

'SCHOOL CLOSURE LED TO LOSS IN FOUNDATIONAL ABILITIES'

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Education and related issues

How badly were students, especially those in lower classes, impacted by the sudden and extended closure of schools from March last year as COVID-19 took its toll on society? A field study by Azim Premji University paints a grim picture. Children not only missed out on the regular curricular learning they would have acquired had schools remained open, but also “forgot” what they had learned the previous year.

According to the study, on an average 92% of the students from classes 2 to 6 have lost at least one specific foundational ability in languages that they might have acquired in the previous year. The corresponding figure for mathematics is 82%.

As many as 16,067 primary schoolchildren in 1,137 government schools between classes 2 and 6 across five States were surveyed for the study, titled ‘Loss of learning during the pandemic’. Two thousand teachers and 400 members of the Azim Premji Foundation conducted the comparative field study. Foundational abilities are those that form the basis for further learning. The researchers noted that a grasp of concepts in language and mathematics during primary school years forms the basis of a student’s further learning in all subjects. Some examples of foundational abilities include reading a paragraph with comprehension and addition and subtraction.

In mathematics, foundational abilities include identifying single- and two-digit numbers, performing arithmetic operations, using basic arithmetic operations to solve problems, and reading and drawing inferences from data, among others.

Anurag Behar, Vice-Chancellor of the university, in a press release said, “When schools reopen, teachers have to be given time to cover this deficit and be provided with other support. A carefully synchronised set of measures across States will be required.” Some of the suggestions included eliminating vacations, extending the academic year well into 2021 and perhaps beyond depending on when schools open and reconfiguring the syllabus.

The report pointed out that the extent and nature of learning loss was serious enough to warrant action at all levels. It suggested supplemental support in the form of bridge courses, extended school hours, community-based engagements, and appropriate curricular materials that will help students pick up foundational abilities once they return to school.

It also said that teachers should be given enough time to compensate for the learning loss and must not rush to promote students.

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