

COVID-19 and Online Education: Changing Trends in Modern Socialization

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ABSTRACT

The process of becoming social is known as socialization for it is socialization which makes human beings a superior species than animals. COVID-19 has raised several questions for the future generation but whenever the dust would settle down, education will be the biggest casualty. The present research paper is based on the data collected from working parents as well as home makers from different states viz Delhi, Jammu, Punjab, Karnataka, U.P in order to identify the problems they have faced while socializing their children and coming on terms with online mode of education. Going to schools, colleges and higher education institutions for that matter for acquiring knowledge has actually become a thing of past. It would not be incorrect to use “traditional education” for pre COVID education system. The Covid-19 pandemic which made social distancing a new normal for everyone has affected all walks of society, including education. The pandemic situations have given an unparalleled push to online education. According to a recent United Nations report, “the COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries and all continents (UN 2020). For keeping education system running, educational institutions had to quickly adapt to the contemporary situations. Online mode of education has its own pros and cons. Under developed as well as developing countries where providing offline education was a challenge in itself, online education has risen as a much bigger challenge. It has become difficult for parents, especially working parents, as well as students themselves to cope up with the crises generated by COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, Online Education, Parenting, Personality Development, Schooling, Socialization.

No one was aware of such devastating effects of a virus, which eventually lead to a complete change in the lifestyles of people. The global outbreak of COVID-19 has spread worldwide and no country is immune from the unprecedented impacts of covid-19 have made. Social distancing is the new normal and social distancing, in turn, has given a big push to virtual lifestyle. Whether it is learning, teaching or working for any organization, everything has been brought down to the screen of palm tops and laptops. During the COVID pandemic, many corporations, schools, and public officialdoms all

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around the world asked their employees to work from home i.e., to adopt what are called “smart working” modalities. For the security of their citizens most of the welfare states of the world rightly took the decision of temporary closure of educational institutions in order to curb the outbreak of covid-19 virus amongst children. With an increasing number of states, provinces and even whole countries closing institutions of learning, over 91% of the world’s student’s population are not attending schools/colleges (UNESCO,2020). Much before the arrival of third wave of coronavirus, which is said to affect children the most, the governments took their call on supporting online mode of education by shutting down educational institutions.

Socialization, COVID-19 and online education

21st century is an era of science and technology; students prefer online platforms for better understanding. Lockdown and social distancing due to COVID-19 has led to closure of schools and colleges, which, in turn, has left both teachers as well as learners with no alternatives other than online education. Transition from traditional, face to face mode of education to virtual interface or online education is an entirely different experience for both the students as well as teachers. There is a paradigm shift in the way teachers used to teach. E-learning tools have proven to be very helpful in facilitating students learning during the closure of schools and universities. (Subedi et al., 2020). Online education through video conferencing has replaced the traditional classrooms. Google meet, zoom calls, Webex and innumerable applications have been created only to provide a digital platform of learning to students and also allow teachers to create various educational modules, skill development courses (Petrie ,2020). Through online learning, education amongst physically challenged students is also stimulated as it provides differently abled students a chance to participate in the classroom avidly with limited movement (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020).

But there is no “one size fits all” pedagogy for online education. Since, everyone holds different IQ level, it becomes even tougher on the part of teachers to interact with each student separately in online mode. The learners with fixed mind setup find it difficult to adapt and adjust whereas those having a sharp/ growth mind setup adapt to new learning environment quickly. Hence, in online learning, manifold approach is required for myriad category of learners belonging to different subjects and age groups (Doucet et al., 2020).

Information and communication technology (ICT) plays quite a decisive role in enabling any society to adapt to technical changes that come with time. The unparalleled changes brought by COVID-19 compelled governments to take stringent actions in order to curb the outbreak of the pandemic. As preventive measures, educational institutions for that matter schools were completely shut down. The closure of schools made parents, teachers, students all over the world feel unexpected ripple effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Online education has become the need of the hour as people are helpless and cannot risk their lives by going out of their homes.

The use of suitable and applicable pedagogy for online education may depend on the proficiency and exposure to information and communications technology (ICT) for both educationalists and the pupils. Some of the online platforms used so far include unified communication and partnership platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, Canvas and Blackboard, which permit the teachers to generate educational courses, training and skill development programs (Petrie, 2020). They provide students with options of workplace chat, video conference and file storage that keep classes systematized and easy to work. They usually sustain allocation of a variety of content like Word, PDF, Excel file,

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audio, videos and many more. Through these applications, teachers are able to track students' progress in learning and progress by using quizzes and the rubric-based assessment of submitted assignments. The availability of flipped classroom is a simple approach for providing learning resources such as articles, research papers, pre-recorded lectures by the teacher and YouTube links before the class. By providing study material in advance, teachers are able to use the online classroom time to deepen understanding through discussion with faculty and peers (Doucet et al., 2020).

Objectives

The objectives of the study are to;

- Analyze the impact of COVID-19 on schooling and changing trends in socialization.
- Enlighten various online tools/platforms adopted by educational institutions during the pandemic.
- Highlight some merits and demerits of Online Learning and put suggestions for improvement.

Contemporary socialization; changing trends

'Socialization among the young allows for the more general phenomenon of social reproduction- the process whereby societies have structural continuity over time' (Giddens, 2006). It was Parsons who stated that family has two main functions to be performed, i.e., socialization of the young and stabilization of the adult personalities (Parsons, 1995). But the contemporary era has witnessed few changes in the modes as well as agents of socialization. The role played by primary agents of socialization (family, peer group, school and mass media) have been brought to one screen i.e., smart phones. Today's generation kids belong to the era of gadgets and gizmos, well informed about the technological know-how. Internet has over powered all the agents of socialization. Mobile phones, social media platforms have replaced the place of traditional socialization agents.

Impact on schooling- COVID-19 has led to the largest disruption in education system in the human history, temporary closure of schools, educational institutions and other learning spaces has affected more than 94% of the student population all over the world. (UN, 2020). Schools act as an agent of socialization where students gain knowledge, learn values and discipline. The pandemic has left people with no option other than online mode of education. The virtual interface is not at all an accurate replacement as it hampers the overall process of personality development. Children are not able to interact with others and everything is now limited to digital platforms.

In India, there are other social problems posing threat to national development, one cannot ignore. Many students used to go to school for food, schemes like the "mid-day meal" have gone for toss which used to attract children to school for a daily meal. It cannot be denied that the high percentage of school enrollment was largely due to mid-day meal scheme that guaranteed students at least one good meal. The aftermath of this pandemic, for that matter closure of schools, has led many families face hand to mouth situation.

Online education; issues and challenges

The COVID-19 epidemic posed a significant threat to global education system. With over 1.3 billion people, India, the world's second most populous country, has been particularly vulnerable to the pandemic. Both waves of COVID-19 have triggered a public health emergency in the country, posing a serious threat to people's lives.

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People began developing psychological issues as a result of the complete lockdown, social distancing, health complications, and other factors that exposed the masses to an unprecedented situation.

The entire government machinery and administration shifted their focus to saving people's lives through medical and social interventions. Educational institutions were closed indefinitely, social gatherings were prohibited, and people were strictly ordered to maintain social distance and stay at home as much as possible. The pandemic presented the government with a new challenge, as children's education suffered the results of the indefinite closure of schools.

The government's only option has been to abruptly transition from traditional classroom learning to online learning. However, this was accompanied by a number of issues such as a lack of resources and infrastructure, digital illiteracy, poverty, a lack of awareness, and insufficient access to internet facilities. In addition, the teachers lacked the necessary training to impart knowledge and skills through the online mode of teaching.

Furthermore, the traditional schooling mechanism came to a halt, and new methods of imparting education and administering examinations were implemented. All of this caused consternation among teachers, students, and their parents, prompting them to either struggle or seek ways to adapt to this new normal. Teachers who were used to conventional mode of teaching only felt technically handicapped.

India was already facing Digital divide in education and it has got a push due to COVID-19 pandemic. As per a recent survey report by National Statistics Office (NSO), titled 'Household Social Consumption on Education', only 4% of the rural population has access to computers as against 23% of the Urban population of students above 5 years of age. This huge divide is not just limited to the access but is also applicable in the use of technology as well.

In rural households, only 10% of students are able to operate computers against 32.4% of students in urban households.

With 68% of India's population living in rural areas these stark gaps in access and the ability to use technology for learning will have profound effects on the development of students from these areas and will impact nation's development too.

Where online learning has almost become a new norm, institutions should facilitate the faculty with technological setup for that matter, personal computers, webcams, headphones etc. While conducting this study, it was found that poor internet connection (from students' side, as well as teachers') is a continuous problem. Many a times, the teacher is not able to take the class due to network issue, same is the case with students (Saminathan, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The study is both descriptive and exploratory in nature based on online questionnaire administered in May 2021. For this study, both primary and secondary sources of data have been used. Secondary sources of data were research articles, journals, e-contents relating to online education, socialization and Covid-19. Whereas, primary data was collected from working parents belonging to myriad professions such as teaching, banking, corporates, as well as from homemakers. The data was collected by taking information through google

forms and online interviews through video conferencing. Since, the mode of data collection was online, the respondents were not from specific area. A total of 100 online questionnaires were filled and 25 detailed interviews were conducted through video conferencing. The respondents belonged to Delhi, U.P, Punjab and Karnataka.

In order to get a detailed information regarding parenting, socialization and education, the respondents were firstly asked about some general details such as age, marital status , years to marriage, number of children and their age as well. Later on, opinions about changing trends in socialization, online education were recorded from the respondents.

DISCUSSION

This section of the research paper entails discussion made with the respondents. The author has tried to maintain the authenticity of experiences and opinions of the respondents. Parents shared their experiences and suggestions to enhance the knowledge of their children. Although, majority of the parents were doing their work from home, they were not able to provide adequate time to their child's school activity. In several cases, it was found that parents felt overburdened as they have to manage home chores along with their office work. Managing their ward's school activity act as an extra burden to them. On asking about if they were facing any issues in raising/ educating their children in the present pandemic crisis, majority of the respondents agreed to it. Socializing children has become tough, as they are not able to interact with other people. This would gradually lower down their psycho motor skills, the confidence to interact in public domain would also get hampered.

One of the respondents who was a government teacher by profession and a single mother said,

"I travel almost 100kms every day to work just to ensure better future for my son. I had bought him a smart phone from my hard-earned money, but instead of studying, he keeps playing games and wastes time over social media platform. I cannot stop going to work just to keep a watch over him, I hope schools reopen soon."

High speed internet connection has become one the priorities if one has a student at home. Here the problem of digital divide intervenes. For a nuclear household which consists of both the spouses working, which children studying in schools or colleges, high speed internet and devices to avail the internet connectivity becomes a must. Such is the case of respondent who was a university employee and had her husband with two children at home. She narrated;

"Humare pass ek hi laptop tha jo mere husband use krte hain apne kaam k liye, ab bacchon ko online class attend karne ke liye laptop ki zarurat hoti hai, lockdown main padhai na ruke isliye naya laptop khareedna pda. Saath hi private high speed wi-fi connection bhi lena pda, ghar main sabko internet istemal krna hota hai. COVID ki vajah se kharcha badh gya hai."

(We had only one laptop at home which, my husband uses for his work from home. Now, for attending online classes, children need laptop. So, in order to keep their studies going, we had to buy a new laptop along with private high speed wi-fi connection as everyone at home needs to avail the internet. COVID has increased financial expenditure.)

One of the other respondents, who was an ex-air hostess by profession and now runs a business with her husband said,

"Online education is the only option available at present because of covid. As my child is 5 years old, can't even expect them to wear mask for long. So, sending him to school is just

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not possible. However, 1. in school child learns better because of better interaction with teacher & classmates & environment. 2. Due to covid situation, kids are not having any kind of physical activities. As we live in Delhi & in flats there is not much space available. 3. In school, kids also work on language & better vocabulary, however, at home in joint family, it's not possible. 4. Undoubtedly, due to online classes parents & teachers both are overburdened. 5. Skipping online classes is just not an option. At least these classes keep kids busy & they do learn."

Some of the parents were of the opinion that slowly and gradually schools should be re-opened with a provision of 50-50 or odd even formula, so that students learn properly because it is very difficult for kids up to 4th standard to learn through online platforms. Children at this age need some physical activity in order to learn properly. Due to the closure of schools and in the absence of extra-curricular activities children are not adaptable to the culture of sharing and interacting. Values like team spirit, community feeling, fraternity is not there. Only indoor activities and that too virtual have reduced their capacities to socialize with others. Though people have no other alternative than online learning, they are not in favour of online mode of education. 70.7% respondents disagreed when asked if they support online mode of education as parent.

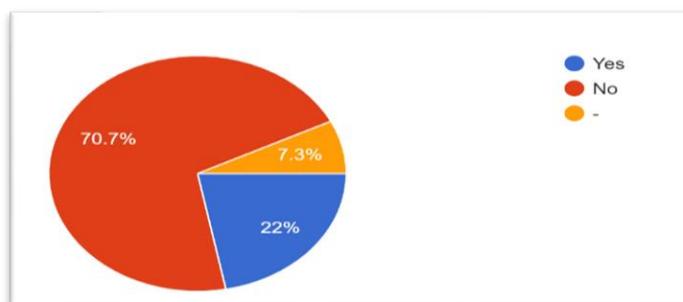


Chart 1: favouring online mode of education

Parents were of the opinion that their children are overburdened by school authorities. The school authorities are in a hurry to complete the syllabus rather than making the topics clear to the students. Not every student is able to grasp what teacher is saying at once. They said, smart phones have made children addicted to gaming, web surfing, children keep wasting their time on social media platforms. This new norm of online learning is hampering their socialization and making them more and more dependent on these gadgets. Over use of phones will cause harm to the eyesight of children.

On asking about the comparatively better mode of education, majority parents chose the pre-covid education system.

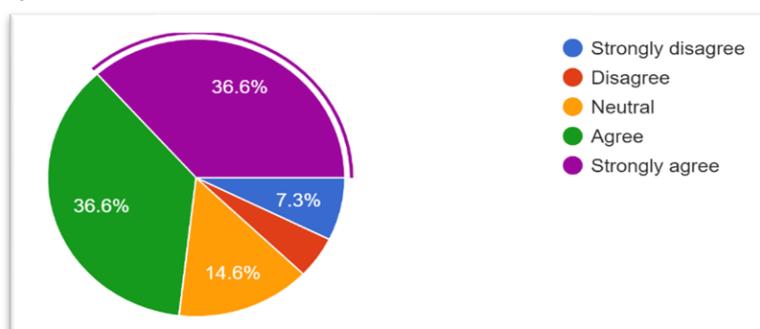


Chart 2: pre-covid education system was better than post-covid

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The respondents were of the opinion that during the pre-Covid times there was healthy learning atmosphere. The offline interaction with teacher was a healthy practice required for doubt clearance, which is missing in recent times. The recent situation has increased the screen time of students leading to health problems. They are becoming technology addicts and less social.

Another respondent narrated,

As the whole world is facing the curse of the Pandemic every aspect whether it is schooling or social life has been hampered and is changed from real world to virtual world. This has changed the life style of every individual most particularly the students who were too young to adapt to these unprecedented changes and in the growing stage of their life get affected the most. The social distance between the students and the educational institutions has increased and the virtual world occupied the gap, which in result, changed the life style of people. It will be very difficult to bring the real routine of the students back on track which involve two steps; first breaking the virtual social network and then to join the actual or real-world activities again.

One of the parents was of the view that,

Although the online schooling has definitely hampered students' social skill and other developmental domains especially psycho-motor domain, it gives a new approach and a novel outlook to education system which certainly is a progressive one despite having initial struggle. Due to COVID pandemic, people have realised the significance of socialisation and its impact on children's overall development. At the same time, it led to more exposure of online opportunities. Thereby, it gives a chance to weigh different schooling approaches and choose accordingly.

Another parent narrated,

WE can't say that this is post covid as it is still there. As far as socialization is concerned it is difficult to make students socialize because they don't get chance to meet people. Moreover, there are many students who only took admission but couldn't go to school so they didn't even get the chance to meet their teachers physically. So, I think socializing children is getting tough due to COVID situations.

Another parent said,

I am a mother of a five-year-old daughter and a store manager by profession. I am continuously worried about my daughter's socialization. My kid will face fear while socializing and interacting in public domain. Kids, nowadays, are limited to home and indoor so much that self-learning and exploring is not there. We ourselves are making them limit to mobiles and I -pads in name of new normal. Early education helped them to be disciplined, self-development and learn moral values. Also, their physical activities too have limited. As we don't have any option for the safety of children online education is the only way to keep are kids safe from COVID until and unless they get vaccinated or the government comes up with stringent rules to re-open the educational institutions.

While discussing about parents-children relationship, many parents said that in this Covid times though online schooling is helping in engaging children in studies to some extent but it is responsibility of parents to spend their time in teaching their wards to clear their concepts thoroughly. They should not blindly trust the online classes and lessons only. Some were of the opinion that online learning has overburdened the parents as they are the ones who are

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making every effort to make their child study. It's more of home schooling and paying fees to school after bearing all school expenses.

One of the respondents who was teacher by profession narrated, *It is as difficult for teachers to adapt to the online mode of teaching as it is for students to learn through virtual interfaces. Explaining concepts to students is easier in real classroom as compared to virtual one. Teachers themselves face many problems while providing online notes, explaining concepts, delivering detailed lectures. Other than academics, the student-teacher relationship has also been changed. Education through school is the best mode of education by far because at school, the students learn number of activities which are not possible at home. Online classes lead towards laziness among the children, lack of discipline, lack of physical activities pose a bigger challenge regarding to their overall personality development.*

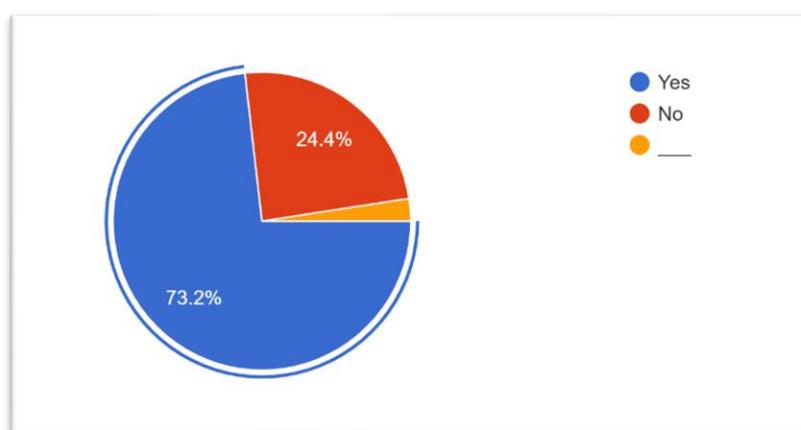


Chart 3: Health of children is more important than offline school education

Chart 3 indicates that 73.2% respondents were in favour of online education until and unless their children get vaccinated properly. In the present scenario, the health of the children holds more importance than anything else. As soon as the situation becomes normal, schools will be opened and the normal learning process will resume. But it must also be acknowledged that a number of social and health issues are associated with online education system. Schools are an important factor of socialization for a growing up child. Apart from getting the formal education the child gets exposed to a new milieu, learns to live, adjust and interact in a broader group other than family and starts developing a new personality in accordance with the needs of the time. However, the online process of learning has resulted in the confinement of the child in the four walls of home and changes the entire concept of schooling which is otherwise holistic in nature. Additionally, lack of physical activity, prolonged exposure to mobile phones and laptops, no face-to-face interaction with teachers and fellow students, sudden and prolonged interruptions in the routine of the child has resulted in a number of health issues ranging from anxiety to depression to weak eyesight, physical weakness and mental degradation. Addiction to electronic gadgets is also a serious issue which needs to be focussed upon. Apart from attending online classes, children started playing games, watching movies, are exposed to pornographic content which is easily available on the internet thereby shaking the moral fabric of the society. Moreover, the effectiveness of the online learning system is also questionable as it has reduced the entire learning process to just a video call where anyone can be disconnected, muted, and bullied anytime. For small kids who are in their primary classes, the online learning process is not

very conducive as they are digitally illiterate and the entire burden is shifted to the parents and especially the mother for completing their work. There is no doubt that teachers are doing their level best to make the learning process effective but technology constrains and lack of proper training always come in the way of effective teaching and learning.

CONCLUSION AND INFERENCES

Rather than family, social media and peer groups have become the new prominent agents of socialization. Online mode of education will boost in the post covid times which will make it a norm in the future. But till that time, using the term “post-covid” would not be correct as the world is still suffering from this pandemic. Parents, teachers, students and every other person has become helpless in front of this crisis. The only way forward is adapting to the changes and going with the conditions and time. As far as socialization and education are concerned, online mode of teaching and learning is the only option till this pandemic ends. Learning through online teaching only is not sufficient as it barely provides chance for growing kids to get socialized. Through offline mode, children get quality education along with a good exposure to public domain, socializing them to interact confidently, making them learn morality, brings a person of good character out of them.

The data collected from the field indicates that parents are not fully ready to adapt to this virtual interface of learning, but at the same time want their children to be safe. The unparalleled changes brought by COVID-19 have left the world into a flux. For a safe and sustainable future, abiding to the restrictions and taking all the preventive measures is the only way forward.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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