



Remote Learning Unlike To Replace Classroom-Based Learning



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The education sector much like any other is currently being disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic. Educational institutions of all hues have been forced to shut down physical classes and resort to online interactions with their students. The technology for online interactions and remote learning that has been available for quite some time now is seeing an upsurge in adoption. With study-at-home being the new norm, students are hunched in front of their computers or many cases their mobile phones, trying to keep up with their studies.

Remote learning using digital tools as an option for continuing education has been gaining momentum even before the pandemic struck; the pandemic and resultant lockdown have acted as catalysts to boost

adoption thereby enhancing the significance of the medium. Educational institutions across the board have experimented with remote learning and may have made significant investments towards setting up an ecosystem where teachers can virtually engage with students, take tests, and evaluate the performance of students. Having experimented with the benefits of virtual learning, schools and colleges across the country are likely to make remote learning a significant part of the education system even after the lockdown is withdrawn completely and things return to normal.

The versatility of remote learning and the various advantages it embodies are by now well known. This shift to remote learning, however, has several inherent

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shortcomings, which make it unlikely that remote learning will replace classroom-based learning and physical textbooks any time soon. For one, virtual methods cannot replicate the atmosphere of a physical classroom. Real-time teacher-to-student interaction and student-to-student interaction in a physical setting are all part of the learning experience. The spontaneous interaction enables the teachers to present the full scope of the subject or topic that is being taught. Such an interaction is hardly possible when both teachers and students are physically apart and interacting from behind a computer or mobile phone screens.

The sudden shift to the online medium of learning, over the past few months, has also brought to the forefront a digital divide that exists in the society. A necessary precondition to access online modules and attend online classes is a reliable high-speed internet connection. A broadband connection though relatively cheaper may

not be affordable for every family in the country. High population density and hence the high mobile phone density also means that mobile internet is often spotty with data transfer speed less than ideal for live video conferencing and online group meetings. Moreover, accessing online classes requires constant access to an internet-enabled computer or device which can be a challenge for households with more than one school going child.

The role of a teacher is not just about passing on information to students. Had that been the case, there are ample resources on the internet for information that can make classrooms redundant.

Textbooks - the ubiquitous companions of students - play a significant role in instituting a structured approach to information dissemination and retention by learners. The internet is one giant source of information that brings enough information with questionable credibility. A well-researched book, compiled and edited by scholars and subject experts to match various levels of learning, helps filter through materials and deliver relevant information that will help students advance in their learning journey.

Remote learning with the imposed acceleration in adoption will play a crucial role in the education ecosystem. Remote learning helps people - who would otherwise have opted out - access education at their own pace and their convenience. The use of digital tools and virtual learning can add much to the current classroom-based learning system and will complement classroom-based teaching and learning.

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