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NEW EDUCATION ERA | TEACHING IN KERALA | SPOOF

# gobar times

ISSUE NO: 227, August 1–15, 2020

A DOWN TO EARTH SUPPLEMENT FOR THE YOUNG AND CURIOUS



## E-EDUCATION SPECIAL

The good, bad and ugly of online classes



# ONLINE COURSE ON ENVIRONMENT EDUCATION

LAST DATE TO APPLY  
**August 10, 2020**

#### TARGET AUDIENCE:

- Teachers from all subjects and classes
- Freelancer/Professionals from NGOs working in the education sector in India

#### COURSE DATE

August 17, 2020 – September 14, 2020

#### COURSE DURATION

Four weeks (six hours per week)

#### COURSE FEE

INR 3,500

#### COURSE TYPE

Online (Moodle)

#### LANGUAGE

English

Participants will be awarded with a certificate on successful completion of the course.

#### FOR ANY FURTHER QUERIES,

#### PLEASE CONTACT

##### Course Coordinators:

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Email id: support@greenschoolsprogramme.org

Website: <https://www.cseindia.org/>,

<https://www.greenschoolsprogramme.org>



#### BACKGROUND

The study of environment was made a compulsory part of the school curriculum at the behest of a Supreme Court order dating back to November 22, 1991.

The directives issued in December 18, 2003 provided a framework for all the educational agencies across the country. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) also prepared the syllabus for environment education for class 11 and class 12, in line with the Constitution of India.

Environment, however, remains a peripheral issue in the formal schooling system. It continues to be viewed as an extracurricular activity rather than a subject with a priority position in the national curriculum. Therefore, there is an urgent need to fill this gap between the reality of environment education and its intended purpose.

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To introduce multidisciplinary approach to environment education
- To help participants acquire knowledge and skills to understand the issue of climate change and environment in today's world
- To integrate environment in daily classroom teaching

#### ABOUT THE COURSE

The Online Course on Environment Education will educate participants and make them aware of environment-related interlinkages. The course encourages self-study and has been designed to help participants study in a structured manner during the four-week period. Participants will be provided with learning material such as presentations, audios and videos, real-world case studies, etc. Quizzes and assignments will also be part of this course. An orientation webinar will also be organised to introduce the course and answer all.

#### FOR MORE DETAILS, PLEASE VISIT

<https://www.cseindia.org/>

#### FOR REGISTRATION, PLEASE VISIT

<https://rb.gy/lidhatj>

# **gobar times**

**E-education special**

## **Environment education during a pandemic**

**Neeraj Kumar**

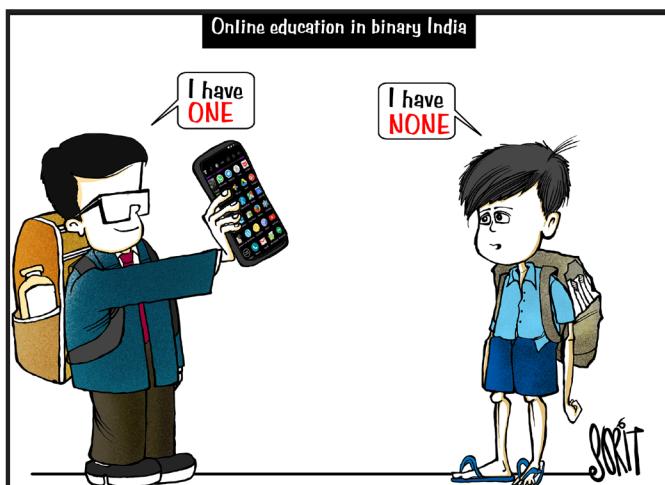
The coronavirus pandemic has changed our lives completely. Economy is suffering, production at industries has been impacted and agricultural activities have also taken a hit. There is hardly a sector that has remained unaffected by the crisis. And the education sector has been no different.

Schools and colleges have remained closed since March 24, 2020 when a nationwide lockdown was declared by the Union government. India has more than 15 lakh schools and around 26 crore students across states and union territories. During the past few weeks, education regulatory bodies like the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), Council for the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (CISCE) and National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) along with the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) have issued several guidelines to help education institutes ensure the continuation of studies.

And online classes became part of the solution proposed by the authorities to keep education alive in these unprecedented times. Online classes began on a large scale roughly around June, although few states may have already experimented with it before this. All these efforts were a way to adapt to the current situation and find solutions to keep children motivated for learning.

However, is this ideal? Nearly 24 per cent of households have internet facility in India, according to a 2017-18 National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) report. While 42 per cent of urban households have internet facility, the percentage of rural households having the same is roughly 15 per cent, the report states further. It is no surprise that students from rural backgrounds are bound to face difficulties getting access to these online classes.

An uninterrupted learning during the pandemic is key and the Centre for Science and Environment's Green School Programme (GSP) is trying to continue educating students about the environment through the online medium. In July, GSP launched *Audit@home*, an online survey for students of class 5 to class 10. It was aimed at helping students observe, assess and improve household practices. Additionally, *Gobar Times* and GSP jointly conducted the environment e-camp for students in primary and upper primary grades in June. Workshops, quiz and



story-telling sessions were conducted with a view to enhance the skills of children confined within their homes.

We are looking forward to launch the GSP Audit 2020 soon. The annual audit focuses on "learning by doing" and promotes active participation of students in ground activities, usually within school premises. Due to the pandemic, however, we now face the unique challenge of sustaining the green practices of schools.

And we are not alone! Students, teachers and educationists from all over the country have told us what they think of e-learning as an effective tool for education. So, presenting the "E-education special edition" of *Gobar Times*.

\*If you want to share your views and stories with us, write to [editor@gobartimes.org](mailto:editor@gobartimes.org)

# Online ~~class~~ alas!

**Children are often scolded for being glued to the screen, but everything now, from studies to socialising, requires a gadget**

**Asmi Gupta**



The writer is a class 9 student at Bharti Public School, New Delhi.

**C**lasses, followed by homework, followed by tuitions, followed by additional homework and studies for tests. This is the normal routine of a kid these days, isn't it?

But wait, it seems I have missed something. Well, guess what. To top all of this, now we have five hours of online classes!

These are such confusing times. Until the other day, we were told to keep ourselves away from mobile phones,

laptops and other gadgets. These, we were told, were bad since they lead to something called "gadget addiction". And to be fair, it is true. Gadget addiction is indeed common among youngsters in our world.

All in all, it was agreed that we must keep technology at an arm's length and avoid addiction, as much as possible.

But then came the online classes. We received a notice just three days after being told to stay away from our gadgets. The notice said that we will have

to download Google Meet, a video-communicating service owned by the tech giant Google, in our phones. It allows up to 1 hour of meeting time and can accommodate up to 100 participants.

We were also provided a time-table for attending online classes for all five subjects. At first, I was pretty excited about the whole thing but soon the word

"interest" made a flight out of the window. Of the 400 students, only a hundred of us could afford a smartphone, let alone a Wi-Fi service for 5 hours! So, what about the remaining 300?

I guess, they had to figure it out on their own and catch up with what had been done in the past few months. And when the school re-opens, they would have all of it neatly put down on their notebooks. How much of this is possible, I am not sure but I hope this comes true.

One thing is for sure for all 400 of us though — we have to finish reading all the chapters in our textbooks during the lockdown. Now, that's a big challenge. What do we do if we face doubts?

If the Wi-Fi service is weak, we have to join the meeting again. And woosh! Our teacher just completed a chapter and we are scared and reluctant to ask for a re-do or repeat. There is a daily time limit we have to follow to complete and share our work with teachers. And if we want to clear doubts, we have to wait for our turn, which is usually one day in a week! So, this is it. The life of a typical student learning through online classes.

When I check my phone to connect with my friends, my mother yells at me. She tells me that I am glued to the phone the whole day. And then we're expected to be an all-rounder! I wish we were allowed to start afresh next year. What a relief a "zero year" would be! ↳



# Back to school? Not anytime soon

Schools used to facilitate learning beyond the books, but those days are gone!

**Pavith Mallik**



The writer is a class 9 student at Indian School, New Delhi.

**I**t looks like our world is confined within the four walls of the house. Looking back on how things were a few months ago, it was unimaginable that such a situation would arise where everything — teaching, studying, assignment work and grading — would be dependent on the digital platform. But today, that's how things stand.

And the outcome of this great leap into to the online world remains quite unclear. Teachers are stressed that they can only communicate with students through online classes. And when we sit and attend these online classes, we concentrate on listening and hardly engage with the teacher.

At home, we are in our rooms — a familiar territory but it has many distractions. This makes it harder for us to concentrate on what the teacher is saying. Learning from a screen lacks many practical aspects. For example, communication skills, vocabulary, critical thinking and

scientific aptitude are traits we are used to learning in a classroom setting. But there's very little scope to pay attention to these aspects during online sessions.

Teachers also feel that face-to-face interaction helps students understand better. Back at school, we attended around eight to nine classes per day. Now, we have around three to four classes. That's half the number of classes we used to attend!

And there's more! Earlier, I was used to waking up early and getting ready for school. But now, I wake up between 8 am and 9 am to attend online classes. And during these classes, teachers usually ask us not to interrupt them while they share their screen to teach a particular topic or chapter. This means that we have to write down our doubts and share them in the chat section. But the chat is not usually visible to the presenter while sharing the screen. This means that on several occasions, our questions



go unseen and our doubts remain unaddressed. In the limited time we have with our teachers, it becomes impossible for each of us to gain equal understanding of a particular subject.

And to add to all of this, the increased use of internet leads to problems like the frequent hanging of laptops and computers; and weak network service.

Schools used to facilitate learning beyond the books, something that is usually missing from our all-consuming academics-oriented lives. We would discuss with friends and classmates, play games and all of this kept us in good shape — physically and mentally. Alas, those days are gone! ↳

# A new era of education

**Online teaching becomes viable only when all its constituent elements are in place. One cannot expect a transition overnight**

*Swastik Bose*



The writer is principal of Anglo Bengali Inter College, Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh.

**O**n a late June evening, I was enjoying my *kaada*, a liquid concoction made of various spices like *tulsi*, cardamom, cloves and so on, with an optimism to escape the infectious jaws of corona. Just then there was a beep on my phone. There was a WhatsApp message waiting to be read. It was a message from the Madhyamik Shiksha Parishad or the Uttar Pradesh State Board. As I got the chance to read its directives, a reflexive smile appeared on my face. The purpose of these directives was quite noble. All in all, they just wanted to achieve what's best for the students during a pandemic. But, the question that lingered was how much can we really do?

How can we transition to online classes overnight and make this switch easy for all the students of the country?

To my surprise, the WhatsApp message had asked us, schools, to prepare a report stating the number of students having access to smart phones, laptops and internet connection. Apart from this, we were also asked to find out how many students had access to television sets in households and the type of connection they had.

Nostalgia took over me as I remembered those pre-COVID-19 days. The smiling innocence of the tiny tots, the naughty tweens and the curious and investigative teenagers who made our school lively and jovial. Suddenly, everything had come to a standstill. Everyone is confined within their house, playgrounds remain barren, classrooms are empty and there is an undefined silence prevailing the campus. And suddenly, online teaching has become the new normal.

Now, online teaching in

a country where a majority of students come from low-income families is difficult to even conceptualise, let alone implement! What are the odds that every student in the country has easy access to smart phones and internet? Besides, do we have the necessary infrastructure in place to ensure each child gets equal access to online teaching? Even as the schools across the country are conducting online classes, these questions remain unanswered. And as our experience has taught us, the method of online teaching is not without flaws.

The sudden load on the internet is causing problems of connectivity. Now, connectivity has always been a problem in non-metro cities and towns, especially in the remote regions of the country. However, a sudden surge in online activity — classes, webinars and meetings — has led to

# E-education

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added pressure on the existing network. These factors are making learning through online teaching an uphill climb for teachers as well as students. It's no surprise that due to these connectivity-related problems, attendance issues have surfaced lately.

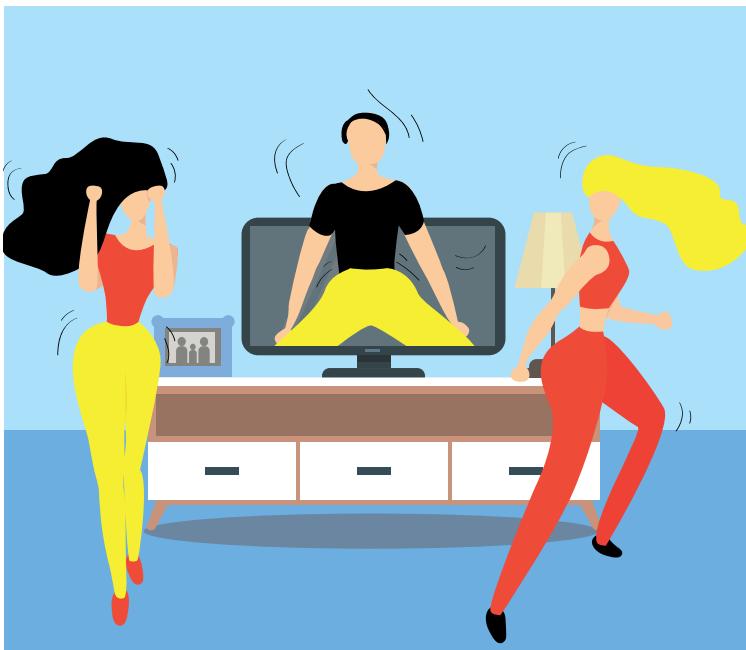
Assignments are being given to students and their performances are being evaluated as well. But how can one perform the practicals online? A government-aided school like ours functions with limited funds and we are

in no position to meet these expenditures. In our experience, uploading teaching and learning material on a website has been beneficial because it gives students the freedom to access them at their convenience. They can download it whenever they have access to good internet connection and use it later.

Online teaching becomes a viable option only when all its constituent elements are in place. This includes the teacher, the taught, internet connectivity and smart phones — all of this should fit in the

same frame to ensure proper teaching through the online mode. One cannot expect a transformation from offline to online overnight. However, currently online teaching is our best bet at keeping the flow of learning intact.

What's certain is that it's just the beginning of a new era in our education system and each domain is expected to fulfill the ultimate goal of providing students with the chance to get proper cognitive, effective and psychomotor developments. ↗



## Dancing in front of a screen

**The new way of imparting dance lessons has put students as well as teachers in a tough spot**

**Sumit Sumanta**



The writer is a dance teacher at Vishwa Bharti School, Noida, Uttar Pradesh.

**W**ho would have thought a few months ago that there would be a virtual wall between the dance teacher and his/her students? But this is exactly what happened. Of course,

the online system of teaching has indeed been helpful. At least, it has ensured that classes have not come to a halt altogether. What would we have done otherwise given that an art form like dance is usually taught under one roof.

There's a very practical aspect to it.

When it comes to learning dance, nothing is better than one-to-one interaction between the instructor/facilitator and students. Body posture and dance moves are taught through an active and interactive form of teaching. Sometimes we (instructors) show it to the students how it's done and sometimes we simply walk up to them and correct their posture. This, of course, is no more possible while teaching online.

Nevertheless, we are trying our best to use the medium to train students despite problems like poor connectivity, video and audio lags and space constraints. This is a new way of teaching and it has no doubt put students as well teachers in a rather tough spot.

Many of us, teachers, had to step out of our comfort zones and record videos just so our students are able to follow our dance lessons.

Online teaching may seem ideal but we can't apply the "one-size-fit-all" *mantra* while practicing it. Access and affordability of smartphones and internet connection is no doubt a challenge for many in our country. And it's also the reason why many students from low-income families are dropping out of regular sessions.

Our school is definitely following World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines and Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) orders, but each of us is praying to get back to school and pick up where we left. We are waiting for the day when the schools re-open and students from all backgrounds get an equal chance to be a part of mainstream education. ↗

# Learning along the way

**New to online teaching, students and teachers in a Meghalaya school share how each day becomes a learning experience**

**K Dilip Kumar**



The writer is principal of CMCL Vidya Bharati School, Lumshnong, Meghalaya.

**T**he CMCL Vidya Bharati School in Lumshnong Village is around 100 km from Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya. We began online classes on April 9, 2020. It was a new form of teaching and learning that our teachers and students weren't used to. Initially, nearly one-third of the students were not attending classes. But attendance improved gradually.

This was not surprising at all since many of our students come from low-income families and their parents can't afford a smartphone, a pre-requisite for online classes. For those with phones, internet connectivity was a problem. However, with some help from Star Cement Ltd, a corporate entity, we were able to resolve internet-related issues.

On the other side, teachers had to learn how to operate video-servicing apps like Zoom. A simple feature like

mute-unmute caused disruptions while teaching.

We kept learning along the way. For example, students started recording the video lessons and shared them via WhatsApp. This kind of quick thinking also helped us manage classes better. However, we realised that there is an urgent need for online ethics and discipline.

While some of our students have adapted well to online classes, others have struggled. This

difference has come across in assignment submissions and attention spans. The National Council of Educational Research and Training's books online and Diksha platform, a digital learning initiative of the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), have been helpful, especially to students who were struggling to get access to study material.

With schools shut, laboratory work has come to a grinding halt. For science teachers, this created problems. They shared sessions with students but these were a far cry from the hands-on learning students are used to in a laboratory.

Being a private school, we were able to make arrangements and act quickly. However, the situation of students in nearby villages has left me concerned. Take Master Kishore, for example. He lost his father three years ago and his mother runs a small tea shop in the village. Due to the pandemic, income from the teashop has stopped. It remains closed. For students like Kishore, education has suddenly become next to impossible simply because neither his family nor his school has the necessary resources. ↗



# No pens and copies, how will we study?

**With stationery shops closed, a pen gone dry or a filled up notebook are enough to stall the learning journey of a student**

*Pallavi Ghosh*

Faizan is a class 12 student from Srinagar, Kashmir. Since March 19, his school has remained shut due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Online classes started on April 8 and the flow of study and assignments resumed. But as assignments started pouring in, he was confronted with a problem. There was a lack of stationery items since all the shops were closed.

With online classes in full swing, Faizan struggled to

keep up with the syllabus covered by his teacher due to a dearth of stationery items like notebooks, highlighters, pens and pencils.

“Making notes while the teacher is dictating on the phone is anyway difficult. The voice keeps breaking. And if you run out of pages in your notebook or your pen runs dry, there is a break in your learning and you can’t do anything but wait for the items to be available,” said Faizan.

Shops are now open but Faizan still remembers the difficulties he faced until April end, when stationery items

were not readily available. He hopes that he doesn’t have to face a similar situation in future.

Education is dependent on multiple factors — the availability of stationery items being one of them. There have been multiple reports about poor connectivity and mobile phone accessibility and how these have adversely impacted learning among students. However, the sudden break in the supply of stationery items during the COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted the lives of students across the country.



# Through the looking glass

**From body ache to anxiety, online classes have left students vulnerable to a host of health-related problems**

**Poorvi**



The writer is a class 12 student at Kendriya Vidyalaya, RWF West Colony, Bengaluru, Karnataka.

The lockdown period has been challenging and on several occasions, the confinement has left me feeling overwhelmed. Before the online classes started, it was quite boring but even after they began, nothing changed, really! They were rather monotonous and in my opinion, they were just patchwork solutions for these unprecedented times. Why?

Take these mobile applications, for instance. Each teacher prefers an app he/she finds most comfortable to operate. And unfortunately for us, we had to download at least four different apps. This meant we, students, had to take the extra effort to learn how to operate each of these apps alongside our regular learning, which involves five subjects in senior school.

Also, invites to these classes are shared via WhatsApp or Gmail and joining the meeting or class is a whole new story! It usually means asking your friends and teachers about what went wrong and then getting

rebuked by teachers, as though it's our fault! All of this ends up creating stress and it leaves us feeling fatigued and frustrated.

Moreover, these sessions are not safe spaces. Just the other day, an unknown person got

access, played some lewd songs and used abusive language before logging off. And it is difficult to stop these from happening since it's very easy to lose control in the online world. In a classroom setup, this is not the case.

A day when the internet connectivity is poor is enough to increase frustration levels in a house. While children are anxious because they missed online classes, their parents are stressed about not being able to work from home. Ultimately, we end up shouting at each other!

Apart from the stress, slouching over the computer, laptop or phones for hours can cause severe pain in the neck and the back. These can easily aggravate into a physical illness like spondylitis. Long hours on the screen can also impair vision. And the continuous use of earplugs/headphones can damage hearing to the extent of becoming deaf!

So, imagine this for a second. You have a cervical belt around your neck for the rest of your life, you can't hear properly and are wearing spectacles. All of this because of excessive gadget handling and bad posture!

To avoid this, we can take small measures like using a



laptop or computer instead of a smartphone, which usually has a small screen and is more straining for the eyes. And using a speaker is better than using earplugs or headphones. After all, it's better to be safe than sorry! ↗

# Online classes in India: A bird's eye view

**Are we ready to re-open schools yet? C V Shimray, Associate Professor at NCERT's Department of Education in Science and Mathematics speaks to Pallavi Ghosh and shares her views on the subject**

**Q: In many households where space is an issue, the closing of schools has been a big blow. Your thoughts?**

A: Space definitely is an issue in many households with or without the pandemic-imposed learning from home. This is where the inequitable impact of pandemic is exposed. While there is no quick fix to this problem, we might consider the positive side of what I would call "community learning" where students and family members can engage in learning. Nevertheless, students who have enough space at home can learn in their own comfort of space and time.

**Q. Schools, in many ways, created a conducive environment for students to study. Do you think learning will be the same, given their situation?**

A: Schools definitely are conducive for learning many life skills such as interpersonal development or communication. Sitting at home, students would be deprived of these. However, many of the activities in schools are often ritualistic — students sit in classrooms, there's one-way transmission of information, students write exams and move on to the next class! But home environment is different. Students are definitely not

mentally prepared or tuned, especially because of the sudden shift in the location and mode of learning. However, this does not necessarily mean that there is a lack of conducive environment at home. Of course, other issues of the family could deter learning.

The worst-affected are the differently-abled students whose learnings were facilitated by special educators. One wonders how they are learning now.

**Q. Argentina, Austria and even Bhutan, our neighbouring country, have been using broadcast media, especially television, to teach. In India, so far only Kerala has taken such an initiative.**

A: Although television has not been used across India to broadcast lessons or classes in the form of a daily school routine, it does not mean nothing has been done. Soon after the imposition of the lockdown, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) sprung into action and started running programmes for all standards between 9:00 am to 5:30 pm. This initiative covers all subjects, besides adding topics beyond the subjects specified in the school curriculum. And this is still being done seven days in a week. These programmes are currently telecast live on various platforms

such as NCERT Official YouTube, Kishore Manch App, Jio TV, DD Free Dish, Dish TV, Sun Direct, Tata Sky, Airtel and Videocon.

Coming back to television, the government has launched the "Pradhan Mantri e-VIDYA" initiative on August 1, 2020. It focuses on the digital education of students. This will include one earmarked TV channel for each class upto class 12 and other media platforms like community radio and podcasts.

**Q. What are the advantages and disadvantages of TV when it comes to teaching?**

A: TV as a platform has at least some pros like no disparity on what students learn, no division on the basis of privilege, children and adults can learn together and schools can show videos on the TV to enhance learning. There is also the simple fact that those who have access to TV, will have "access" to teachers. Besides, all presenters are qualified and experienced.

However, the cons are manifold and these include one-way learning, no student-teacher interaction and the use of the same strategy for all students, even though learning styles tend to vary among students. The TV medium does not inculcate interpersonal, social and communication skills. Sharing of

# E-education



ideas is not possible and it cannot substitute hands-on experiences. The quality of learning is likely to be hampered and there will be difficulty in adjusting to new platforms for learning. All of this apart from the harmful impact of continuous exposure to the TV screen on the eyes. And even after this, some students will be left out because their families can't afford a TV.

#### **Q. Are we prepared to open schools?**

A: While few experts have alerted us to the negative impact of confinement upon kids, public health experts say that there is too much

risk in re-opening schools. Opinions can vary on this but we can all agree that it will be almost impossible to create an environment that is foolproof in terms of infrastructure to re-open schools. Evaluating risk to students, teachers and staff, sanitisation protocol and maintaining sanitation and hygiene will be challenging. And it's not just about school campuses. Appropriate measures have to be taken at every step — from home to school, and from school to home. Such levels of preparedness will be unrealistic to achieve in every school.

Therefore, it's better to be safe than sorry. Remember China

and Israel had to shut down schools after re-opening.

#### **Q. What will schools that don't have the required infrastructure do, in case they re-open?**

A: Since most classrooms are not pandemic-ready, school timings might have to be changed with "odd-even" kind of arrangements. Multiple shifts or alternate-day arrangements are likely. Also, something as basic as ensuring proper ventilation for air flow will have to be taken into consideration. ↗

*\*Views expressed in the interview are personal.*

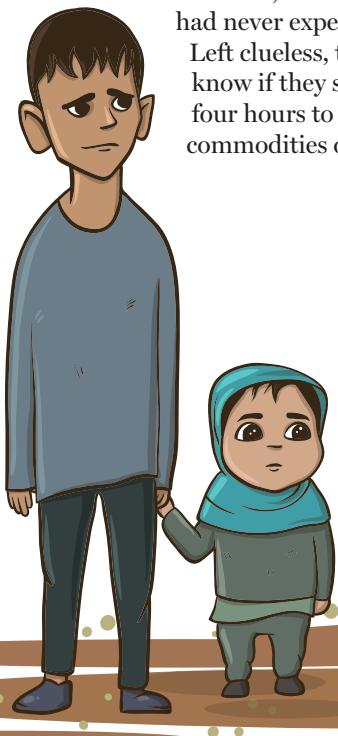
# Between 0 and 1, there is grey

**Digital learning has failed to infuse hope among our society's most vulnerable people**

*Kundan Pandey*

The other day Brij Kumar, a class 9 student of Kota Gunjapur primary school in Madhya Pradesh's Panna district came to know that his school will not be re-opening on the scheduled date. He was not very happy. Since the lockdown came into effect in March, he has not been allowed to play with friends. That's why he was eagerly waiting for his school to re-open. But alas, his school will remain closed! On top of this, classes will be conducted online now.

The 13-year-old has no clue about online classes. His poor and illiterate mother, Hakki Bai, does not even know what "online" means. She has never heard the word!



However, the buzz around online began some five years ago when our country's policymakers proposed a grand plan of transforming the country through Digital India. From cities to phones, watches, TVs and cars, everything had to be "smart". It became the buzz word.

Then on one fine evening (8 pm, to be precise), our PM announced a 21-day lockdown in the wake of a pandemic. And the lockdown period was extended several times in the coming months. The country's 130 crore people were given four hours to prepare for this lockdown, something they had never experienced so far. Left clueless, they did not know if they should use the four hours to stock essential commodities or sit back at

home and wait around for a better time. And then, there was chaos.

By July, online sessions had become the new normal. From work to webinars and classes, everything was happening online. But as academic sessions kicked off, there were two things that were missing — schools and classrooms. Suddenly every student and teacher was supposed to be tech-savvy. And up went the demand for "smart" teachers and students. Now, for most people living at urban cities and towns, this switch was exciting but for students like Brij Kumar and parents like Hakki bai, it was the end of the road.

When asked if her son attends these online classes, she says that there is no phone in the family. And even if she bought a phone despite all odds, it would



still not be very helpful since there is no electricity in her village.

Hakki Bai is not alone. A primary school in her village has 31 students. After getting the instruction of online classes, the school administration went for a door-to-door survey only to find that there were eight mobile phones in the entire village and only two were active!

The situation in other villages is almost the same. Most families belong to tribal communities who struggle to make ends meet. It's take a huge effort to convince them to send their kids to schools. In fact, there are many households across the country that simply cannot afford these online classes.

Smriti Parsheera, a lawyer and policy researcher with the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP) got an opportunity to talk to several (government) school teachers in Himachal Pradesh. After speaking to them, she found that most families were facing a peculiar situation. In many households, there was just one phone for 5-6 family members. And almost every family had at least three students.

"When 5-6 people are dependent on a single phone, one can easily imagine the chaos it can lead to," says Pasheera. If a family member goes out for work or shopping, s/he has to carry the phone, which means that others in the house won't have a phone even if they need it, she explains.

The pandemic has made everyone vulnerable. But there's no doubt that lockdown has impacted the have-nots more. Digital learning has, likewise, ended up marginalising the weaker sections of the society further.

Hakki Bai has just one dream — to educate her only child and ensure a life with dignity for him. The lockdown has been a tough time for her and her fear gets compounded whenever she sees her son sitting idle for hours.

"No one knows, how long this will continue. If schools are opened, I don't know if my son will be able to catch up or not," she says. ↗

# E-education





# Teaching in Kerala

**With internet connectivity emerging as a challenge, TVs have become a key tool to ensure learning is not derailed in the state**

*Pallavi Ghosh*

**K**ITE Victors is an exclusive channel launched by the state government to teach students from class 1 to class 12. It is part of the state's education department, which is in charge of more than 14,000 schools in Kerala. Classes are being held since June using the TV platform.

With internet connectivity emerging as a challenge,

especially in remote areas, TVs have become an important medium to ensure that learning of students from vulnerable backgrounds is not derailed.

“Unlike radio, which nobody listens to these days, the practice of watching the TV is still a regular feature in every household,” says T V Vineesh, Research Officer, State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Kerala.

To help students understand better, these broadcast lessons are mostly in Malayalam. Only for students studying in higher secondary, lessons are delivered in English. However, since admissions have not taken place, no classes are being held for the 11th standard at the moment.

Classes begin at 8:00 am and continue till 5:30 pm. Monday to Friday, there are regular classes and during



the weekend there are repeat lessons.

However, even this is not enough. In districts like Wayanad, Idukki and Palakkad, home to several tribal communities, access to resources such as textbooks is questionable. Assuming that these students have access to lessons via online classes or a TV broadcast would be rather wishful, if not impossible, says Vineesh.

To ensure these students do not fall behind or drop out from education altogether, several teachers have volunteered to visit the homes of these students and teach them personally. This is being done solely as a teachers' initiative. Asked if

pandemic protocol is being observed during these visits, the SCERT official claimed that teachers who are making these visits are using masks and maintaining hygiene and sanitation standards.

"Lessons on TV lack local adaptation. This makes it difficult for students coming from these districts to comprehend and learn. Therefore, these visits are able to give that human touch, which makes all the difference in terms of enabling understanding via local adaptation," explains Vineesh.

And to ensure students are not deprived of education, especially in remote areas, teachers have started using

Anganwadi centres, libraries and classrooms to teach. However, protocol is reportedly being followed while using these spaces.

"Discretion is being used to decide if space available in the campus should be used. And considering the risks of infection arising from the pandemic, school space is being used in a limited capacity or only when it's absolutely necessary," Vineesh says.

Another major issue with the shutting of schools is the halting of mid-day meals. Again, students from remote areas and low-income families are the most vulnerable to such events.

Under the Central government's order, the state has been distributing food kits comprising staples such as rice, wheat, sugar and salt among households, says Vineesh. The kit also contains green gram, Bengal gram, pulses and common spices like turmeric, chilly powder and coriander powder, he adds. Shared below is a break-up of the existing framework of food distribution that is being reportedly being followed by officials:

#### **KIT A**

For students enrolled in pre-primary: 1.2 kg of rice and groceries worth ₹297

#### **Kit B**

For students enrolled in lower primary: 4 kg of rice and groceries worth ₹300

#### **Kit C**

For students enrolled in upper primary: 6 kg of rice and groceries worth ₹400

Students up to class 8 are eligible to get food supplies under this framework, said the SCERT official. ↗

# Comforts of e-classes

**Online classes allow one to study from the comfort of home, but not all of us are privileged enough to have such facilities**

**Anipurba Dutta**



The writer is a Class 11 student of Holy Child School, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal

**T**he online teaching system has left me with more questions and doubts than answers and solutions. The number of COVID-19 positive patients is increasing everyday and so is the death toll.

Even developed countries are perplexed and are making efforts to make the best out of the pandemic situation. In

the field of education and learning, this has meant switching to online classes, leading to trials and errors being committed along the way.

In the new normal, this paradigm shift from classroom to e-learning has not been easy for teachers and students. However, the old saying — “where there is will, there is a



way” — has indeed been our guiding principle.

Online classes have benefited me in several ways. They have given me the liberty to study in the comfort zone of my home. With a fresh mind and body, I have been able to work better, improving my concentration level and multi-tasking abilities. Home has indeed been a conducive learning environment for me.

Staying at home has also cut down daily travel expenses and these have translated into household savings. A lot of time was also saved, which was otherwise spent in travelling.

However, there are many for whom these months have been extremely difficult. In a country like India, where a majority of the population has no internet access, the online classes system is bound to exclude thousands of students. Children from poor backgrounds cannot afford to buy laptops and smartphones for these classes. And it is this section that will suffer the most.

Internet connectivity in most non-metro cities and towns is poor. In Jalpaiguri as well it is something of a see-saw. Even here, internet is out of reach for most students from low-income families.

However, some problems are faced by all the students. Take the rise of anxiety and depression among students. These seem to have been triggered from restrictions on socialising. Many have also complained of back ache, headache and migraine attacks during the period.

However, amid all this gloom we, students, are expected to keep up with our studies. Schools are shut, but the show must go on... ↩

# Education in a limbo

**In a survey, students with disabilities say that more than half of them were attending classes irregularly**

**GT Staff**

**A**bout 43 per cent of children with disabilities are planning to drop out of studies due to difficulties related to online education, said a survey conducted by the Bhubaneswar-based nonprofit *Swabhiman*. The survey is based on the responses of 3,627 students, parents and teachers. It was conducted in May across Odisha, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura, Chennai, Sikkim, Nagaland, Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir.

More than half the surveyed students said they were struggling, yet attending classes irregularly. Of the total number of respondents, 77 per cent said they would fall behind in learning due to their inability to access distance learning methods. Nearly 44 per cent said they were planning to drop out from studies.

At least thirty-nine per cent of students suffering from some form of visual impairment said they could not understand lessons. According to the survey, many students complained about the absence of a sign language expert during the webinars.

Parents of children with disabilities said they did not know how to use technology and around 81 per cent of teachers

said they did not have access to educational material. Over 60 per cent students reportedly told their teachers that there were no smartphones or computers at home and they needed a device to join the online classes.

At least seventy-four per cent of the surveyed students were in need of Wi-Fi service, while another 61 per cent demanded for scribes, escorts, readers and attendants. A report based on the survey made detailed recommendations for policy changes.

“Policy changes are required to ensure that children are supported by suitable curricula in alternate formats suitable for them, and have the hardware and data to make online learning feasible. At the same time, an investment in special educators and parents to adapt to the changed environment is necessary so that they can support children with disabilities better,” said the report.

In light of “the new normal” created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the report proposed revisions in the education budget, use of community radio and television for education,

and continued nutritional support to students from low-income families.

In March, schools and colleges were forced to shut down due to the lockdown imposed in the wake of the



COVID-19 pandemic. Soon, almost every educational institute switched to virtual teaching and learning. But weak internet penetration has turned e-education into a distant dream for many children. ↗

**E-education**



# Baandho rishto ko samajhdari ki dor se

Ritika Bohra /GT

Seek advice from local health authority about precautions. Wash hands regularly with soap or use alcohol-based hand sanitiser. Don't forget to wear a mask while meeting others. Avoid stepping out if unwell and seek medical attention if you have fever, cough or difficulty in breathing.