

INNOVATIVE IDEAS TO EDUCATE IN THE NEW NORMAL

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Abstract

The COVID-19 outbreak has bound many universities to proximately switch to the online delivery of classes. Many instructors, however, have found evolving effective online lessons in a very small period of time, very taxing and difficult. This article describes how this crisis has been effectively addressed by converting conventional flipped classes into fully online tossed classes with the help of different cloud-based video conferencing apps. As in a conventional course, in a fully online flipped course, students are invigorated to complete online pre-class work. But unlike in the conventional flipped approach, students do not afterwards meet face-to-face in physical classrooms, but rather online. This article examines the effect of fully online flipped classrooms on student learning process. It describes how the transformation happened from the conventional classes into fully online classes. It also identifies the benefits, challenges and future of the online classrooms in the wake of the pandemic.

Keywords: New Normal, Online Classes, education system, covid, Online Learning

INTRODUCTION

“COVID19 has steered in a time of change and enforced paradigm shifts in many areas. It has forced us to about-turn the traditional school model and interrogate the way we teach.”

If several news and warnings from the World Health Organization are to be understood, the coronavirus might be here to stay. It is said that the virus, devoid of a vaccine, could take years for the global populace to build up sufficient levels of immunity. While there might be a noteworthy difference in the number of COVID-19 cases across the globe, there are currently more than 1.2 billion children in 186 countries affected by school closures due to the pandemic.

During these school closures, all face-to-face lessons were annulled, compelling many institutions, to immediately changeover from face-to-face in-person knowledge to completely online lessons. At the inception, this was the only key that was brought to the table in the form of online learning. It was a potential solution that could help students continues studying in the cosiness of their homes, and it just takes a few clicks through their laptops or smartphones. It is gifted in an ideal situation like today but for a developing country like India, it's not as easy as it looks.

A couple of questions come to mind when this hint was put out. Some of these may have apparent answers, but still enumerating it here for highlighting:

1. Does every student have firm access to an internet connection?
2. Does every schoolchild have a smartphone or laptop that they can be used to access online materials?
3. Are educational institutions, especially public schools, ready to shift to this kind of model? Do they have the resources and infrastructure?
4. Do our teachers and educators have the capability and skills to tweak their curriculum and conduct their classes online?

To get a fair understanding of online education, let's have a look at some of its benefits:

1. As students' progress through classes, they seek more self-sufficiency and intellectual freedom. Online learning can help them follow highly personalised learning programs, possibly even college-level courses. These combined with hands-on exercises, real-world investigation, and thorough assessments can be highly beneficial to their learning progress.
2. By trying out preliminary topics from different fields, it allows the students to explore their options before committing to any specialisation. Online learning techniques make these students become more sovereign learners.
3. Since online learning provides greater control to users through the use of negligible infrastructure, the students can personalise their learning. This enables students to take up new courses and learn almost from anyplace and anytime.

4. Everyone has a different and exclusive learning pace matched by delivery of online learning. Online learners benefit from flexible learning schedules.
 5. Online learning offers an improved discussion element, often in a forum for discussion board.
 6. With an estimated 93% of communication being non-verbal, online learners do not have to burden about body language interfering with their message. Online education removes physical judgments that can cloud normal discussion.
 7. At traditional schools, talking to a teacher after class can be thought-provoking. This is not the situation in an online learning environment.
 8. Online learning makes parent-teacher association positive and transparent.
 9. Online systems permit deep analytical summaries of a students' growth. This helps in creating a personalised learning expedition for each student.
 10. Students can experience innovative learning and bring innovative learning ideas back to the programs.
 11. Be motivated and inspiring when it comes to learning and also network and build connections with other professionals through approaching them all across the globe.
- Furthermore, with this sudden shift away from the classroom in many parts of the globe, the acceptance of online learning will continue to persist post-pandemic, and such a move would impact the worldwide education market. By following an interactive, concerted approach, the students and instructors will co-create the learning process and for the better!

NEW NORMAL VS. OLD NORMAL

Now that we are more than a full year into this pandemic, working from home or joining school from home has become the new normal for many of us. The good news is we are opening to see a light at the end of the pandemic tunnel now. Have you observed that people are still saying, “when we get back to normal,” followed by whatever activity they are missing?

When we pause for an instant to really think about that declaration, we quickly realize that the old normal is just that.

In response to the current situation, educators have been instrumental in finding new ways to ensure learning continues for children by developing online and offline learning materials; learning about the working of video conferencing tools to be able to see students regularly and conducting mental & social well-being sessions during the start of the school day and at closure.

Virtual school might be relatively a new notion in India, but we are experiencing a new inclination of the blended learning model gaining popularity. We have to accept that virtual school is not just about taking a lesson through a video conferencing tool; it involves more than that. It involves an exemplar shift in pedagogy through an understanding of the blended learning model by teachers, parents and students. The stability of online and offline tasks is a critical characteristic to consider while designing the timetable and lesson plan. This model helps learning to endure beyond the four walls of the classroom, allows students' choice and elasticity to learn at their pace, creates more opportunities for collaborative tasks along with providing chances to rethink the mode of assessments & feedback. Virtual education has opened up possibilities of rethinking the way we are doing teaching & learning. The use of educational technology apparatuses can begin to transform the classroom, and most of it depends on the creative agency of the teacher.

We also need to admit that the transition to virtual learning can be stimulating for all stakeholders. Parents will have to think differently about how to prepare their children in the virtual learning space; how to generate structures and routines that allow their children to be successful; and how to support their learning journey while considering the emotional well-being as well. Schools like hospitals are caregivers and we, as a school will fall back on the school framework of Significance, Connection and Severity to support parents in this process of creating meaningful engagement with their children.

HOW IS THE EDUCATION SECTOR RESPONDING TO COVID-19?

In response to significant demand, many online learning platforms are offering free contact to their services, including platforms like **BYJU'S**, a Bangalore-based educational technology and online tutoring firm founded in 2011, which is now the world's most extremely valued edtech company. Since announcing free live classes on its **Think and Learn app**, BYJU'S has seen a 200% escalation in the number of new students using its product. **Tencent** classroom, meanwhile, has been used widely since mid-February after the Chinese government tutored a quarter of a billion full-time students to recommence their studies through online platforms. This resulted in the largest “online movement” in the history of education with approximately 730,000, or 81% of K-12 students, attending classes via the Tencent K-12 Online School in Wuhan.

Other companies are encouraging capabilities to provide a one-stop shop for teachers and students. For example, **Lark**, a Singapore-based collaboration suite primarily developed by **ByteDance** as an internal tool to meet its own exponential progress, began offering teachers and students unlimited video conferencing time, auto-translation aptitudes, real-time co-editing of project work, and smart calendar scheduling, amongst other

features. To do so quickly and in a time of crisis, Lark ramped up its worldwide server infrastructure and engineering capabilities to ensure reliable connectivity.

Alibaba's distance learning solution, **DingTalk**, had to prepare for a similar incursion: "To support large-scale remote work, the platform tapped Alibaba Cloud to arrange more than 100,000 new cloud servers in just two hours last month – setting a new record for rapid bulk expansion," according to DingTalk CEO, Chen Hang.

Some school districts are forming exclusive partnerships, like the one between The Los Angeles Unified School District and PBS **SoCal/KCET** to offer local educational broadcasts, with separate channels fixated on different ages, and a variety of digital options. Media organizations such as the **BBC** are also powering virtual learning; **Bitesize Daily**, propelled on 20 April, is offering 14 weeks of curriculum-based learning for kids across the UK with celebrities like Manchester City footballer Sergio Aguero schooling some of the content.

Below listed are few innovations seen worldwide during the pandemic. In some instances we see older modes rediscovered, and in some others we see new innovations being incorporated; however, one endless evident in all the instances is the determination of the children to learn and the resolution of several organizations that came forward to make it possible for them.

1. TREE CLASSROOM: THE NEW NORMAL FOR STUDENTS IN ODHISHA'S KORPAUT

They wish to continue their education, come what may! Deprived with poor mobile connectivity has led to children in the Dudhari village of Koraput, Odisha to accept innovative, yet risky, methods.

It is now a common visual to see young kids with mobile phones in their hands precariously perched on twigs of trees struggling to balance themselves while attending to the lectures and taking down notes. The State Government's 'Sikshya Sanjog' programme aims to involve students in their schooling using Whatsapp. Large scale Whatsapp groups have been formed, wherein teachers stay in touch with the students and study material is disseminated easily. However, due to poor network connections, students are finding it hard to access the resources made available by the government.

2. RADIO TO THE RESCUE FOR CHILDREN IN INDONESIA

Rediscovering the positive effect of interactive radio in keeping children connected with their education, **Save the Children** introduced a radio talk show programmes—*Kelas Lintas Udara*—involving local education officials to advocate to communities about supporting children's learning during school closures. The programmes provide a space for parents to share their experiences about home learning with their children and positive parenting. Similar programmes are also being conducted in Rwanda and Ethiopia.

3. CAMEL LIBRARY IN ETHIOPIA HELPS KIDS FORCED OUT OF SCHOOL DUE TO COVID19

With more than 26 million children forced out of school due to Covid-19 restrictions, an initiative that began in 2010 is reappearing to help challenge the crisis. Another brainchild of Save the Children, the camel library includes 21 camels; the camels carry up to 200 storybooks in wooden boxes that are strapped to their backs. The exceptional library is currently reaching over 22,000 children in 33 villages and is proving to be a valuable link between students and learning opportunities.

4. SCHOOL-IN-A-BOX KITS FACILITATED BY PHILIPPINE SCHOOLS

The Navotas Schools Division in Metro Manila, a small sized division of 24 schools, has designed a **NAVO School-in-a-box kit** for every pupil in the division funded by the Department of Education and the city government. At the kindergarten level, each child will obtain a plastic bin loaded with learning packets, story books, donated school supplies, a hygiene kit and a toy from a partner. The kit also comprises a guide for parents that covers home learning events and a guide to organizing the study environment at home.

5. MESSAGING PLATFORMS SUPPORT PARENTS IN VIETNAM

In Vietnam, online messaging platform, **Zalo** is being used to socialize activities for children and their caregivers. Both voice and text messages are used to refer activities that can be carried out by all children, including differently abled children. These messages also make sure that the parents or caregivers have a bank of possessions to plan their children's day.

6. EDUTECH START-UPS PAVE THE WAY FOR E-LEARNING IN PAKISTAN

Several start-ups in Pakistan are escalating to the occasion by either offering independent learning solutions or partnering with government institutions, telcos, and NGOs. From providing no-cost access to **STEM** learning material on YouTube to game based learning applications, an excess of start-up concepts have begun leveraging technology to shape up distance learning solutions, increasing accessibility and affordability of education. Notable start-ups have also made pro-bono contributions to the content used by the government's Teleschools program.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE FUTURE OF LEARNING?

While some believe that the unintended and rapid move to online learning – with no training, insufficient bandwidth, and little preparation – will consequence in a poor user experience that is uncondusive to sustained progress, others believe that a new hybrid model of education will emerge, with significant benefits. "I believe that the mixing of information technology in education will be further accelerated and that online education will eventually become a vital component of school education," says Wang Tao, Vice President of Tencent Cloud and Vice President of Tencent Education.

There have already been successful transitions amongst many universities. For example, Zhejiang University managed to get more than 5,000 courses online just two weeks into the transition using "DingTalk ZJU". The Imperial College London started proposing a course on the science of coronavirus, which is now the most enrolled class launched in 2020 on **Coursera**.

Many are already flaunting the benefits: Dr Amjad, a Professor at The University of Jordan who has been using Lark to teach his students says, "It has altered the way of teaching. It allows me to reach out to my students more efficiently and effectively through chat groups, video meetings, voting and also document sharing, especially during this pandemic. My students also find it is easier to connect on Lark. I will stick to Lark even after coronavirus, I believe traditional offline learning and e-learning can go hand by hand."

THE CHALLENGES OF ONLINE LEARNING

There are, however, challenges to overcome. Some students without reliable internet access and/or technology tussle to participate in digital learning; this crack is seen across countries and between income brackets within countries. For example, whilst 95% of students in Switzerland, Norway, and Austria have a workstation to use for their schoolwork, only 34% in Indonesia do, according to OECD data.

In the US, there is a noteworthy gap between those from privileged and disadvantaged backgrounds: whilst virtually all 15-year-olds from a privileged background said they had a computer to work on, nearly 25% of those from disadvantaged upbringings did not. While some schools and governments have been providing digital equipment to students in need, such as in New South Wales, Australia, many are still worried that the pandemic will widen the digital divide.

It is a trial for underprivileged students, for connecting to the internet is not always accessible and reachable even within their school. There were examples when parents of students would march to school whenever they found out that teachers are demanding their students to go online. These, however, occurred before the pandemic when going online was still non-compulsory. In our situation today, their options just became more imperfect.

Going online is not only the problem of the students. Even many of the teachers also did not have a laptop and access to a stable internet connection. Some of the older teachers are also used to traditional styles of teaching and are not digital popalaces to begin with. Would the government be able to aid schools in adjusting to the new normal in terms of resources and capacity building in time? Even the Department of Education's commendation to start the next academic year in April with a break of summer vacations now, has been approved by the government's Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF), will two months of adjustment be enough?

Teachers are also confident that the education sector will be given more consideration and support. In addition to that, they also trust that teachers should be well-compensated and equipped more than ever with digital skills for they are also considered the frontliners of the sector at this time.

IS LEARNING ONLINE AS EFFECTIVE?

For those who do have access to the right technology, there is indication that learning online can be more effective in a number of ways. Some investigation shows that on average, students recollect 25-60% more material when learning online equated to only 8-10% in a classroom. This is mostly due to the students being able to study faster online; e-learning requires 40-60% less time to learn than in a traditional classroom setting

because students can study at their own stride, going back and re-reading, skipping, or hastening through concepts as they choose.

Nevertheless, the efficacy of online learning varies amongst age groups. The general consensus on children, especially younger ones, is that a structured environment is required, because kids are more easily side-tracked. To get the full benefit of online learning, there needs to be a concerted effort to provide this structure and go further than replicating a physical class/lecture through video capabilities, instead, using a range of collaboration tools and engagement approaches that promote “inclusion, personalization and intelligence”, according to Dowson Tong, Senior Executive Vice President of Tencent and President of its Cloud and Smart Industries Group.

Since studies have shown that children comprehensively use their senses to learn, making learning fun and real through use of technology is crucial, according to BYJU’s Mrinal Mohit. “Over a period, we have perceived that clever integration of games has established higher engagement and increased motivation towards learning especially among younger students, making them truly fall in love with learning”, he says.

A CHANGING EDUCATION IMPERATIVE

It is unblemished that this pandemic has utterly disturbed an education system that many assert was already losing its significance. In his book, 21 Lessons for the 21st Century, scholar Yuval Noah Harari outlines how schools remain to focus on traditional academic skills and rote learning, rather than on skills such as critical thinking and adaptability, which will be more significant for success in the future. Could the move to online learning be the catalyst to create a new, extra effective method of educating students? While some worry that the hasty nature of the transition online may have hindered this objective, others plan to make e-learning part of their ‘new normal’ after experiencing the benefits first-hand.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DISSEMINATING KNOWLEDGE IS HIGHLIGHTED THROUGH COVID-19

Major world events are often an modulation point for rapid innovation – a clear example is the rise of e-commerce post-SARS. While we have yet to see whether this will spread on to e-learning post-COVID-19, it is one of the few sectors where investment has not withered away. What has been made clear through this pandemic is the significance of disseminating knowledge across borders, companies, and all parts of society. If online learning technology can play a part here, it is compulsory upon all of us to explore its full potential.

CONCLUSION

Amidst the mushrooming use of online learning during the impulsive present, this article evaluates the efficacy of fully online classrooms measures adopted by different countries so that the imparting of Education does not stop even in the worst of the pandemic times. A thick description of the development of the flipped classrooms and different apps has been done to encourage replication by other countries and educators. The findings also reveal that the online classroom approach can be as effective as the conventional classrooms. Few advantages and limitations have also been identified while using videoconferencing to support online flipped classrooms. This set of challenges can be useful guidelines for the different service providers and governments who might be interested in implementing an online flipped approach to impart education. This study provides another interesting area for future work as to how instructors can support learners’ self-regulation during online classroom as well as what strategies can best motivate students to complete the pre-class work and be attentive in the online learning environment.

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