A Status Report on
History & Trends of Online Learning
and
Screen Time for School Students

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The coronavirus pandemic and the unprecedented measures taken worldwide to contain its spread are indeed disrupting nearly every aspect of children's lives: their health, development, learning, behaviour, their families' economic security and their mental health. As per UNICEF almost 99% of the world's children are living under some form of pandemic-related limit on movement; while 60% live in countries that are under full or partial lockdowns and almost 1.5 billion children are out school. Never before have so many children been out of school at the same time, disrupting learning and upending lives, especially the most vulnerable and marginalised.

Many families with increased professional and household responsibilities have been experiencing emotional and mental pressures due to the lockdown situation especially with juggling work and household responsibilities. Children, are used to their safe spaces, places where they can go out and interact with others of their age groups, something that has not been happening since the lockdown began. They are learning to keep up with the new learning methods and getting used to the 'new normal'.

Having said this, caregivers and educators have responded in stride, and have been instrumental in finding new ways to keep children learning by developing online and offline learning materials, including for physical exercise, to help improve children's physical strength, health and mental wellbeing during the school closures. Virtual classrooms are not to transact curriculum but to exhibit care and build an effective relationship with the students. Additionally, rhythm, routines and rituals are providing the necessary cognitive comfort to growing brains.

However, there are growing concerns that this in this format children may not be receiving in-depth education and are spending a little too long in front of the computer or mobile phone screen, questioning how much of a good thing is actually good. In this context, FICCI ARISE in collaboration with Eduvisiors has examined various aspects of online learning including screen time and presented varied viewpoints both globally and locally. The report also highlights recommendations and best practices prescribed by leading institutions and experts in order to make the most of online learning efforts.

This report has taken into consideration national and global perspectives on online learning for schools and seeks to bring to the fore the best practices and safeguards that are practiced across the industry.

FOREWORD

Covid-19 has caused great pain and discomfort to the entire human race. However, there is at least one positive fallout of Covid-19 - it has got the world rethink about the centuries old traditional school model, which is now being questioned and challenged. We all know that learning continuity is absolutely essential to education, specially in early years of development.

To ensure continuity in education, must adapt the environment of the classes being delivered in remote environment (normally called as online, virtual or remotely delivered classes). Such remotely delivered classes are delivered:

- on real-time basis (synchronous); and/or

- in a pre-recorded mode (asynchronous)

Either of the above two can be combined with Q&A sessions (usually known as doubt-clearing sessions) separately.

For the outside-the-classroom activities (such as music, art, craft, drama, theatre, sports, and laboratory-related work), the schools must:

- move to virtually delivered projects; and

- think differently to reimagine the education for practical work involving social, emotional, and physical development-related aspects.

The school delivery model must take care of not only the delivery of content, assessments, and Q&A sessions but also the following infrastructure and environment-related aspects:

- adequate infrastructure (suitable access device and internet bandwidth); and

- appropriate environment (sound/noise, light, space and ergonomics).

There is a lot of debate on whether too much of screen has a bad effect on young learners. While considering screen time using digital media, it is important to make a distinction between:

Active learning v/s Passive learning; Directionless interaction v/s purposeful engagement; Consumption led viewing v/s creative collaboration. Learning v/s replaying; Goal-oriented usage v/s aimless pursuit of the unknown.

The digital device in itself is neither good or bad - instead it is just a means to an end and it can be as good or bad as it is made to be by the user. The key to success is to use the digital device and resources well and make them the drivers of learning and not get driven by them.

I believe that online and digital learning will usher in the much-needed era of personalised learning journey for each learner.

Vijay Shukla
Managing Partner, Eduvisors

REPORT BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and quick adoption of online learning by schools, there have *questions about the benefits of online learning when compared to its limitations and associated increased screen time.* Such questions have brought about a confusion with regard to validity and effectiveness of online learning vis-à-vis traditional learning in schools.

The general public opinion on online learning and screen time is mixed. While there is a section of society that believes that concept of online learning is the one in which the benefits clearly outweigh the shortcomings by a significant margin, on the other side, people are concerned about its ill effects on learners' social and emotional development.

There are *unanswered questions around how to adopt online learning and how much online learning to be adopted.*

On the one hand maintaining learning continuity is critical for school-going students and on the other hand there seems to be a sense of urgency in the general idea of returning to traditional course of events.

In the recent years, online learning has significantly evolved to include elements of one to one interaction and personalized learning paths. The benefits of online learning notwithstanding, there have been concerns around screen time.

This report independently examines various aspects of online learning including screen time and aims to objectively present varied viewpoints both globally and locally. It also highlights recommendations and best practices prescribed by leading institutions and experts in order to make the most of online learning efforts.

This report seeks to bring to the foreground a holistic picture of the concept of online learning and screen time including an examination of the claims and counterclaims made by various experts and reputed institution.

This report also considers national and global perspectives on online learning for schools and seeks to bring to light best practices and safeguards that are practiced across the industry.

ONLINE LEARNING

Online learning is education that takes place over the Internet. It is often referred to as "e- learning" among other terms. Most leading Indian schools today have elements of online learning integrated with their curriculum. Globally, schools have been a strong proponent of online learning for students of all age groups. The common understanding amongst millennial parents is such that online learning opportunities are a reflection of the sophistication and forward-looking outlook of the school and its leadership.

1.1 Historical Background

The original format of online learning was 'distance learning'. The idea of distance learning finds its origins in a correspondence course offered in Great Britain where the instructor sent lessons and received students' completed assignments by mail. In the year 1960, The University of Illinois, created an intranet of computer terminals where students could access course material and listen to audio recordings of lectures.

Schools were comparatively late responders, and introduced technology lead learning only in the mid to late 90's. While the initial few years saw school students learning through proprietary software with binary content, these practices slowly evolved with the introduction of the internet. Indian schools were able to offer online learning only in the mid 2000's where virtual teaching aids were the first introduction of technology in the learning environment. It was only by 2005-06 that schools designed curriculum with information technology as an elective subject and students were able to learn the basics of computing.

1.2 Examining Online Learning

Online learning is the newest and most popular form of distance education today. Within the past decade it has had a major impact on postsecondary education and the trend is only increasing. Online learning used to primarily consist of a student going through reading modules, submitting assignments through e-mail, and/or watching pre-recorded lectures. Interactive features today allow for the social element that face-to-face learning offers, such as through live video conference classes or virtual Q&A sessions

As students' progress through classes, *they seek more autonomy and intellectual freedom.* Online learning can them pursue highly *personalized learning programs,* possibly even college level courses. These combined with hands-on exercises, real world exploration, and thorough assessments, can be highly beneficial to their learning progress.

They can explore their options, by trying out introductory topics from different fields, before committing to a specialization. *Online learning techniques these students become more independent learners.*

Widespread adoption of online learning is causing a pedagogical shift in teaching and learning. There is a shift away from top-down lecturing and passive students to a more interactive, collaborative approach in which students and instructor co-create the learning process.

The above-mentioned reasons clearly indicate the future, involvement, and potential of online learning in India. Having said that, it is also important to understand the inherent edge that online model possesses over traditional school model:

- Students can *personalize their learning* since online learning provides greater control to users through the use of minimal infrastructure. This enables students to take up new courses and learn almost anywhere.

- Everyone has a different and *unique learning pace matched by delivery online learning.*

- Online learning offers an *enhanced discussion element,* often in a forum for discussion board.

- With an estimated 93 percent of *communication* being non-verbal, online learners do not have to worry about body language interfering with their message. Online education eliminates physical judgments that can cloud rational discussion.

- Online learners benefit from *flexible learning schedules.*

- At traditional schools, *talking to a teacher after class* can be challenging. This is not true in an online learning environment.

- Online learning makes parent teacher *collaboration positive and transparent.*

- Online systems permit deep analytical summaries of a students' progress. This helps in creating a *personalized learning journey* for each student.

In recent years this form of education has evolved and is widely accepted.

1.3 Global Success Stories

Over the last decade, online learning has grown from a small part of education that was largely limited to universities into a new method of educating a wide range of people, from primary school students to people in postgraduate education. With the Internet making interactive online learning possible, online schools have emerged as a method of teaching students a range of subjects, from mathematics to English and more, over the Internet.

Online schools might be relatively new compared to other educational methods, but they are quickly proving themselves as an excellent option for students that want to learn outside the traditional classroom environment. From giving students the ability to learn at an enhanced pace to providing a proven framework for students to prepare for exams and assessments, online schools offer a wide range of advantages for students.

≫ K12 Inc

is one of the best examples of online schooling flourishing in the West. Headquartered in Virginia, United States, K12 is a two-decade old educational management organization that provides online learning and online curriculum directly into the homes of the students and families through grades K-12. Over the years, K12 has garnered 1 million enrollments and topped US$1 billion in revenue. K12 inc offers personalized learning, curriculum customization and self-paced learning opportunities to students across the US. Students are also exposed to ample opportunities of social interaction through hobby clubs, talent shows and competitions which they deliver through their partner schools. This exciting blended learning model helps students develop into well rounded personalities ready to take on the world.

≫ Wey Education

is yet another successful online schooling and education management organization in the UK. Through its portfolio brands such as *InterHigh* and *Academy 21,* Wey Education has become the face on virtual learning in the United Kingdom. InterHigh School delivers a fully interactive British education to the comfort of student homes or wherever they may be. This unique online school offers the best in Primary, Secondary, IGCSE and A Level courses, delivered by expert teachers. In fact, InterHigh UK was recently awarded as the 'Educational Establishment of the Year' award at the annual Education Resources Awards.

❯❯ Connections Academy

is another classic example of how blended learning can be both effective and value adding for both schools and students. Based out of the United States again Connections Academy offers a K–12 accredited online public-school program that is tuition-free and aligned with respective state's educational standards. Using their proprietary learning platform, Connections Academy has swiftly become the school of choice for parents and students across the US. Soon after their acquisition by Pearson's Inc. they were able to revolutionize the online learning and schooling industry for grades K-12 by offering personalized and inclusive learning for student families.

1.4 Limitations of Online Learning

As with any online offering, there are certain challenges within the online learning paradigm. Certain inherent aspects of the real world are hard to replicate in online environment and therefore it becomes essential to identify such drawbacks for a comprehensive understanding of online learning.

- Lack of communication skill development - E-Learning methods are proven to be highly effective at improving the academic knowledge of the students. However, developing the face to face communication skills of the students requires considerable effort in online lessons.

- Limited social, emotional & physical development - Learning in isolation can be tough for students if the program Is not designed carefully.

- All classroom aspects are difficult to emulate - Students may sometimes find it hard due to the lack a real-time teacher.

Over the years, industry experts have been able to address some of these concerns by increasing the use of technology in their learning platforms. As new and more innovative online learning platforms are designed every day, the industry can expect to see fewer limitations. Certain drawbacks will cease to exist as the industry evolves and positions itself to become the future of learning.

UNABRIDGED LEARNING - LEARNING CONTINUITY

There is no gainsaying in the fact that learning continuity is critical to each student's personalized learning path. *There are 6 important aspects to achieve learning continuity in the current times:*

1. Criticality of Consistency

2. Significance of Routine

3. Development Learning Window

4. Relevance in COVID-19 times

5. Optimal Learning Timelines - Schedules that Work

6. Social and Emotional Learning

These 6 critical aspects are examined as below.

2.1 Criticality of Consistency

Consistency is critical to creating space for effective learning environments. Students are able to participate in learning more effectively when they have a clear understanding of classroom procedures and their importance. If students can spell the expectations and receive consistent responses to their behavior they are in better control of their actions. Classroom expectations are important to academic achievement—consistent learning environments allow students to really thrive academically by providing time and space to focus on the academic material.

In India, over 250 million students have been affected by COVID-19 school closures, and though the government quickly recommended shifting to "online teaching". TO ensure learning continuity the 3 important elements *(The Teachers, The Environment and Reinforcements)* are to be managed well. All the 3 elements must work in tandem to ensure learning continuity:

❯❯ The Teachers

The teacher is the lead and facilitator of the classroom norms and expectations. They are responsible for implementing classroom structure and providing guidance for holding students accountable to their behavior choices. Teachers deliver clear and direct instructions so students do not have questions about what is expected of them. In doing so, teachers are able to reinforce positive behaviors through modeling and incentives. Modeling gives students clear examples when they have to make a choice about what is appropriate.

❯❯ The Learning Environment

The learning environment is an important component in behavior management because it provides a controlled physical space that impacts learning. Visuals used by teachers serve as a simple reminder for students when faced with making behavior decisions. For example, teachers display behavior charts and signs to remind students of positive behavior. In some cases, they are taught language they could use or scenarios of varying classroom interactions.

An organized classroom is a great place to model consistency and predictability. However, there must also be routines during the start and end of class that serve as an additional layer of reinforcement. Together students and staff contribute to making the classroom space one that promotes consistent behavior management.

❯❯ Reinforcements

Reinforcements are also a critical part of consistent behavior management. Most schools adopt a set of principles or values that serve as school wide standards for behavior expectations. There must be both school wide and classroom positive reinforcements for when those standards are met to encourage consistent behavior. For instance, some schools use weekly or monthly reward systems in the classroom as well as school wide to incentivize positive behaviors.

Teachers lead the learning so they must leverage the classroom environment in conjunction with targeted reinforcements to maintain a positive culture. Their guidance and consistent practice with meeting classroom expectations is a key part of behavior management. When teachers take the time to thoroughly instruct and model the expectations, students can and will follow.

2.2 Significance of Routine

Significance of routine is a critical factor to achieve learning success. As per KLA Schools, USA, as adults, our reaction to routine varies. Some of us rely on routine, while others feel it is dull. However, young children are different. Here are 4 reasons why routine is important for children which can be achieved through well designed timetable for students studying from home:

❯❯ Increased confidence and independence

According to Dr. Peter Gorski of *Harvard Medical School,* knowing what to expect from daily life develops a child's confidence. Being able to rely on past experiences in a safe environment allows children to feel comfortable.

❯❯ Greater self-control

If a child has no limits on when they can watch cartoons, for example, they may not learn that sometimes they have to turn the TV off in order to do something less fun. A routine helps your child understand the balance between enjoyable tasks such as play, and functional tasks such as brushing their teeth.

> ### Stress reduction
When a child has a predictable daily routine, it reminds them that they are in a secure, loving environment. If your child knows what they can reasonably expect to happen each day, they do not worry about "what if" scenarios and it is also easier for you to enforce rules. When your child knows what is expected of them, it will help to reduce their stress.

> ### Exposure to healthy habits
When a child routinely performs the same activities such as getting ready in the morning, studying at a certain time, taking a walk after dinner etc., it may seem like just an organized way to get things done on time. However, this repetition also creates habits around these healthy activities that your child can carry with them naturally into later life.

2.3 Development Learning Window

Human brains analyze and process information with an efficiency far beyond the world's fastest computer. Human brains have many different areas to control actions and thoughts. Brains develop and mature during different stages of life. Windows of opportunity are optimum periods for specific areas of development. These are the times when learning in specific areas can develop at an incredible rate.

What is going on in the brain when windows of opportunity are open? The brain is choosing to sustain certain kinds of connections, and at the same time deciding not to maintain connections of other areas.

There are times when specific kinds of learning must take place for a child to develop to the fullest. Windows are open at birth for sensory connections: (sight, hearing, touching), for basic motor skills, for developing attachments, and for learning language. These windows close at different times. The window for sight, for example, closes early. At first, a baby does not see much detail, cannot focus both eyes on a single object, cannot coordinate eyes and hands, and does not have any distance judgment. By the time a child reaches their first birthday, they have developed most of their visual skills. It is important that babies have proper eye examinations to determine if there are any concerns. Visual problems must be taken care of as quickly as possible in order for the brain to develop the necessary skills at the optimum time for brain connections to be made. Children who do not have the opportunity to see objects with details and varied textures, colors, patterns, and other attributes may have difficulty learning to read because they may have trouble visually with the details of letters: a 'b' looks just like a 'd', a 'c' looks just like an 'o', and so on. Making the most of these optimum learning times, the windows of opportunity, helps put children on the right track for learning.

These windows are only effective if there are effective environmental stimuli which the child can interact with.

Similarly, *primary education at the right development window is extremely important for children.* The role of primary education is to ensure the development of children. This means that all children are able to develop their social, cognitive, cultural, emotional and physical skills according to the best of their abilities. To get a quality primary education, it is important for children to experience continued learning.

2.4 Relevance in COVID-19 times

A top World Health Organization official warned that it is possible the new coronavirus is here to stay. It is said that the virus, without a vaccine, could take years for the global population to build up sufficient levels of immunity. While countries are at different points in their COVID-19 infection rates, worldwide there are currently more than 1.2 billion children in 186 countries affected by school closures due to the pandemic.

With this sudden shift away from the classroom in many parts of the globe, some are wondering whether the adoption of online learning will continue to persist post-pandemic, and how such a shift would impact the worldwide education market.

Even before COVID-19, there was already high growth and adoption in education technology, with global Edtech investments reaching US$18.66 billion in 2019 and the overall market for online education projected to reach $350 Billion by 2025. Whether it is language apps, virtual tutoring, video conferencing tools, or online learning software, there has been a significant surge in usage since COVID-19.

While some believe that the unplanned and rapid move to online learning – with no training, insufficient bandwidth, and little preparation – will result in a poor user experience that is unconducive to sustained growth, others believe that a new hybrid model of education will emerge, with significant benefits. "I believe that the integration of information technology in education will be further accelerated and that online education will eventually become an integral component of school education" says Wang Tao, Vice President of Tencent Cloud and Vice President of Tencent Education. Learning continuity has become even more important during the Covid-19 affected time.

2.5 Optimal Learning Timelines - Schedules that Work

From school pupils to civil services aspirants to doctoral students, all are engaging in online learning, happening across the spectrum of education institutions and the scale is mind-boggling. When it comes to schools, some of the best schools have created timetable for students as per their age, class and developmental needs. Some of the most praised learning schedules are shared below for reference:

Time Table - Grade II & III												
From	9.00	9.05	9.15	10.00	10.15	11.00	11.15		12.15	1.00		
To	9.05	9.15	10.00	10.15	11.00	11.15	12.00		12.45	1.30		
Monday			Block 1		Block 2		Block 3	End of Synchronous Learning	Small Group/Personalised Learning			
Tuesday	Setting Time	Morning Circle / MM	Literacy - English	Break & Movement Time	Numeracy	Break & Movement Time	Expedition		Group 1 and 2	Group 3 and 4		
Wednesday			Literacy - English		Numeracy		Literacy - Hindi		Group 5 and 6	Group 7 and 8		
Thursday			Literacy - English		Numeracy		Expedition		Group 1 and 2	Group 3 and 4		
Friday			Literacy - English		Numeracy		Literacy - Hindi		Group 5 and 6	Group 7 and 8		
Saturday			Literacy - English		Numeracy		Expedition		12.10-12.30 : Two students(one per teacher)	12.30-12.50 : Two students(one per teacher)	12.50-1.10 : Two students(one per teacher)	1.10-1.30 : Two students(one per teacher)

Please Note: Children will have the virtual classes from 9:00 a.m. to 12 p.m. From 12:15 p.m. teachers will have small group/ personalised one on one teaching sessions with the children. Each child will get an opportunity to have two small group sessions with the peers and teacher in each week. Each child will get a one on one session with the teacher once in a month.

Asynchronous Work will be for a duration of 90 minutes and will include work which the child can do at his own pace and time. The nature of work would be online, off line individual or collaborative in nature e.g.:- (MIM reflection, read aloud, reading from raz kids, math games/tasks, writing, PE, art and craft, yoga, Makers space, hands on projects)

Time Table is subject to change as it evolves over time. Any change in it will be notified well in advance.

Time Table - Grade Nursery, Kindergarten and I											
From	9.00	9.05	9.15	10.00	10.15		11.15	12.00			
To	9.05	9.15	10.00	10.15	11.00		11.45	12.30			
Monday			Block 1		Block 2	End of Synchronous Learning	Small Group/Personalised Learning				
Tuesday	Setting Time	Morning Circle / MM	Literacy	Break & Movement Time	Numeracy		Group 1 and 2	Group 3 and 4			
Wednesday			Literacy		Numeracy		Group 5 and 6	Group 7 and 8			
Thursday			Literacy		Numeracy		Group 1 and 2	Group 3 and 4			
Friday			Literacy		Numeracy		Group 5 and 6	Group 7 and 8			
Saturday			Literacy		Numeracy		11.10-11.30 : Two students(one per teacher)	11.30-11.50 : Two students(one per teacher)	11.50-12.10 : Two students(one per teacher)	12.10-12.30 : Two students(one per teacher)	

Please Note: Children will have the virtual classes from 9:00 a.m. to 11 a.m. From 11:15 a.m. teachers will have small group/ personalised one on one teaching sessions with the children. Each child will get an opportunity to have two small group sessions with the peers and teacher in each week. Each child will get a one on one session with the teacher once in a month.

Asynchronous Work will be for a duration of 75 minutes and will include work which the child can do at his own pace and time. The nature of work would be online, off line individual or collaborative in nature E.G:- MIM reflection, rhymes/songs, read aloud, reading from raz kids(KG and Grade 1), math games/tasks, writing, art and craft, PE, Maker's space (Grade 1)

Time Table is subject to change as it evolves over time. Any change in it will be notified well in advance.

(Source: The Heritage Xperiential Learning School, Gurugram)

2.6 Social and Emotional Learning

Tens of millions of students are dealing with high levels of anxiety in their daily lives with their schools closed for uncertain duration. Add to that fears over a pandemic that could sicken them or loved ones, students now more than ever need strong coping skills to adjust to this new reality that will likely, for many, extend through the end of the school year and beyond.

According to the ***Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning,*** an organization that works toward integrated social-emotional learning for preschool through high school, "Social and Emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions."

According to The Pennsylvania State University and ***Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*** research brief Social Emotional Learning in Elementary School, "extensive research shows that SEL programs can promote academic achievement and positive social behavior, and reduce conduct problems, substance abuse, and emotional distress. Benefits of SEL in the elementary years have been documented in reviews by independent research teams and through meta-analyses which demonstrate the immediate and long-term positive outcomes of well-designed, well-implemented SEL programming."

School is the place where students encounter the majority of their social interactions, challenges, and opportunities for personal growth. Such a narrow focus gives short shrift to the ways that children need to grow and learn in their relationships, identity, emotional understanding, and overall well-being. After all, children are multi-dimensional "whole" beings whose development is complex and rich.

School teachers have always provided way more than academic support to the students by taking care of their social-emotional learning. A research in neuroscience shows that:

» Brain development
is shaped by consistent, supportive relationships; responsive communications; and modeling of productive behaviors. The brain's capacity develops most fully when children and youth feel emotionally and physically safe; and when they feel connected, engaged, and challenged.

❯❯ Learning

is social, emotional, and academic. Positive relationships, including trust in the teacher, and positive emotions, such as interest and excitement, open up the mind to learning. Negative emotions, such as fear of failure, anxiety, and self-doubt, reduce the capacity of the brain to process information and learn. Children can build skills and awareness to work with emotions in themselves and their relationships.

❯❯ Adversity

poverty, housing and food insecurity, abuse, or neglect produces toxic stress that affects learning and behavior, but how schools respond matters. Positive, stable relationships when adults have the awareness, empathy, and cultural competence to understand and listen to children can buffer the effects of even serious adversity.

SYSTEMIC SAFEGUARDS

Despite the changes in school functioning and movement to online learning, many institutions and agencies have created a set of framework guidelines already, which give a sense of direction and don't and don'ts. Most notable framework guidelines are:

National level

• Ministry of Human Resource Development Guidelines

• Promotion of Technology-Driven Education by the Government

Global Level

• World Health Organization (WHO) Key Messages and Actions for COVID-19 Prevention & Control in School

• International Institute of Education Planning, UNESCO COVID-19 Education Framework

• Australian Government on Online Education

The summary of the framework guidelines is presented as below:

3.1 Framework Guidelines – National

≫ MHRD guidelines

On 8th June 2020, MHRD issued "Guidelines for Digital Education" which addresses need for digital education post COVID. The guidelines highlight the type of online education, online learning and teaching, possible modes of digital education etc. The document also includes guidelines for State's/ UT, Teachers, School Leaders, Students and Parents. For Children with special needs, following tips are shared:

• Select and use appropriate assistive technologies for CWSN

• Develop and use resources like audio books/ talking books, TTS, sign language videos, audio tactile materials etc.

• Use accessibility curriculum of NCERT

• Encourage students to watch the NIOS sign language TV channel

• Encourage online classes with customized activities, flexible schedule and involve parents, siblings, peers, special educators & volunteers

The guidelines also highlight operationalizing digital teaching:

• Adequate precaution to facilitate ICT infrastructure for teachers (laptops/ tablets, connectivity etc.) and encourage them to try different ICT tools in teaching learning and assessment.

- Interact regularly with teachers and parents (at least once a week) to get feedback

- Teachers may post a weekly announcement to provide an overview of the coming week's topic or a recap of the previous week's work, or both.

- Where parents are not in a position to support students in digital learning, suggest alternative support like peer learning and seeking help from the older siblings, identified local volunteers etc.

- Do not rush for the sake of completing the syllabus

- It should not be expected from teachers to be engaged in six to eight hours of online teaching in a day.

❯❯ Promotion of Technology-Driven Education by the Government

Several online education initiatives announced by the government to promote technology-driven education with quality post-COVID. Following key announcements were made for schools:

- One earmarked channel per class from 1 to 12 (one class, one channel)

- DIKSHA for school education in states/UTs: e-content and QR coded Energized Textbooks for all grades (one nation, one digital platform).

- New national curriculum and pedagogical framework for school, early childhood and teachers will be launched; integrated with global and 21st-century skill requirements.

- National Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Mission for ensuring that every child attains Learning levels and outcomes in grade 5 by 2020 will be launched by December 2020.

- Provision made for telecast of live interactive sessions on these channels with experts from home through Skype.

- Also tied up with private DTH operators like Tata Sky & Airtel to air educational video content to enhance the reach of these channels.

3.2 Framework Guidelines – Global

❯❯ WHO Key Messages and Actions for COVID-19 Prevention & Control in School

In March 2020, WHO released COVID-19 Prevention & Control in Schools. Along with the guidelines on how to make sure that schools are safe in school, the document mentions following plan for continuity of learning. In the case of absenteeism/sick leave or temporary school closures, support continued access to quality education. This can include:

- Use of online/e-learning strategies

- Assigning reading and exercises for home study

- Radio, podcast or television broadcasts of academic content
- Assigning teachers to conduct remote daily or weekly follow up with students
- Review/develop accelerated education strategies

❯❯ International Institute of Education Planning, UNESCO COVID-19 Education Framework

IIEP, UNESCO released contingency planning, risk reduction, preparedness and response framework which includes following:

- Develop context appropriate strategies for continuous learning that allow pupils, teachers and schools to utilize flexible and remote/ home-based learning, which may include homework assignments, reading material, Radio, TV, online content, and internet-based learning

- Digital Classrooms: Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, many others: While the requirements of good and consistent connectivity may be a barrier, these tools create a digital classroom environment, with multiple functionalities that recreate a physical classroom environment online, like group and individual activities and assignment functionalities, and classroom management options.

❯❯ Australian Government on Online Education

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) in Australia have mentioned that Online Learning is a good practice in a recent press briefing as under.

"TEQSA commends the sector's adaptability and resilience and its commitment to continuing to uphold the Higher Education Standards during the challenges presented by the pandemic. TEQSA is committed to working in partnership with the sector, and this endures in ordinary, and extraordinary, circumstances. We have recently produced guidance relating to online delivery of courses which details key considerations for providers in changes to mode of delivery."

3.3 Best Practices - Stanford Online High School

There are institutions such as Stanford Online High School ("SOHS" - it is a part of Stanford University), that has been using solely online delivery for their entire school for several years. As per the SOHS, some of the effective best practices in online learning:

❯❯ Multi-Video Screens

For many online classrooms, the use of multi-video (having all students appear on screen) can help create a seminar environment while also helping the instructor to track student engagement. Instructors adopt a variety of best practices.

❯❯ Text Chat

Text chat can be an invaluable tool for fostering and maintaining discussion in the online classroom. First-time instructors might initially find distracting the presence of a text chat that runs simultaneously with spoken discussion, but text can be made to serve the interests of the entire class.

❯❯ Breakout Rooms

Breakout rooms for small-group work enable instructors to generate student-driven discussion or problem-solving activities by removing the instructor from the centre of the classroom. As with multi-video, instructors often find that their practices evolve to meet the needs of a specific class.

❯❯ Presentation Slides

Many instructors utilize PowerPoint slides to guide students from one activity to another. Instructors find it useful to think even more carefully than they might in a conventional classroom about how much information individual slides convey and how that will affect the pacing of the class.

Instructor Presence

Establish teaching presence early and often:
• Post announcements, appear on video & participate in discussions
• Show your personality, passion and expertise

Clear Expectations

Help Students five straight into the content by providing them with:
• Detailed syllabus
• Due sates and schedule
• Clear assignment directions

Learning Objectives

Alignment matters! Be sure that:
• Course content aligns with objectives and assessment
• Extra content not directly supporting the learning objectives is removed or made optional

Real World Applications

Motivate students by making a real world connection:
• Show students how they will apply what they are learning personality, passion and expertise

BEST PRACTICES FOR TEACHING ONLINE

Prompt Feedback

Provide feedback to improve student outcomes:
• Reinforce important materials, concepts and skills
• Provide timely feedback students can apply during the course

Teach For Online Students

Orient students to the online course:
• Break learning into smaller chunks
• Establish a pattern of activity & due dates
• Describe expectations for online participations, communication and netiquette
• Provide technical support information

Engage Students

Quality interaction between students is a sign of successful class
• Create educational experiences for students that are challenging, enriching and that extend their academic abilities
• Provide students with opportunities to interact with peers such as through discussions & group work

360º PERSPECTIVE ON SCREEN TIME

Screen time is the amount of time spent using a device with a screen such as a smart phone, computer, television, or video game console. The concept is under significant research with related concepts in digital media use and mental health. Screens are used for work, education, communication and leisure. Due to their many uses, it is often difficult to measure or control the amount of time children spend using screens.

Small amounts of screen time can be useful and enjoyable for families. They can offer time for children to connect with others, be creative and learn. Screen time can keep children entertained, or distracted, and are used in educational settings by teachers. As a consequence of the pandemic, student screen time as exponentially increased due to online learning. This has raised concern amongst parents as they believe that their children have gone from moderated and supervised gadget use, to unrestricted and extended interface with digital devices.

As schools and regulators grapple with the idea of optimizing student's digital interface, it is important to understand medical viewpoints and contemporary outlook towards the idea of 'Screen Time'.

4.1 Understanding Screen Time

There are lots of amazing reasons for kids to use technology—in class, many kids learn with tablets and smart whiteboards, they research facts, they watch tutorials, collaborate with others, build relationships. They gain new skills, play and have fun, and use creative skills. All of these involve a certain amount of screen time.

One of the top experts on children and media - "Mediatrician" Dr. Michael Rich, Director of the Center on Media and Child Health at Boston Children's Hospital/ *Harvard Medical School* says:

"Screen time has become an obsolete concept in an era where we are surrounded by screens and move seamlessly between the digital and the physical to use them in virtually all human endeavors - learning, interacting, creating, and having fun. It is how we choose to use screens and to pursue non-screen activities; it is the content we consume on screens and the contexts in which we consume it that affects our well-being."

Measuring technology usage in terms of quantity rather than quality is also difficult. Children spend time on multiple devices in multiple places, sometimes in short bursts, and at other times with long connected usage. Calculating the

incalculable puts pressure on parents, who end up looking at the clock rather than their children. The term "screen time" is problematic to begin with. A screen can refer to an iPad used to Skype their grandparents, a Kindle for reading poetry, a television for playing video games, or a desktop computer for their homework. Most screens are now multifunctional, so unless we specify the content, context and connections involved in particular screen time activities, any discussion will be muddled and misguided.

4.2 Screen Time Classification

The seamless infusion of technology in all forms of human activity has created a lot of fluff around the duration of screen interface that is actually harmful. There are several situations wherein spending time on screen is essential and productive and should not be confused with screen time invested in avoidable activities such as binge watching, excessive gaming, aimless browsing etc. In general, when people spend a lot of time passively consuming information - reading but not interacting with people - they report feeling worse afterward.

It is therefore important to understand contrast between screen time spent on productive activities and screen time wiled away in leisure activities. Yolanda Reid Chassiakos, MD, who teaches pediatrics at the *University of California, Los Angeles,* and was the lead author of a 2016 American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) report on kids and media contributed immensely to the current AAP guidelines that say that for kids under 18 months, parents should avoid digital media, but the guidelines make an explicit exception for video chats.

The reason for the exception is that doctors are not worried about screens themselves, but about everything kids are not doing while they are looking at screens. For younger children, Reid Chassiakos explains, physical play in the three-dimensional world is crucial for brain development. So is social interaction. When kids are watching a video or tapping an app, these healthier activities get pushed aside. *Georgetown University* developmental psychologist Rachel Barr, PhD, says this displacement, which researchers call "technoference," is not as much of a problem with things like Skype and FaceTime because interaction with others is built-in to the experience of video chatting. There is someone on the other side of the screen and often on the same side, too, engaging with the child.

In a similar 2016 study, *Lafayette College* developmental psychologist Lauren Myers, PhD, and her colleagues used daily sessions of either FaceTime or prerecorded video to teach actions and made-up words to toddlers between 12 and 25 months. After a week, the oldest toddlers in the FaceTime group had learned more words than those watching prerecorded videos. Barr says

that virtual conversations can also help young children learn to take another person's point of view. When parents tell a child to hold a toy up to the camera so Grandma can see it better, or to move back from the screen so Daddy can see their whole face, they're actually giving sophisticated lessons about perspective.

Screen time can therefore be broadly classified as Productive or Unproductive wherein *productive screen time involves cognitive application and yields developmental benefits* while *unproductive screen time relates to aimless activities.* Parents and schools must understand that the time spent on live lessons through online classrooms has direct implications on the cognitive development of the child. The discussion should therefore be around regulating unproductive use of screen time that leads to unwanted developmental side effects.

4.3 Measuring & Moderating Screen Time

Researchers interested in studying the role of screen time in sedentary behavior have sought means of measuring the increasing amount of time that children and adolescents are using screens. A Statistics Canada report from 2016-2017 found that only 53% of Canadian children and youth aged 5-17 years met the recommendation of spending no more than two hours a day on screens. With so many exceeding the recommended screen time limits, it is important to accurately measure the amount of time spent on screens in order to study its effects.

Most parents today employ estimations rather than measuring the amount of screen time a child spends on core (learning) and non-core activities throughout the day. In the course of such estimations, parents have a tendency to inflate the time spent on unproductive activities. Objective measures are especially important in the study of screen time as subjective measures have been found to be inaccurate. For example, a study which compared parent reported to objective measures of physical activity and sedentary behavior found that parents overestimated their children's physical activity by 40 minutes a day and underestimated their sedentary/screen time by several hours. In certain scenarios, parents fail to take into account the sporadic nature of screen time their child is exposed to. It may well be the case that the child has had sufficient breaks and pauses during the course of their online learning which is also a key highlight of screen time recommendations by leading health and wellness bodies globally.

The **American Academy of Pediatrics** recommends screen time that is not video conferencing for learners and teachers should be:

• Ages 2–5: 1 hour, broken into sessions of a maximum of 30 minutes.

• Age 6 and above: no specific screen time limits, but screen time should not affect physical activity and face-to-face interactions at home and school. Consistent limits on screen time are important.

The **Department of School Education & Literacy, MHRD** recently released guidelines on digital education in consultation with State and Union Territory governments with a specific mention of moderated screen time (regardless of grades) as below: Guidelines for Teachers Keeping overall development in mind, the screen time may not be beyond 30 mins on alternate days for pre-primary and two sessions of 30-45 mins/day for elementary and four sessions 30-45 mins for secondary and higher secondary.

4.4 Global Best Practices on Screen Time

With the widespread disruption in student learning across the globe, interesting and efficient models of moderating student screen time have surfaced. In fact, school specific guidelines and recommendations have been circulated that categorically suggest measures to oversee and regulate student screen time invested in unproductive activities. Frameworks have been provided by leading organizations such as UNICEF and WHO that equally stress the importance of regulated online learning.

Application of these guidelines has given rise to some common themes and best practices that schools and parents seem to agree on unanimously. These have been listed hereunder:

» Active engagement and parental oversight
Legitimate reservations around the content of some video games and a range of online risks that might befall children playing them can be mitigated by active parenting strategies. These include talking to children about their online experiences; making sure they do not play games intended for an older audience; and observing their general mood and happiness as they play. Playing video games together with children is a good way to ensure that they stay safe.

》Physical activity in front of screens

Keep in mind that during a pandemic many children will not get the amount of physical activity that they are used to. If learning, socializing and play are, for now, confined to the screen, we need new ways to help children remain active. With restricted outdoor movement, the WHO has recommended active video games and online exercise classes as a way to stay healthy at home. This is a good solution because it provides both physical activity and entertainment. This advice is useful both during the COVID-19 pandemic but also when life goes back to normal.

》Limited Device Accessibility

Keep devices with screens out of your child's bedroom after bedtime especially for young children, and do not allow a TV and other digital devices in your child's bedroom. Use parental controls to block or filter internet content.

》Scrutinize & Communicate

Ask your child regularly what programs, games and apps he or she has played with during the day. When watching programs with your child, discuss what you are watching and educate him or her about advertising and commercials

Unstructured playtime is more valuable for a young child's developing brain than is electronic media. Children younger than age 2 are more likely to learn and remember information from a live presentation than they are from a video. Also, parents must act, keeping in mind that the quality of the media the child is exposed to is more important than the type of technology or amount of time spent.

4.5 Expert Opinion on Screen Time

Blanket statements about the ill effects of online learning on young students have been doing the rounds almost as long as the online learning has emerged. However, recent guidelines from the *Royal College of Pediatrics and Child Health* in the UK said that evidence that time in front of a screen has negative effects on children is 'contested' and that 'evidence of harm is often overstated'. Their study also revealed that the evidence is so weak that it was impossible to issue recommended thresholds for parents to limit their children's screen time. In the absence of this evidence, researchers agreed that young children should not be exposed to screen time an hour before their bedtime.

After studying children ages 4 to 11 on their use of screen time, a *University of Michigan study* found that how children use the devices, not how much time they spend on them, is the strongest predictor of emotional or social problems connected with screen addiction. There is a fine line between passive screen time, defined as when a child passively consumes digital content with no thought, creativity or interaction required to progress, and active screen time,

which involves cognitive thought and/or physical engagement. As long as kids are actively using their screens, the problems that come with passive screen use can be avoided.

In a longitudinal study of Australian students investing in active screen time, the **Australian Government** posits that there are actually two types of active screen use: physical and cognitive. Kids can actually get similar benefits to physical exercise when they play with active digital games. Playing active games has been proven to have similar effects to moderate walking, skipping and jogging. There are also plenty of active screen uses that spark the cognitive side of the brain.

The Canadian Pediatric Society conducted a similar study to conclude that children respond to activity-based programming when it is fun, designed for them and encourages imitation or participation. These can include learning a new skill like coding games or websites, creating music, writing and publishing stories or poetry, or simply anything else that requires them to use the creative side of their brains.

Research psychologist and author **Jordan Shapiro** suggests in his book "The New Childhood" that rather than worrying about early and inconclusive findings of ongoing research, parents should teach their kids how to use screens with integrity. In his book, Shapiro suggested it is more important to focus on how kids use screens rather than the frequency of use. Shapiro attributed people's fear of too much screen time to the fear previous generations had about too much television time. But not all screens are "passive" devices like television, so the concept may not be applicable to newer screen technologies, like computers or smart phones. Instead of assuming screens will ruin a child's life, Shapiro said parents should focus on making their kids the best possible versions of themselves in the digital world. To do this, he suggested parents partake in screen time activities with their kids in order to model and help their child understand ethical, appropriate behavior in the digital age.

SUGGESTED SCHOOL SCHEDULE DURING COVID-19 IMPACTED PERIOD

Keeping all factors and perspectives into consideration, a suggested school schedule during the Covid-19 impacted period is presented here. It has 3 components across class levels.
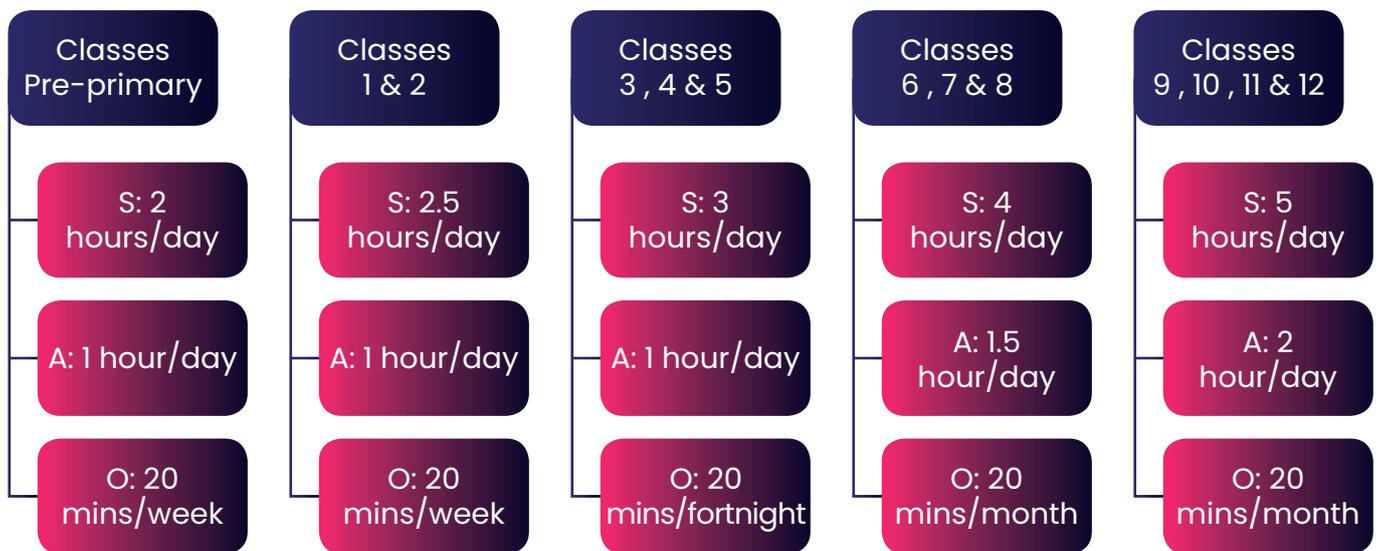
» Synchronous Learning
it refers to a learning event in which a group of students are engaging in learning at the same time.

» Asynchronous Learning/ Home work/ Independent work
it refers to a learning event in which teachers provide materials, lectures, tests, and assignments etc. that can be accessed by the students through digital medium.

» One-to-One Learning
It refers to the learning event where student interacts with the teachers individually.

Classes Pre-primary	Classes 1 & 2	Classes 3 , 4 & 5	Classes 6 , 7 & 8	Classes 9 , 10 , 11 & 12
S: 2 hours/day	S: 2.5 hours/day	S: 3 hours/day	S: 4 hours/day	S: 5 hours/day
A: 1 hour/day	A: 1 hour/day	A: 1 hour/day	A: 1.5 hour/day	A: 2 hour/day
O: 20 mins/week	O: 20 mins/week	O: 20 mins/fortnight	O: 20 mins/month	O: 20 mins/month

The suggested schedule incorporates various perspectives as mentioned in this report and attempts a reasonable balance.

SUMMARY

Online learning for young children in schools is an area that has received widespread acceptance and fair share of criticism. A close examination of facts, best practices and expert views reveals that online learning for all age groups is here to stay. *Online learning is the only strategy that schools possess to ensure continuity in learning and personalized learning journey for each student.* There is worldwide acceptance of the benefits of the online learning that further the cause of quality education however, the limitations of online learning must also be recognized.

School educators, policy makers and regulators must focus on staying the course even under the pressure of outbreaks. Keeping student interests in mind, schools must ensure that learning continuity is maintained until full operations are resumed. Online learning techniques today have evolved substantially and can be channelized to assist with the student's cognitive development as it is clear that *learning consistency, routine and developmental learning window are important factors for children of young ages.* In fact, leading schools across the world have employed the latest in online learning and designed systems that address the obvious reservations related to virtual environments and target even the social and emotional learning of their students.

Leading medical and child welfare organizations have now assumed a more supportive position of the idea of online learning. Organization such as *WHO, UNESCO and IIEP have come out with new guidelines that provide an extensive framework on how to employ online learning techniques in an ethical and productive manner.* The push for online education from local and global governments is substantial and is a clear indicator of the renewed understanding amongst leaders and reformers of the countries. It is clear that the common understanding now is that online learning can yield credible results provided it is administered and monitored in the right way with the help of systemic safeguards.

Concerns around screen time have now been deliberated upon enough to prove that the quality screen time must be encouraged. While it is widely agreed that children must be allowed to engage in physical activities, it is also possible to ensure that young children do so with the help of online coaches or embedded bursts of free time. All stakeholders must approach the screen time issue from an objective viewpoint and differentiate active and passive screen usage. Experts have clearly mentioned that it is the passive, mindless and mechanical use of screen time on activities such as aimless social media browsing, binge watching and excessive gaming that inflict much more damage on young, developing minds than productive and cognitive activities such as investigative and experiential learning. Hence, *rules, regulations or guidelines must consider the 'good or bad screen usage time' rather than 'good or bad screen time'.*

Schools must now be more ready than ever to leverage online learning and ensure that students continue to grow and develop as they ought to. With no end to the pandemic in sight, online learning is the only way to render education to children of all ages. If the policy makers, regulators and schools can collaborate to share best practices and learn from each other around the globe, they can efficiently and swiftly cover the lost ground and provide high quality education to all students.

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