Lockdown: Online Classes - Let's plan, not ban

For months now, young children have had to limit their social interactions, especially in urban areas. For the first time in my 20-year engagement with education, I truly believe that digital and other forms of technology could be the key for learning to continue. But let's not close the window of opportunity to create a safe, creative online learning environment for all children.

For us, at EkStep, which have together worked with tens of millions of young children, there has never been a time when learning had to stop. We cannot level down in the name of equality. We must level up. Perfection will not happen overnight. We need to think ahead for the next pandemic or climate change related event that would create the next disruption to the school system.

The lockdowns have prompted a vast migration to online platforms by both students and teachers. However, with no proper plan to resume school routines, we must find other ways to keep children curious and learning. Online interactive sessions could be one element of this accustomed learning environment.

Ironically, the Union government and many states, too, have embraced digital technology for education course material. In Jharkhand, government schoolteachers make house visits to demonstrate the use of course material. In Himachal Pradesh, training is provided into smaller, cohesive groups at the parents' mutually convenient times.

There are already improvements through television and radio. As they continue to expand digital platforms, we must ensure that all children have, and the preferred methodologies for making the screen time engaging. Online playgrounds. Now, the state government has banned them from resuming their social interaction online, for months.

I pray that my state government will have a rethink on the total ban on online learning. I hope it will see this as an opportunity to rethink, re-examine and re-imagine the learning landscape. For months, the children have had to cut down on their social interactions, especially in urban areas. For the first time, children have had to learn to read, write and speak in the absence of their peers.

Together, we now need to think ahead and plan for an uncertain future. We must build a flexible and resilient system for children's learning. The pandemic has exposed the digital divide and the disparities in children's learning experiences. We cannot let this moment pass without creating a new learning infrastructure that is accessible to all children. A part of this digital platform will have a focus on maintaining learning. Any child with special education needs should continue to receive appropriate support in the virtual environment.

The pandemic has also highlighted the role of technology in education. We cannot let this moment pass without creating a new learning infrastructure that is accessible to all children.

I am a firm believer in the power of technology for learning. Let's not miss this opportunity to create a safe, creative online learning environment for all children.