

## LEARNERS' ATTENTION IN "SCHOOL ON-SCREEN"

Yasha Sharma\*  
Dr. Jipsy Malhotra\*\*

### ABSTRACT

*The COVID-19 pandemic wave has completely transformed the education sector. The temporary shut down of educational institutions and shifting to E-learning and remote teaching was one of the pivotal steps taken to break the chain of the spread of the virus. While wading through these adverse situations, lots of reflections and views emerged regarding the pros and cons of E-learning and its impact on the learners. One of the major factors that popped up was learner's attention in online classes as the traditional face-to-face teaching shifted to "School On-Screen". This paper aims to look at how this transition affected the attention of learners and the steps an educator can take to maintain positive and productive levels of student attention.*

*Keywords: Learners' attention, Online learning, Online teaching, Teaching-learning content, Online teaching aids, E-learning*

### INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has influenced almost all domains of human life. No professional sector has been left unaffected and similarly the education sector is no different. E-learning was always a prospective approach in the sector, but this transition was expedited and the entire education sector had to adapt to the "E-Learning Way". Online learning environments are divisible into many categories, some of them being asynchronous, synchronous & hybrid learning environments. The Asynchronous modes are not time bound and are often self-paced for the students whereas synchronous learning environments are time bound and have real-time interaction. Hybrid learning environment is a mixture of asynchronous and synchronous types. Learning, both online and offline, possesses some learning objectives that need to be attained for achieving learning outcomes. However, one of the major challenges e-learning poses is capturing and maintaining learners' attention.

### ATTENTION: OFFLINE & ON SCREEN

Attention can be defined as the process of selectively focusing on specific information present in the surrounding environment. It enables us to selectively concentrate on a discrete stimulus or other perceivable stimuli. It basically serves as the bedrock for a plethora of cognitive functions in our life (Cooley & Morris, 1990). In the present lifestyle, multitasking has become quite prevalent and students tend to juggle between a lot of things. Students also experience an overload of information as they are continually surrounded by sources of infinite information be it online classes, the world wide web, video games and the mass media.

The retention of topics and concepts by students is greatly influenced by attention. It allows them to "focus" only on the important bits and "tune out" other bits of unrelated information, distractions, background noise and unrelated thoughts. According to Benjamin (2002) learners are able to pay attention at the beginning of a class. However, this attention starts to waver for most of the learners after 10 minutes. Motivation, attention and engagement together enable a productive teaching-learning experience. In the absence of these factors from a teaching learning process, it

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\*Pre-Service Teacher, Amity Institute of Education, Amity University, UttarPradesh

\*\*Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of Education, Amity University, UttarPradesh

decreases the efficiency of the process. Hence it becomes paramount that the learners are able to focus and maintain their attention in the class. The current situation is unlike anything that has happened before. Technology has brought the classroom to learners' screens but at the same time the students do experience a certain level of stress. Students' perception of what happens in their life directly impacts the way they learn and also reflects in their academic performance (Langer & Imber, 1979).

It can be said that the learners nowadays are feeling the effects of stress in ways that are completely distinct from the kind that existed a decade ago (Young, 1995). The situation is such that this stress is with them in school and classes as well as at their homes. The psychological manifestation is comparable to that of adults under distress (Miller & McCormick, 1991).

Hence, the teachers have a pivotal and critical role in capturing and managing learners' attention and keeping them engaged.

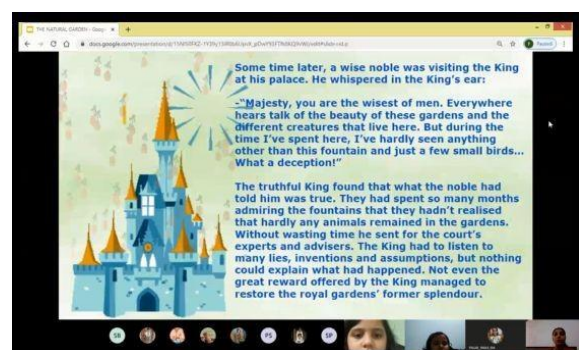
With the shift to online learning, the meaning and context of attention has also undergone some changes. In the face to face mode, the teacher had greater control in classroom operations. The environment in the regular classroom is free from technical glitches and difficulties that often arise in E-learning. Therefore, a number of teaching aids and activities could be utilized to make and keep the learners attentive. To promote engagement and keep the learners active throughout the session, it was comparatively easier to carry out group activities in the regular classroom. All this has taken a different shape in the online classroom.

We are familiar with distance learning, online courses and MOOCs available over the internet. But the way we interact via these tools has changed for good. Now, online learning is being considered as a full time and

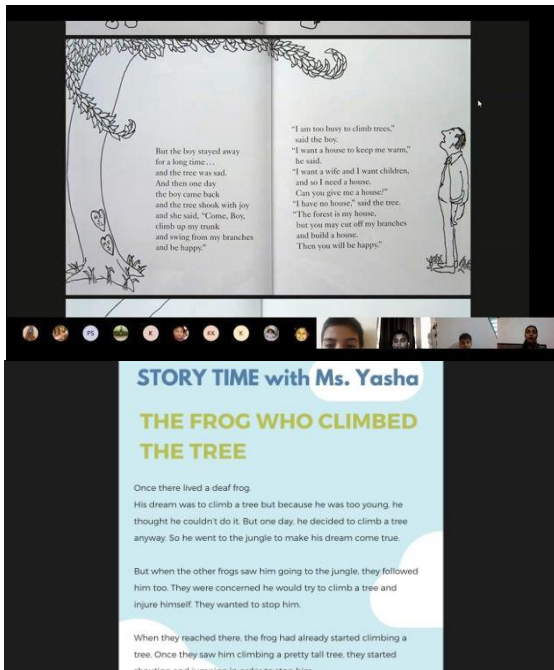
serious mode to impart education to the learners in many cases, like, from a learner who cannot reach his/her educational institution due to distance constraints to a global pandemic. E-learning is the boon that was needed to advance education into the future. As times are changing and evolving, so is the online learning domain. Various e-learning tools and aids have not just simplified the process of teaching and learning but also helped in active engagement of teachers and learners.

Both the teacher and those being taught can make the most out of these tools. Some of the tools and techniques that can be used are:

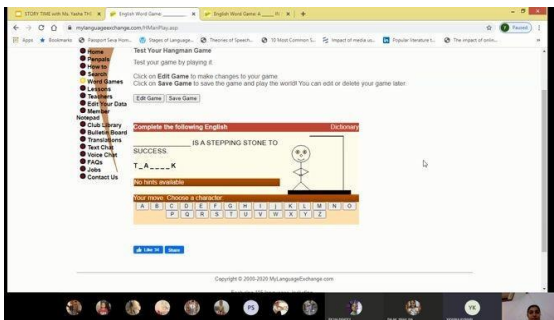
- Animated slides and narrated slides



- Infographics



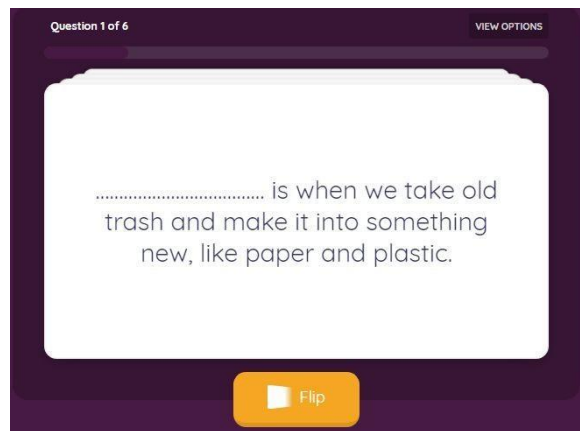
- Online games- Hangman, Spin the wheel



**Wheel of colors**



- Quizzes and digital flashcards

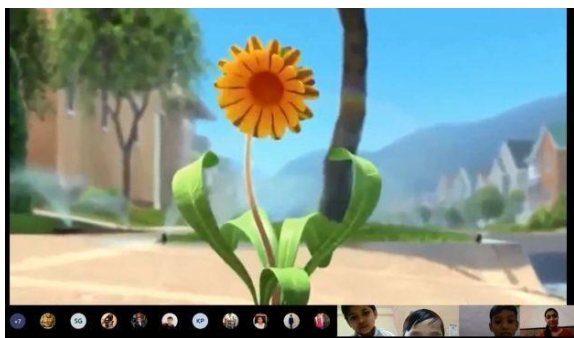


- Puppetry, demonstrations, live hands-on activities etc.



- Audio-visual aids like animated

videos



- Classroom interaction



In order to make online sessions more fun and engaging the teacher needs to have active engagement with the learners and identify areas of interest and relatability. Also, the individual differences amongst the learners of different age groups for responding differently to different stimuli has to be kept in mind.

This helps in identification of teaching content centered around it and also allows expression in such a manner which invites learners' attention and engagement. New techniques should be tried and those to which the learners respond positively can be included in further sessions and others can be discarded. The educator must act as an anchor for the classroom. The energy level, motivation and passion of the educator is pivotal and infectious to the response of the class irrespective of the platform (online or offline). Thus, she should make sure that all these parameters remain in the positive quadrant. For attentive learners and increased engagement, it is essential to tap into topics, issues and activities that affect, intrigue or inspire them. Also, rewards and reinforcement have a huge role to play. The

learners' need to be heard is amplified on the online platform but carrying it out is that much more difficult in comparison to the regular face to face classrooms. If the learners are being seen and heard, they will be more attentive and adding a few words of appreciation in the mix wherever requires further improves the chances and duration of improved attention and concentration.

Hence, the steps that can be taken to capture and manage learners' attention in the online classroom, are:

- Designing relatable, relevant and precise teaching-learning content
- Inclusion of audio-visual aids (both physical and digital)
- Providing the learners with thought provoking problems that need to be discussed, analysed and solved.
- Providing them with something they are emotionally and mentally connected to.
- Encouraging them by appreciating them and prompting them to put forward their thoughts and opinions continuously.
- Prompting experience sharing

## CONCLUSION

Globally every sector is trying to do it's best to adjust to the new normal, so is the education sector. One of the essential things that should never be forgotten is the online teaching platform is here to stay. Many times there is a difficulty in managing online classes as it is extremely challenging to maintain learners' attention in an online environment. With only a set of screens and wires connecting the educator and learner, some say that holding learners' concentration is an uphill task with several factors ranging from network issues and technical and device related glitches to lack of participation and response.

Attention has to be captured by reinventing creativity in the online classroom. The educator has to evolve continuously and



develop various tools, techniques, methods and games to make the learners intrinsically motivated and attentive. In the times to come an online classroom will definitely be at par with the offline classroom experience. But for now, an online classroom is still a beta program. We were always planning to make a shift to the online platform but the need for it would arise so soon was unprecedented.

It is bound to take some time, trial and error to find out what is interesting and relatable to the learners and there isn't any singular or definite thing or answer. The methods for capturing attention differs with the varied learners' profile. The best an educator can do is to formulate a healthy blend of attention capturing activities using different techniques and aids. Also, switching and continuously exploring newer techniques will always be helpful and keep the teaching-learning process dynamic, effective and productive.

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