

India (Nagaland): Tele/Online Education Programme

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The coronavirus crisis led schools and universities to rapidly transition to a distance-learning mode, via the Internet, television or radio. This series documents some country initiatives that ensured education continuity for all using technology and provided support to teachers, students, and their families.

General description

Tele/Online education programme is an initiative by the Directorate of School Education (DoSE), Nagaland to support the learning of public school students, and make up for the loss of instructional days due to school closures resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the *first phase* of the programme that rolled out in April 2020, TV and radio education was offered through the regional public television (Doordarshan, Kohima) and the regional public radio (All India Radio, Kohima). This constituted an immediate response strategy that could maximize access for students and retain them in the school system, especially those from disadvantaged background in this tribal majority state. It focused on video and audio lessons on key subjects for secondary and senior secondary school stages (grades 8, 9, 10, and 12).

In the *second phase*, that rolled out in May 2020, the DoSE expanded to digital content distribution through a dedicated YouTube channel and offered audio and video lessons for students in upper primary school stage (grades 5, 6, and 7).

The broadcasts are conducted daily in three-hour slots. The schedule of the broadcasts is organised so that each day of the week is devoted to a different theme. Moreover, each lesson lasts 30 minutes, followed by another lesson of 30 minutes in a different subject, thereby trying to keep the videos short and diverse to make the lessons more engaging for students.



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The programme was set up within a week, allowing for education continuity three weeks after the school closure.

There are two innovative aspects of this initiative that merit specific attention:

1. *Ongoing creation of local, contextualised digital content in a state that had limited digital content repositories in the past:* For the first phase of television/radio tutoring, the DoSE hired in-service private- and public-school teachers having subject proficiency to record video/audio lessons aligned with the state curriculum from its headquarters in Kohima. In the second phase, the DoSE used the content created from the first phase, and also invited volunteers from the general public to submit curriculum-aligned video lessons over email. An incentive mechanism was also instituted for rewarding good content.
2. *Online students' evaluation programme:* To incentivise the use of digital content distributed through various channels (TV/Radio/Online), the DoSE created a web-based evaluation portal within a few weeks, trusted students to take evaluations without proctors, and offered a combination of rewards and recognition to well performing students as well as schools.

Main problems addressed

- *Reaching the students early, and maximising outreach.* The initiative was started in April 2020, within days of the announcement of the closure of schools, and the medium identified (public television and public radio) for transmission and broadcasting of these video and audio lessons was implemented with the aim of supporting equity and inclusion. The problem was to ensure that children, even in the remote areas of the state of Nagaland, have uninterrupted access to these lessons.
- *Addressing issues of accessibility.* The DoSE was proactive in addressing accessibility issues in terms of the equipment of students, parents and teachers. The District Education Officers, Sub Divisional Education Officers, and School leaders are working in association with District Administration in each district to make necessary arrangements so that the broadcast of these lessons can be viewed or listened to at a common place such as a village hall, school auditorium etc. Students who do not have access to television or radio at home could thus benefit from the lessons.
- *Supporting educators and parents.* In order to support the educators/parents better in helping the students, the Directorate of School Education of Nagaland also created grade-wise DVDs/Pen Drives of the entire telecast, and distributed them to interested parents, teachers and schools at a nominal charge. Accessing the lessons at their convenience allowed for the revisiting and better understanding of the lessons for students (or educators/parents). Given the level of equipment in the state, an online repository was not an appropriate option.

Mobilising and developing resources

- *Content for broadcast lessons.* In the first phase (TV/Radio tutoring), the DoSE invited applications from the subject teachers in the region: 23 teachers from a pool of 50 applications were selected through a screening process, which included 11 teachers from public schools and 12 teachers from private schools in and around Kohima. They were guided by the DoSE officials in their task of delivering lessons in a temporary studio that was set up at the DoSE headquarters. A private production unit was allocated the responsibility for producing the audio/video recordings. The videos were shot well ahead of the proposed date of the telecast to provide sufficient time to educators to prepare for the lessons.
- *Content for online distribution and use of educators outside the school system.* The DoSE tapped into the expertise of educators from the state as well as from other parts of the country for curating

content. For this purpose, the Department released a notification. It solicited interested educators to shoot an original video of 20 minutes for several lessons/topics that would then be available on DoSE's YouTube channel and Facebook page. In order to incentivise educators, the Department also proposed to reward the best video recordings and honour the producers of all the videos that would be selected for broadcast with certificates of appreciation.

- *Access channels.* In order to make sure parents, teachers, and students have access to the videos as per their convenience and are able to make the best use of the online lessons, all the videos telecast through Doordarshan were made public on social media. For this purpose, the DoSE shared all the videos with the public through the creation of the [School Education Nagaland](#) page on Facebook and the YouTube channel [DoSE Nagaland](#). This also helped students outside the state of Nagaland to utilise the lessons according to their needs.
- *Well planned schedules.* The schedules for the broadcast of the audio and video lessons for the entire duration of one month were prepared in advance. They were shared in the first week of the month to help the broadcasters prepare well and for the educators to adjust their routine in accordance with the timings of the digital lessons. They also provided the students with the opportunity to prepare in advance for the lessons that were to be broadcast.

Most of the content resources were thus newly developed during the crisis, mobilising existing teachers and educators through new mechanisms. The new distribution channels were also newly developed.

Fostering effective use and learning

The following efforts were initiated to foster effective use and learning of the tele/online education programme in the state of Nagaland.

- *Supplementary study material.* To help the students make effective use of the digital lessons, the department requested the schools to devise a mechanism for preparing and circulating notes to the students for the broadcast lessons. This was meant to further help the students to enhance their learning through the audio/video lessons.
- *Online Assessment.* As the conventional tools of evaluation could not be used during this period of crisis, the department developed the Online Students Evaluation Portal <https://dosenl.in>. The portal was developed to ensure device compatibility across form factors (Mobile/Laptop/PC) and is light enough to be accessed via second-generation (2G) cellular networks. The objective of these evaluations is to incentivise engagement of students with digital content, and not to use them as summative assessments.

Two tests, designed as 20 multiple choice questions to be answered within 45 minutes are planned to be conducted during June 2020 for every subject, based on the video lessons broadcast in the previous month. The evaluation schedule will be announced to students in advance so that they could view the video lessons again and prepare well for the assessment. The portal will be activated during specified schedules only, allowing students to take the tests after they provide their enrolment details. The results and the number of students appearing for online assessment will be made publicly available to ensure remedial measures can be taken by engaged parents and/or educators. A combination of rewards and recognition to well performing students as well as schools is planned as incentives that could also motivate all other students and schools.

- *Engagement with students.* During the school closure, teachers are requested to engage with students and discuss the lessons, help them by providing explanations and clarifications regarding the lessons. They use easily available media such as WhatsApp or text messages.

Implementation challenges

Few of the implementation challenges and the measures deployed to resolve them are discussed below:

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- *Identifying broadcast partners.* Selecting broadcasting partners quickly from the private sector market within a government setup might still take several weeks of contracting process. DoSE decided to choose public broadcasting platforms (Doordarshan, and All India Radio), ensuring a speedy collaboration with government agencies for broadcasting its video/audio lessons. This also led to greater accessibility even in remote areas within a short time frame.
- *Access through private cable services.* A related challenge with broadcasting is about households that access TV services via private cable services or DTH connections that might not air government channels for free. The DoSE is working with the federal Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to identify ways to ensure that Doordarshan Kohima satellite transmission gets included in the telecast list of private operators.
- *Engaging students outside of home settings.* The Naga society suffers from pockets of extreme poverty with many households without a TV or a radio set at home. One of the key risks of TV/Radio tutoring strategies was the exclusion of students from these households, with the potential to wipe out the gains in equitable access made by public school systems over several decades. To mitigate this challenge, a deep engagement strategy was rolled out in collaboration with district and sub district officials, and school leaders. As mentioned above, it entailed solutions such as organising video/audio lessons in village or community halls, in school auditoriums etc. To comply with the social distancing norms and to ensure that children do not group in large numbers in school/village council halls, where the telecasting can be viewed, the broadcast schedule was prepared in such a way that only two grades will be having the lessons on a particular day.
- *Communication.* Well-intentioned efforts, even with reasonable deployment of resources, might not work without a coordinated communication strategy that reaches all stakeholders with timely and actionable information. The DoSE effectively utilised features provided by social media and timely government notifications to publicly disseminate content, schedules, evaluation plan, and other information relevant to digital learning. The DoSE also proactively issued communication within the Department so that all district and sub-district officials could effectively coordinate implementation of the digital lessons without confusion or misinterpretation of information.

Monitoring success

For a recovery strategy of a school education system that needs to dynamically evolve and adapt amidst a raging pandemic, monitoring success is difficult. Some of the measures deployed by the government are to consistently monitor the subscription numbers on social media channels and to call for user feedback. Within four weeks, DoSE's Facebook page had 6 848 followers and the YouTube channel registered 17 600 subscribers. In addition, the data gathered from the online evaluation system should allow a more nuanced understanding of the impact of DoSE's efforts.

Adaptability to new contexts

Some of the lessons from the initiatives in Nagaland could be useful in similar resource-constrained environments where access to the Internet remains challenging.

Most of the interventions in Nagaland are low cost and rely on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation strategies to drive community participation in curation of content and dissemination of educational material.

A strong administrative coordination mechanism forms the backbone of these efforts which has been implemented in a short time frame.

The DoSE has also proposed to carry forward this initiative even after the schools re-open, so that students can make best use of the expertise and experiences of the teachers who came together to build a digital education model that never existed before. The story of Nagaland, unfolding over less than three months,

showcases how an opportunity presented by the crisis to ‘build back better’ was created by the efforts of a dedicated government system.

Key points to keep in mind for a successful adaptation

1. **Perfect is the enemy of the good.** Devise a multi-channel dissemination strategy, and roll it out as soon as possible with scope for continuous adaptation. Use available options first (such as government broadcasters of radio/TV), followed by channels that need additional efforts to set up and execute. When evaluations are critical to incentivise content use and monitor success, an imperfect assessment platform is better than not having any.
2. **The best solutions lie in your neighbourhood.** When it comes to content, there is nothing better than trusting one’s own hyperlocal context. It is possible to crowdsource good content which is contextual, provided the right incentives and quality control mechanisms are in place.
3. **Emphasise communication and coordination.** Best strategies fail without communication to engage stakeholders and without coordinating with people who can get the job done. Working in collaboration with district and sub-district administration as well as school leaders to identify and resolve issues of scalability and accessibility goes a long way. Digital broadcasts require an extra layer of coordination to schedule transmissions accurately in advance, ensuring that the scheduling is not repetitive and communicated effectively.
4. **Support students and teachers.** The “last-mile” requires support. Providing supplementary materials such as notes, assessments, and engaging students and teachers with easily available media such as text messages or WhatsApp may be useful. Helping students and parents to engage with teachers regarding better understanding of lessons and providing them social and emotional support is also critical.

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