

# HOMESCHOOLING: A PARADIGM SHIFT DURING COVID-19 CRISIS

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## ABSTRACT

*COVID-19 pandemic has shattered the human life globally. This paper tries to explain how education sector is affected by the pandemic. It has suspended all sorts of pedagogical services except electronic medium. Could an alternative education fill the void caused by the closure of institutions by homeschooling? This paper deals with homeschooling, its genesis and growth, a brief history of Indian homeschooling movement, homeschooling methodology, its advantages, disadvantages, support services and also enumerates that the positive impact of COVID-19 pandemic is the use of technology in educational sector.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, homeschooling, support services, technology, internet

## INTRODUCTION

The world is in shambles due to the invisible common enemy Coronavirus, the COVID-19. Almost every door is closed and everyone is imprisoned under his or her own roof. Every walk of life is impeded during this pandemic and it has shattered the hope of normal life after this pandemic. It is expected that the impact of COVID-19 would be much more disastrous than what it was after the World Wars. It is the worst of human life as such. It has destroyed the poor and rich, the meek and the strong alike. The super powers are in tantrums. Life would be very demanding, the poor would become poorer as the economy of the countries slide to scratches, and millions have lost their jobs and livelihood. The resources of the governments and individuals are melting out. The education budgets won't be the same as of previous years.

The pandemic has threatened education sector very severely. Loss of scholastic (teaching, learning), physical activities may cause tremendous impact such as dropouts, poor enrolment, social media addiction among adolescents etc. The educationists, worldwide, are worried about the future of education, especially the education of poor and under privileged of underdeveloped countries. Would children dropout of institutions and resort to labour? What would be the fate of mass education that is being offered to millions of unfortunate children of have-nots? Could they get quality education? How can these problems be addressed? What are the alternate strategies that could be applied to impart education to all? Could the modern Educational technology pave way to improve the situation?

Jaime Saavedra, Global Director for Education at the World Bank, is of the view that, the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to make education outcomes worse by closing schools almost everywhere in the planet, simultaneous 'shock' to all education systems in our lifetimes. The damage will become a deep global recession. The Global scenario during this COVID-19 pandemic is horrible, but the post pandemic situation would be very grim.

The education team of World Bank declared that it is probable to answer the "shocks" and turn crisis into chance by alternating to remote learning by using new techniques to promote rapid learning recovery in key areas (Sharma, 2020). Modern technologies like, Online learning, Mobile learning, Interactive learning, Homeschooling are the outcome of internet access even in the remote corners of the world. Educationists feel that emphasis on four modern teaching approaches such as constructivism, comprehensive learning, contextual

pedagogy and ICT integration needs to be highlighted. However homeschooling is not new as it has been in vogue since ages.

### **WHAT IS 'HOMESCHOOLING' AND 'UNSCHOOLING'? WHY?**

'Homeschooling' or 'Home Education' or 'Home based Education' is a form of informal or less formal education offered to children by their parents either by themselves or through hired physical or online tutors. Homeschoolers may attend formal schools if there be necessity of certification for their education. Some children would have attended formal schools at some point of their scholastic life. In homeschooling, education takes place in home environment. Most of the parents or families who opt for homeschooling of their children adopt a variety of techniques to educate their wards. Children are provided with graded text and reference books, tuitions, activities and projects relevant to their abilities as per the designed pre-packaged curriculum on the experts' advice. They even impart classical education including Trivium and Quadrivium. Children are let free to explore the environment within a broad frame work.

Unschooling, a word coined by American educator John Holt, is purely natural learning without any interruption of any external factor. It can be termed as pure self study or self directed learning. There is neither a frame work of any sort nor any pre-packed curriculum. They are entirely free to choose anything they fancy, be it fine arts, life skills, athletics or sports, any worldly project or any aspect of day to day life from cooking to farming, as there is no curriculum or time limit or any need for certification or even there is no expectations to fulfill. Unschoolers are free to choose their mode and source of learning. Abundant sources are available in the form of books, journals, films, lectures, discourses, markets, kith and kin, travelling either solo or accompanied and scores and scores of other sources to mention.

Why do people prefer homeschooling or unschooling? The answer is very simple that the parents prefer 'Freedom' for their children and for themselves. Freedom from negative impact of institution on their children, monotonous syllabus, out-dated and mechanized, primitive and broken system, laborious home work and irrelevant projects of the present day schools, both public and private. They prefer an innovative, stress free and happy environment wherein their children can explore new areas of their interest and curiosity at their own phase. It facilitates them to allow their child to study subjects of interest intensively that suits their talent. Parents' economic viability, location, cares for children's future, flexibility of personalized learning are accountable for this alternative education system.

### **HOMESCHOOLING OF YESTER YEARS**

The concept of 'Homeschooling' was common in the yesteryears of Indian history. But it was different from what it is conceived now. The 'Vedh Patasala' and 'Yudha Patasala' were gurukulas in the ancient India. In Vedh Patasala Brahmin children studied 'Vedhas' under a Sanskrit pandit in his home for a considerable period or until they excelled. In the same way Kshathriyas got trained in martial arts under acclaimed warriors. Though there were strict rules and regulations, the children were allowed to explore their interest.

Homeschooling was a part and parcel of religious education in almost all religions of human race. Reading or reciting of scriptures of their choice was a form of home based education. Hindus preferred different scriptures of Saiva, Vainava, and Tamil verses. Bible reading was and is an important aspect of Christian life. In the same way Quran reading was and is a must duty of Muslims.

Gazing over the history, one can find that affluent families of different cultures engaged tutors to educate their wards as there were no schools. Martin Luther was instrumental in establishing the earliest public school in German State of Gotha and Thuringia in 1524 and 1527. Compulsory education was provided in New England in 1647 but it was plagued with unequal regional differences. With introduction of compulsory attendance in schools homeschooling began to shrink to its religious shell.

### **GENESIS OF 'HOMESCHOOLING'**

#### ***In United States of America***

The Modern philosophy of Homeschooling has its revolutionary genesis in 1960s against the 'Secular' nature of American schools. Rousas John Rushdoony, the author of Intellectual Schizophrenia, the Messianic Character of American Education, and the Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum fought unrelentingly for the cause of demolishing secular nature of the Public schools. He was against the progressive school reformers like John

Dewey, Horace Mann Raymond and Dorothy Moore. American educational professionals conducted research on the 'Validity of Early Childhood Education' and the physical and mental development of children.

The result was shocking as the formal schooling before ages 8 to 12 was ineffective and damaging the children physiologically, psychologically, emotionally, socially, and academically. The researchers recorded many childhood problems of juvenile delinquency, nearsightedness, bullying, etc. Even behavioral problems were reported. These were the results of separation of children from parents and siblings due to early enrollment into formal schools. Moore's research proved that children needed home care in the early years of growth for emotional development that lasts throughout their life span.

Moore's books 'Better Late Than Early' (1975), 'Home Grown Kids' (1981), and 'Home school Burnout' are considered as good reference books on homeschooling. Homeschooling movement was slowly gaining ground. Many authors started publishing books, including 'Deschooling Society' (1970) by Ivan Lilich, 'No More Public School' (1972) by Harold Bennet, 'Instead of Education; Ways to Help People Do Things Better' (1976) and "Teach Your own;"(1981) by educator John Holt. Holt's first book called for a "Children's Underground Railroad" which extended help to escape compulsory schooling. This made him popular among US parents who saw him as savior of children and nicknamed 'Father of Homeschooling' Holt began publishing a newsletter 'Growing without Schooling' exclusively for home education. Homeschooling, according to the American philosophers, is a natural and experimental aspect of life and not an academic preliminary to life, which occurs with the involvement of family members and without the school construct into the home.

### **Indian Scenario**

Indian Philosophers have sown the seeds of modern Unschooling or Homeschooling in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century itself. The notables are Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Jiddu Krishnamurthi and Mahatma Gandhi. Their philosophies are 'child centered' and are of the view that a child be let free to explore his innate attributes and strengthen inner power. It is the realization of self and inner power that exists everywhere. It is omnipotent. The concept of Unschooling aims to bring out the inner power of the child.

Indian Constitution declares formal education a fundamental right of every child between the ages of 6 to 14. India is a signatory of 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' which paves way to parents' right to choose the kind of education for their wards. The passing of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE) saw score of educators, lawmakers and homeschooling parents discussing it. Shreya, a homeschooler, filed a PIL in the Delhi High Court challenging section 18 of the act. The government filed its affidavit stating "Parents who voluntarily opt for alternative forms of schooling may continue to do so. The RTE Act does not come in the way of such alternative schooling methodologies or declare such form of education as illegal." Hence homeschooling is not illegal in India.

There is a steady growth of Homeschooling Movement in India as most of the parents are losing faith in public and private schools' ability to cater their talented children. Parents of children with learning difficulties and those who have no faith in degrees and certificate are opting for alternate schooling. Nearly 20K urban parents are Homeschooling their children in India, mostly in major cities.

Child prodigy Shreya, homeschooler, displayed exemplary talent by holding painting, photography exhibitions at the age of 9 and 10. At 11 she was an exponent Hindustani violinist. In 2010 one of the IIT toppers was 14 year old Sahal Kaushik. In 2016, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology offered a seat to 17 year old Malvika Joshi whose application was rejected by IIT as she had not qualified 12<sup>th</sup> class. Both are homeschoolers.

Rajasekharan Nair, homeschooling expert and NIOS trainer feels that formal schooling is primitive, outdated, mechanized and broken system. Rebecca, Children's book author and mum of two homeschoolers, contends that children are forced to sit throughout the day stressfully. Manish Jain of Udaipur felt that formal schooling was artificial and oppressive so he started 'Shikshantar Andolan' in 1990. Later in 2010 Swaraj University with a motto of self-designed learning and green entrepreneurship was co-founded by him. In 2012 Claude Alvares and Urmila of Pune set up a non-profit 'Indian Association of Homeschoolers' to promote swashikshan or self-directed learning. Sandhya Viswan admin of an online 40K parent homeschooling community of Bengaluru asserts that RTE act is quite ambiguous in certain aspects. Manas Chakrabarty, Pedagogical counselor, anticipates a sea change in the coming years. She foresees loss of jobs, drastic changes in climate, social and other issues. Hence, she insists parents to prepare their children to face changes.

## METHODS OF HOMESCHOOLING

A few homeschooling methods are followed in India. In most of these methods, children are not purely confined to their homes, but homely environment is created so as to make children comfortable.

- **Montessori Method** is a child centered and purely scientific educational approach wherein the children are observed and develops children physically, emotionally, cognitively and socially on the basis of observations. This method is developed on the firm belief of child's natural inclination towards knowledge and capacity to learn in a carefully designed supportive environment. Italian physician Maria Montessori developed this educational method and has been in practice for more than 100 years in many countries.
- **Waldorf Education** or Steiner education aims at the integrated and holistic development of children's intellectual, artistic and practical skills. Its pedagogy is focused on the growth of children's imagination and creativity. Teachers are empowered to formulate and design curriculum content, methodology, delivery and governance. A great deal of 'Qualitative Assessment' takes place pushing 'Quantitative Assessment' to the minimal number. The usual 'Standardized tests' are conducted only for the purpose of certification to facilitate entry into Post Secondary Education. This method of education is based on Rudolf Steiner's philosophy.
- **Unschooling:** It is an informal learning methodology wherein both children and adults are put in the same platform without any parental claim of authority. There is no frame work of curriculum, syllabus, class rooms etc. Children learn whatever they are interested in. Unschoolers are free to choose their mode and source of learning.
- **Radical Unschooling:** It is the extension of unschooling philosophy, emphasizing learning through everyday life without any formal structure. It doesn't distinguish any parity between educational and non-educational learning activities. Both parents and children are put on the same platform as parents are partners of each and every act of their children. The philosophy is based on that the children possess an inner wisdom and intuitiveness. Parents facilitate, guide and help the children to connect their wisdom with their life.
- **School at Home Method:** It is the replication of public or private schools. All the aspects of formal schools are followed but within the four walls of child's home. Private tutors are engaged to educate the child. This method is essentially sort by the affluent and affordable parents. Children with learning difficulties, prolonged sickness, differently challenged can be educated by this method

There are a few more homeschooling methods followed by children. 'Self Study' method is encouraged for the children who have a flair for learning with self motivation and interest. 'Practical Study' is learning by doing method. Parents and tutors impart education by involving children in practical experiences. 'Personalized Study' is preferred by the children who wish to do specialization in any particular subject of their interest. There are some other methods which are not strictly homeschooling, such as open and distance learning, online learning etc.

## SUPPORTIVE FACILITIES

Supportive facilities and resources are abundant throughout the globe. Moreover internet makes it easy to get any information, guidance, suggestion, appropriate curriculum content, materials etc., at the stroke of fingertip. Local, National and International Blocks, Forums, Journals, Social Meets, Conferences, Seminars, Social Medias (Facebook, WhatsApp groups, etc) and apprenticeships actively exchange and share knowledge and experiences. There are organizations which offer valuable research data, opportunity to appear for examinations for the purpose of certification. Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI), Organization for Economic Co-operation for Development (OECD), Wolsey Hall of Oxford, National Institute of Open School (NIOS), Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), Alternative Education India, Pune Homeschoolers, Swashikshan - Indian Association of Homeschoolers, Cascade Family Learning Society – Chennai, etc. are a few of them.

## ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

### *Advantages:*

The benefits of homeschooling are numerous when the parents understand the concept and application thereto. The first and foremost is that it enables to cultivate a strong emotional bond among themselves and their family as a whole. They could spend much of their prime time together for interaction and help the children to identify, nurture and develop special talents such as music, drawing, sports, athletics, etc. Parents can protect their wards from much of the negative behaviors usually encountered in public schools like bullying, violence, drugs, unequal treatment by the teachers. Parents are at liberty to decide suitable curriculum, methodology, duration of children's education. They can help their children in studies and offer moral support during adolescence and in difficulties. They adore the role of 'friend and philosopher' by providing religious, ethical and social instructions. Children could be taken on tours and travels at any time without any restriction. Homeschooling is beneficial when formal schools are in far off regions without proper communication facilities, during prolonged bad weather, health hazards and pandemic, civil disturbance, wars, etc. When parents are obliged by personal commitments, or when better opportunities are available within reach, homeschooling is beneficial.

### *Disadvantages:*

There are certain disadvantages of homeschooling. As the homeschoolers are mostly confined to a closed environment they lack peers and that results in absence of a happy childhood, motivation, healthy completion, and positive socialization. All the homeschoolers may not have required infrastructure like libraries, laboratories, playgrounds as found in a formal school. Parents too may have to face many shortcomings. They need to be around their children either helping or keep watching the wards all the time. They may have to face and resolve psychological and behavioral problems. They need to acquire knowledge in the field of children's interest so that they can motivate, teach and educate them. The parents often encounter hostile kith and kin about homeschooling their children. Parents may have to sacrifice much time and resources for identifying suitable curriculum, text or reference books, tutors, play groups, support groups etc.

## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON FUTURE EDUCATION

COVID-19 pandemic lockdown has affected education sector very severely. Millions of institutions at all levels have to shut their doors around the world resulting in confinement of more than a billion students in their homes. Necessity is the mother of invention. Teachers and Educators have turned towards the use of technology for their scholastic pursuit using available online platforms like Microsoft Team, Google meet, Zoom, Cisco Webex, etc., which can be accessed on a laptop or a Smartphone or a smart TV. Webinar, online classes, demonstrations, discussions, and quizzes are being offered on digital media by colleges, universities around the globe. OECD is surveying how technology is replacing traditional methodology of face to face teaching with digital analogues. Educators feel that pandemic has given an opportunity to reshape education. The concept of the school and teacher is under radical change and they cease to be knowledge deliverers. Technology will rule the future of education. Everything is available over internet. New ways are adopted to communicate with isolated student community. This global pandemic will reflect on global generation as many have missed classes, exams, sport, graduation, and employment. This generation is defined by the terms Fear of Being Alone (FOBA) and Fear of Missing out (FOMO). Certainly the COVID-19 pandemic would bring a lasting change for decades to come.

## CONCLUSION



Coronavirus has affected almost all walks of life, bringing unforeseen pandemic around the globe. The effect on education sector is so severe that it would last longer. Yet there is one positive aspect that may change the entire spectrum of educating future generation. The role of technology will be indispensable. Educational institutions and teachers have to shun the role of postman and be more responsible in facilitating education to children. This pandemic lockdown has highlighted the importance and need for 'Homeschooling' in any form.

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## BIOGRAPHIES

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