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## Personalised Learning through Technology

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Shantanu Rooj, CEO, Schoolguru

Education is an organic process where every learner learns at his own pace. 'Technology Enabled Learning' stands for flexibility, freedom, choice, personalisation and individualisation. Shantanu Rooj, CEO, Schoolguru, talks with Elets News Networks (ENN), about the benefits of technological learning that frees up students from the rigors of the classroom

**Is reservation in higher education defeating the very purpose of imparting the best possible education to meritorious candidates?**

Reservation by caste, in higher education, is an old practice and has outlived its purpose. The main purpose of introducing the reservation was to provide an opportunity to the extremely backward classes of the society, mainly the SC/ST students, to rise and

come up to the level where they can compete with the upper class students, who were assumed to be the privileged. However, after the cabinet decision to expand the reservation quota to include the OBC students without considering the case of the creamy layer, the purpose seems to have shifted from the 'upliftment of the classes' to 'securing of the vote bank'. The decision of the Supreme Court seems to be in the right direction, as it directs the government to remove the quota from higher education in general, especially in highly specialised streams like medical services, thereby ensuring that the best possible training is provided to the meritorious students, thereby creating a 'Competent India'.

Reservation seldom helps the needy but at the same time it creates another privileged section, the creamy layer, which suppresses its own community. Reservations, if at all needed, should be for the needy based on several other factors and not the caste. The effective use of financial subsidy provided to the challenged class as scholarships can bridge some part of the gap. The concept of reservation, very often, denies an equal opportunity to the meritorious, the deserving, the efficient, the qualified and the truly needy, an opportunity to avail the right education or the job.

**'Access' to all & 'Quality' of education are the major fault lines in the education system in India. What role can technology play in bridging these fault lines?**

Technology can play a decisive role in ensuring the accomplishment of the above-mentioned initiatives. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) amongst the 18- 23 year olds is at a meagre 22 per cent as per a report of the MHRD. Filling the gap would require us to create large physical infrastructure and the appropriate number of educators in a very short period. Looking at the budget allocations to the education sector, this clearly does not seem to be the priority or the strategy of the government. Moreover, creation of a large number of well-qualified and well-trained teachers require time, in addition to financial resources.

Technology, with its several variants like online learning, mobile learning and blended learning, has the potential to reach out to the masses, the deprived, the challenged and the under-privileged much faster than the classroom model of education. The smartphone and the Internet revolution sweeping the country, come as an advantage and should be able to boost the purpose.



**Being into the technology-enabled learning space, how your organisation can contribute in bridging the education fault lines?**

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**“ The Indian education sector is attracting different nationalities and is actually addressing the need of the market because of the population of the Indian community. It's growing very fast, attracting the needs, and working hard towards the quality education ”**

**Kalthoom Al Balooshi**  
Executive Director, Education Development, Knowledge and Human Development Authority, Dubai

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Schoolguru, as an organisation, has been built around the simple philosophies of helping students get Access (available to the students on demand), Equity (affordable and flexible as per the profile of the students) and Excellence (high quality learning outcome without any differentiation) in higher education. We believe that the online audio-visual medium has the potential to bring in ondemand high quality education, taught by the top educators from

across the world, at the doorsteps of the students.

To help the rural youth, various initiatives of the Indian Government in this line, are a testimony to the same. However, to make them employable beyond basic literacy skills, the higher education infrastructure of the country needs a lot of overhauling.

Keeping in mind the efforts and time required to prune up the physical infrastructure, we believe that the 'online' and the 'virtual' medium of education can quickly fill up the void without compromising on the quality of education. Various reports published across the world (Report on NMEICT of the Government of India and the report on the potential of Online Education by the US Department of Education) are corroborative of the fact that this audiovisual medium has immense potential, if delivered well, to deliver high quality, highly interactive, yet highly flexible learning to the masses.

#### How technological transformations and innovative learning tools can change the education landscape in India in the coming decade?

The several technological innovations taking place in this domain of education are set to change the way quality education is imparted by universities. With some help from Schoolguru, several Indian universities like SNTD Women's University (Mumbai), Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (Guwahati), Tamil Nadu Open University (Chennai) and The University of Burdwan (West Bengal) have implemented such student-friendly technologies and have proven their focus.

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The students of these universities have access to audio-visual course content on their smartphones through a hybrid android app, thereby taking away the two biggest impediments of online education – the availability of a computer and an Internet connection. These universities have adopted several initiatives like launching their own MOOCs programmes, taking initiatives to strengthen their student support services by setting up a call center, providing the highly interactive mobile app to all students, helping them with analytics on their progress, conducting virtual classroom sessions for live interactions and promoting social learning.

Schoolguru also believes that the social media has a great inherent potential to change the way people learn. Online learning can be made more effective by the right use of social and peer learning.

Several universities in India have started adopting the technologyenabled learning platforms to assist their classroom education. Availability of good quality educators in the interior parts of the country has always remained a challenge. Colleges and universities located in smaller towns and cities find it very difficult to attract and retain the right talent. The use of the right technology can help these institutions fill this gap and complement the classroom education.

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