

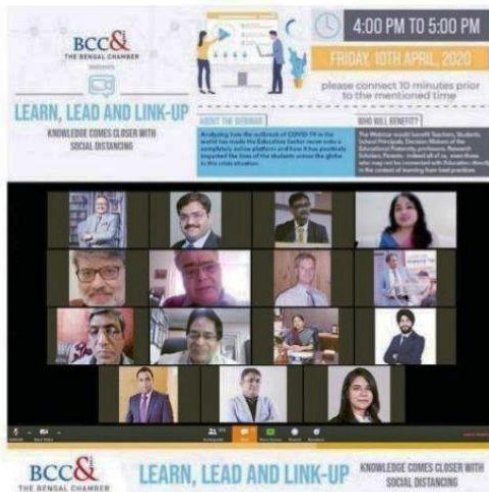
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Webinar on "Learn, Lead, and Link-up: Knowledge Comes Closer with Social Distancing" organized by The Bengal Chamber on 10th April, 2020.



OINDRILA GUPTA

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has completely shaken lives as mankind are being forced to think anew and start afresh. The education sector is witnessing dynamic changes during these times of crisis as the lockdown situation has made "digital renaissance" a reality overnight. Getting with the times, The Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Kolkata, recently organised a webinar titled Learn, Lead and Link-up: Knowledge Comes Closer with Social Distancing. Its aim was to focus on the impact of Covid-19 outbreak on education and explore how academic experts are planning to tackle it. Sumit Dasgupta, founder-director, Allcap Communication Committee, Bengal Chamber, moderated the discussions. Suborno Bose, chairperson, edu-

cation committee, The Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry and chief mentor, IIHM, opened the session, saying, "It is a positive sign that education has still managed to continue inspite of the lockdown. Online training has come in a big way. All the stakeholders of Bengal Chamber, universities and institutions are doing their best to focus on this medium. We are actually moving ahead of time, making technology an integral part of mainstream learning process."

Speaking about how this year will remain a landmark in actual transition from classroom to virtual medium, Dhrubojyoti Chattopadhyay, vice chancellor, Sister Nivedita University, said, "The idea of online education in India was being toyed with for almost 10 years now. It was still far from being applied in real life. The pandemic turned it into an absolute necessity.

‘Moving ahead of time’

The Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry organised a webinar with focus on the impact of Covid-19 outbreak on education and how academic experts are tackling it

Now everyone has embraced online education. There is no other valid substitute for contact classes. Also, institutions are playing a massive role in coming up with innovative teaching methods. With online education, both attendance and active participation of students have improved, assignments have become more interesting."

Since 2017, JIS group has introduced flip learning where smart class with teachers giving in-depth presentation involving texts, graphics, animations and video clips of different subjects took teaching methodology to an innovative level. The college has also decided to do away with end-of-semester examinations.

Another thought explored if this is just a temporary adjustment or a tectonic shift that the education sector is undergoing because of the present crisis?

"We have been following the flip learning method since last three years and so, when the lockdown happened, our teachers were more digitally equipped than others. We are very keen to adapt this new technology of learning and I'm sure after this lockdown, distance learning will be 10x to 20x faster than other countries. At the end of the day every teaching sector's main outlook is to create socially responsible citizens," said Simarpreet Singh, director, JIS Group.

However a change of mindset is immensely important to complement the progress of technology. "Blended learning is the need of the day but without change in mindset no positive shifts will be possible. Everyone, from the ground to the topmost level, has to work as a team to facilitate inclusive learning," said Miraj Digvijay Shah, vice chairman, Bhawanipur Education Society College.

Speaking about the biggest challenges of online learning during the

lockdown, Saikat Maitra, vice chancellor, MAKAUT, said, "Over the last few years, we are into online education system. Government of India is also pushing the online education system as a significant aspect.

Now the scenario has compelled us to use all the digital resources in the best possible way. The main challenge is to self learn. Most of the times students drop their interests and thus, we need to design problems and projects in such a way so that students can adopt this skill and concept sitting at home. However, if the proper mindset is there then no barrier can stop us."

The webinar included students, teachers, faculty members and leading educationists. Special addresses were made by David Foster, professor at IIHM London; David Graham, Sheffield, Halem University, UK; Debanjan Chakraborti, director, East and North East India, British Council; Antonius Raghubansie, director and learning services, British Council India; and Bharati Bhattacharya, secretary general and CEO, Shikshayatan Foundation, among others. It was a truly enlightening, creative and intriguing meet as all kinds of perspectives were welcomed.

