



Opinion

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Embracing the Digital Shift: The Future of Virtual Learning in Post-Pandemic Vietnam

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To Cite This Article: Le Thanh Thao and Pham Trut Thuy. Embracing the Digital Shift: The Future of Virtual Learning in Post-Pandemic Vietnam. *Am J Biomed Sci & Res.* 2023 19(2) AJBSR.MS.ID.002567, DOI: [10.34297/AJBSR.2023.19.002567](https://doi.org/10.34297/AJBSR.2023.19.002567)

Received: 📅 June 17, 2023; Published: 📅 June 21, 2023

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The COVID-19 pandemic has undeniably redefined the educational landscape worldwide, forcing educational institutions, from kindergartens to universities, to rethink and remodel traditional pedagogical approaches. Vietnam, like many other countries, rapidly shifted towards virtual learning to maintain the educational flow amidst the crisis. Although it was initially a response to an unexpected circumstance, it is now poised to become an integral part of the country's educational system even in the post-pandemic era. With a population nearing 100 million and a burgeoning middle class, Vietnam shows immense potential for the virtual learning industry. Moreover, the country's extensive emphasis on education and digital literacy, coupled with a high rate of internet penetration (approximately 70% in 2021), lays a fertile ground for virtual learning to thrive.

To begin with, virtual learning promises to transcend geographical barriers, offering equal opportunities to students in rural and urban areas. Vietnam's sizeable rural population often experiences a scarcity of qualified educators and inadequate educational resources. The virtual learning model, if successfully implemented, can help alleviate these gaps, allowing students in remote areas to access high-quality learning resources and top-notch teachers. Furthermore, the flexibility that comes with virtual learning can contribute to enhancing the learning experience. Students can access their coursework at any time, which can help them learn at their own pace, adapt their learning schedule according to their needs and promote a more individualized approach to education. This flexibility can be particularly beneficial for working students or those with familial responsibilities, promoting lifelong learning and educational inclusivity.

However, virtual learning in Vietnam also faces considerable challenges. Firstly, infrastructure readiness varies across the country, with urban areas having better access to stable and high-speed internet compared to rural areas. This digital divide could potentially exacerbate existing educational inequities if not addressed. Secondly, there is a need for an attitudinal shift among teachers, students, and parents. Many stakeholders are accustomed to traditional classroom learning and may resist the transition to digital education. Adequate training for educators to effectively use and teach through virtual platforms is essential, and a cultural shift to view online learning as valid and beneficial is necessary. Finally, not all courses or subjects lend themselves well to online instruction, particularly those that require hands-on experience or practical work such as certain science and engineering courses or vocational training. Therefore, a hybrid model that combines traditional and virtual learning might be the most suitable approach.

The Vietnamese government has recognized these challenges and is proactively responding. For instance, under the National Digital Transformation Program, the government aims to establish a comprehensive digital education system by 2025. It will facilitate connectivity, promote digital skills and ensure access to digital educational resources. Such initiatives are encouraging and suggest a promising future for virtual learning in Vietnam. Moreover, partnerships with ed-tech companies, both local and international, are crucial in enhancing the e-learning ecosystem in Vietnam. The pandemic has witnessed a surge in ed-tech startups in the country, offering innovative learning platforms and solutions that tailor to the local context. The government and educational institutions should harness this momentum to further enhance the quality and reach of virtual learning.



Conclusion

In conclusion, the potential for virtual learning in Vietnam in the post-COVID-19 era is substantial. Despite the challenges, with concerted efforts from the government, educational institutions, ed-tech companies, teachers, students, and parents, virtual learning can fundamentally transform the education sector in Vietnam. The

integration of technology in education not only allows for continuity in times of crisis but also offers the possibility for more inclusive, personalized, and flexible education in the long run. As we move towards a post-pandemic world, it is important to learn from the COVID-19 experience and leverage the potential of virtual learning to build a more resilient and equitable educational system.