

# THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATOR IN THE AGE OF THE 'NEW NORMAL'



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he style and concept of teaching and learning in the current context has undergone drastic changes with the

development of information and communication technology, and even more so now, by the many incidents taking place across the globe recently, which has changed all aspects of our

lives as we know it. The Covid-19 pandemic is an unexpected and common enemy, and we are all pitted against it, fighting for survival. Medical and health care has become one of the top priorities of the world, while the other sectors halt its processes, until society is deemed normal again. However, due to the impacts of Covid, the education sector too, is facing many rapid changes. Most of them heavily contribute towards the development of inter-communication

methods and facilitate distance learning. With the pandemic broadening our space bubble, emphasizing on social distancing, which in most sectors could pose to be problematic, in the education arena, this factor is immaterial as technologically mediated, new teaching and learning methods were swiftly identified and already in existence. Prior to Covid, the sector of education was heavily dependent on in-class, conventional teaching and



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learning, with little to no attention or resources allocated to technologically mediated education methodologies. Thus, the swift adaptation of technologically mediated teaching and learning was indeed a revolutionary step in the education sector especially in third world countries. Sri Lanka as a fast-developing country, under

normal circumstances, would have taken more time to shift to online and distance teaching from its original form of face to face teaching and learning. However, because of this pandemic, the paradigm shift from face to face teaching to online teaching was rapid and educators and learners were forced to adopt themselves, to teach and learn on

various online platforms. Necessity certainly is the mother of invention; thus, the local education sector gained a strong advantage, regardless of the worldwide adversity. The positive impact was less palpable in the west, however, as they had already established a good practice in this distance teaching and were well equipped with advanced

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tele-communication facilities, with their people well integrated netizens, with networks across the globe through online platforms, thus, this context became a minor influential factor in the education sector, in that part of the world.

Taking into consideration the current learning trends, blended teaching is becoming more popular among young learners and academics and many reputed universities have transformed their delivery mode into blended teaching and learning techniques. Blended learning facilitates face to face collaboration plus online, distance learning. The perfect blend of both mediums generates many advantages. In terms of the curriculum, there are certain parts which could be delivered undoubtedly through online teaching platforms and those subject areas do not require in class presence or practical sessions. Blended teaching and learning could create more collaborations than face to face because it enables networking across the world. Furthermore, this method conserves time, enabling learners to engage in various other activities and skills building whilst gaining an education. Thus, the use of digital technologies, digital tools and integrated techniques in teaching and

learning are fast becoming popular in this era.

Students are digital natives and they are born and raised in an era with advanced technological features. But most of the teachers and facilitators are still under the category of digital immigrants who have many physical and psychological barriers in adopting to advanced technologies. Digital natives very easily absorb and handle smart devices and technologies and the development of information and communication systems are not a challenge to them because they have the ability to seamlessly understand and utilize them for their needs. On the other hand, digital immigrants take more time to understand and absorb technology and this fact creates a barrier between the learner and the facilitator. This scenario is rather different in the western context as their digital literacy is at a higher standard. However, now we have commenced shifting our teaching paradigm to blended learning and Covid-19 was a blessing in disguise to the education sector.

The anatomy of education has started to change, and it is evolving day by day. The learning needs of students are also becoming more complicated. Furthermore, the environment in which we have to teach and learn also creates many challenges. The satisfaction of the students on their learning outcomes in blended learning platforms are debatable, and the real outcomes are yet to be determined. It is undoubtedly true that social interaction is also an inseparable part of education. The learner will never develop with theoretical knowledge alone. The learning process is enhanced through reflection in action. Therefore, social interaction, balance between extracurricular activities and education play a vital role in creating a competent graduate. Therefore, we cannot rely completely on distance teaching, we, as educators have a responsibility to strike a balance and establish a middle ground to educate our novice learners and help them become real knowledge icons in this revolutionary era.

**By Archt. Upeksha Hettithanthri**

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