to reinstate activities as before. In this case government has to come up with some scheme to fulfill the need of school in post pandemic period. The past one year and may be coming year too is hard for the children, especially affecting their physical and mental health. It is required to reopen the schools earliest to address their issues. and to bring them in the stream of education. This exercise cannot handled only be schools. The other stakeholders like parents, alumnae and governmental agencies must come together to reinstate the offline teaching and learning. Collative efforts only can ensure the smooth opening of school reopening.

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