

Making online examinations
possible for the

K-12 segment



welcome to brighter

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Concerns with online exam-taking
3. Do we even need examinations?
4. Is technology an enabler for online school exams?
5. Are online exams a viable alternative to make schools immune to disruptions?
6. Conclusion

Introduction

I am a doting aunt to an eight-year-old who began her stint with online classes later last year after being deprived of education of any sort for a while. Undoubtedly, I was thankful and impressed by her e-learning journey. I was delighted that she had access to education, powered by machine learning algorithms, personalized content, instantaneous feedback, all made available on an easy and convenient learning platform, all of which is facilitated by ubiquitous and low-cost internet. Moreover, I was convinced about the influence exerted by online learning on the education landscape.

But when the same school wished to make online examinations mandatory to maintain academic continuity, I found it shocking and unreasonable. I was upset because I believed that it was just not the perfect setting for an exam. Also, I could not imagine children being so proficient in technology that they could write an entire examination online. A flurry of emotions and the pandemic-induced stress elevated my stress levels.



Until now, I had only heard of various centers for learning and colleges continuing with the online means of assessment for young adults. But was it even possible for school-going children?

It took me a while to realize that my concerns about online exams resulted from some exacerbated parental worries and a conservative mindset, which my friends and I shared. Our fear of online exams is unfounded because most millennials have never taken an online exam, at least not during our formative years. So, part of the bias, I believe, stems from unfamiliarity with digital tools. But we often forget that our children belong to a digital generation and are growing up in a world driven by tech-enhanced solutions.

The intersection of education and technology is not limited to enhancing virtual classroom learning. It also extends to transforming the traditional paper-and-pencil way of exam-taking to digital forms. The Edutech industry is harnessing innovation and creativity to improve examination capabilities and allay our persistent concerns. It is redefining academic processes and educational outcomes for all stakeholders. Be it a non-descript preparatory school or a massive institution, most of them need this alternate if they wish to gain immunity from future disruptions.

Unfortunately, we are often bound by ignorance, which is why I thought of penning down this article. The idea is to prove how seamless online exams can be for K-12 students by mitigating parents' concerns and sharing how a tech alternate is solving them while reshaping examination methods.



Concerns with online exam-taking

So, let's cut the preamble and dive right in. I have shortlisted two typical fears in taking online exams, based on my experience and interactions with a few parents. They include:

How easy or difficult is it for young kids to take exams online?

Young kids are tech-savvy and can spend hours playing on a digital device. But how does a school expect children to type fast and manage their efficiency online? Getting a child to sit, write and complete the exam paper online not only seems like an uphill task but also discriminating, given their age. And any failure to do so would impact their performance and result, consequently their future outlook and self-esteem.

Additionally, children can raise their hands, ask questions and get a quick response when taking an in-class exam. How would they ask questions online? It all seemed complicated!

Do exams taken at home genuinely serve the purpose?

Testing a student's skill and knowledge through examinations has been a benchmark of quality education globally. Therefore, it is critical to ensure a fair means to measure merit and validate that students taking the exams did not resort to any unacceptable means. But how would a school protect the assessment's integrity when giving online exams? For instance, some students might resort to academic misconduct, knowing they were unsupervised. And any act of cheating would defeat the purpose of an exam.

So, what if a set of anti-cheating tools could deter students from indulging in any untoward activity, thereby ensuring the sanctity of exams?

[I came across an article that offered some unique cheating tactics employed by students to trick the online examination system.](#)



I will tell you how you can navigate these concerns.

But let me first ask a pertinent question: are examinations even necessary?

In Wales, the government canceled all its GCSE and A-Level exams due to the pandemic. Instead, it promoted and awarded grades based on classroom assessments. Scotland also made a similar decision. Even in India, education boards like CBSE, ICSE and IB have already canceled their board exams, leaving students anxious and unsure about the road ahead. Many schools have already promoted students, up to the 8th standard, without any examination.

Assessments do not seem to be a priority for these countries. So, do we even need them?

Let's find out.

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Do we even need examinations?

Exams are intrinsic to the learning process. Being an aspirational society, learning and examination, teaching and testing, have always been two sides of the coin. They are equally essential for gaining knowledge and testing one's capability, which precedes holistic development. Discontinuity in either will negatively impact students' future.

Furthermore, exams fulfill a formative and summative purpose. It means exams act as a type of feedback mechanism that teachers use to improve their teaching and students' learning. It is also a yardstick to measure students' potential by comparing them against a pre-decided benchmark of education, persistence and effort. In turn, it would improve a student's overall performance, personality, memory, critical thinking and the ability to express thoughts and opinions succinctly.

Many schools might not visualize the long-term consequences of canceling exams. But students with months of preparation have been demotivated as their diligent efforts have gone astray. It has hindered their productivity. And that's not it; there's more.

Here are a few other challenges:



No interest in maximizing potential

Exam results are a gateway to learning opportunities and maximizing one's potential. Knowing that exam results are a type of selection criterion needed to move ahead in life, students become conscious of their performance and are willing to work harder to enhance their potential by giving their best. Without exams, students will never know their abilities, leading to a hindered career development.



Lack of competitive spirit

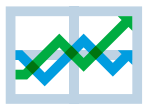
Examinations help promote healthy competition among students. They trigger curiosity, learning and growth by encouraging them to understand their strengths and weaknesses. They also stimulate a positive and supportive environment of collaboration, dignity and respect. There will be no enthusiasm to build camaraderie and a competitive spirit without exams.





Diminished learning exposure

Exams are a good enough reason to learn. They help bring out the best minds filled with knowledge. But there is no commitment to work without them. Even the schools won't be able to differentiate the brilliant students from the average ones, not to create a distinction but to help them chart their learning trajectories better.



Increase in demotivation

Without exams, most students would likely not bother to study at all. Therefore, students would simply fail to concentrate on their studies, losing their sense of purpose because they know they will be promoted no matter how they perform. Soon, they won't even want to reflect on whether or not they are achieving their goals. This will only create significant gaps in knowledge, breed laziness and disobedience that can dramatically impact their future.



Hence, one can imagine the repercussions of postponing and canceling exams on young, impressionable minds. So, the thought of it makes me realize that examinations are an essential cog in the education wheel if learning must achieve its true meaning.

This takes me back to the premise of my article, where I mentioned the growing use of technology in the education sector.



But is technology genuinely re-modeling the examination system? Can schools employ digital tools and solve their concerns about online exams? Can young students enrich their online exam-taking process just as they would by taking exams offline?

Let's explore.

Is technology an enabler for online school exams?

Tech advancements in the online examination space are setting the tone for the future because schools and education technologies share a similar objective- recognizing the imbalances ahead and addressing them, enabling children worldwide to pursue their examination schedules amid increasingly erratic disruptions. And this begins by making every exam process similar to an actual classroom setting.

Don't believe me?

Read on to know how technology is stimulating an offline examination process to enable online exams for K-12 students.



Making exam-taking easy for kids

One of the best attributes of taking an offline exam is not having to worry about the examination process. I believe online examination platforms are replicating that experience. Here's how:



Examination setup

Remember how students were allowed to enter the examination hall only after thorough verification? Once inside, they had to wait, and the exam would commence at the same time for everyone to ensure a level-playing ground. Well, the process remains the same for online exams. After teachers authorize students, they wait in the 'waiting room,' which is a page with some customizable instructions and a prominently displayed 'test start' timer. Once the time is up, the test starts for all students at the same time. Beginning the test at the same time negates the possibility of some students using cheating tactics.



Exam writing process

In my introductory paragraphs, I had flagged typing using the keyboard for examination purposes as the primary concern among students and their parents. But a revolutionary invention has abated that fear as well. Students who are explicitly used to writing by hand than typing can write the answers on paper and scan the answer sheets using a QR code, and upload the images using their phone. The answer sheets are uploaded directly onto the examiner's system to eliminate any security leaks. It also applies to subjects that involve writing exceptionally lengthy answers, drawing a diagram, or solving equations. This application's feature ensures a level-playing field for all students writing the exam and highlights the Edutech industry's efforts to ensure a seamless yet powering virtual exam-taking experience.



Instant interaction

Offline exams offer the advantage of instant communication. But so do online exams. A two-way live chat feature helps students interact with teachers to clarify any doubts that they may have in solving the questions. It also allows teachers to intervene and reach out to reprimand students in real-time in case of any suspicion.

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Preserving the sanctity of the examination process

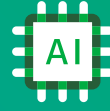
Here's how online exams ensure the same levels of integrity as in physical in-class exams.



Dynamic invigilation possibility

The option of live proctoring allows teachers or staff members to involve themselves in the invigilation process remotely, just as they would in a classroom assessment. With some training and familiarization, they can offer similar levels of accountability as in-class supervision by monitoring every action and activity of the test-takers. Besides, they have the option to view multiple students concurrently and pause, stop or resume the exam in real-time in case of anything suspicious.

Proctoring staff can also use AI proctoring wherein an intelligent algorithm is configured to flag a variety of suspicious cases, such as the non-visibility of face/presence, detection of mobile phone, presence of an additional person, a distracted eye movement, etc. AI-assisted human proctoring lends much credibility, ethics and progressiveness to assessments.



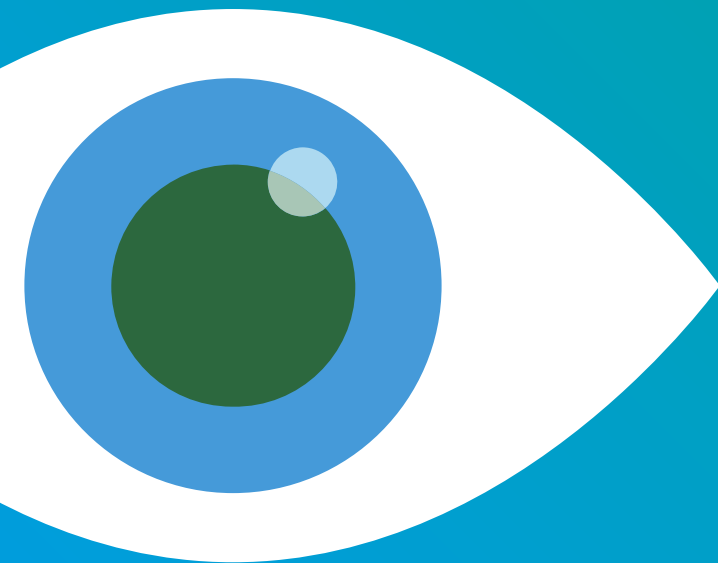
Use of innovative anti-cheating technologies

Whether through advanced facial recognition software, audio scanning devices, or limiting navigation control to prevent on-screen cheating, schools can capitalize on numerous digital technologies to navigate the seemingly never-ending challenges of cheating and maintain their exams' sanctity.

Some features such as:

- [Time-stamped answer sheets](#) help bring clarity to papers written by hand and submitted online. It assures exam administrators they are not tampered with by anyone.
- [Student integrity score report](#) helps faculty identify students who might have resorted to suspicious behavior, if not cheating. It brings much-needed authenticity in promoting only deserving students to the subsequent classes.
- [Using audio proctoring software](#) to accurately scan a test-taker's physical environment for additional sounds or noises via the microphone brings the desired sanctity to the exam-takers' environment.

The provision of several such tools validates the credibility and success of an examination drive.





An additional layer of supervision

Remember how examination controllers or senior supervisors would walk in unannounced in a physical examination classroom to check and assure themselves that the drive was not compromised in any way? That extra layer of security is also replicated in an online exam. Besides, some online platform-and-proctoring service providers have an additional feature of giving examination controllers and principals access to any faculty's classroom view and validating the reliability of the online examination drive.



The above similarities gave me and many parents confidence in technology, helping us ride the online examination wave. As first-time online test-takers, my niece's school was compassionate since young kids were taking exams online. It made numerous provisions for online demo tests to help every student and their guardian gain familiarity and build confidence while using the system before taking the actual test. Given the disruption in classroom examinations, preparing for the new format/delivery of exams was highly fair to students. Needless to say, she recently completed her exams, and it was one of her most thrilling experiences to date.

As I iterated, you need to be open-minded and educate yourself about the myriad benefits that various education technologies accrue in preserving the sanctity of online exams. Only then will you be able to embrace the process with confidence.

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Online exams are a viable alternative to make schools immune to disruptions

I think the verdict is out! It is time to embrace online exams instead of canceling or postponing them indefinitely. Considering we live in a world that is prone to disruptions of all hues, we need technology to ensure unabated continuity. And I have already established how technology is the game-changer that is helping establish a different approach by negating existing threats and those emerging from unforeseen disruptions.

Many schools have shifted their exams to the digital ecosystem by addressing the various challenges and hindrances and streamlining and smoothening processes that help meet their requirements effectively.

Let me share the example of [two K-12 schools](#) that adopted technology and made online exams a viable alternative to improve their learning outcomes.





Silverline Prestige School (SLPS)

Situated in Ghaziabad, India, this premier institution found it challenging to conduct critical examinations at various levels.

**Periodic assessments/
unit tests:**
(Classes 3-12th)

Mid-term/final exams:
(Classes 3-9th and 11th)

Pre-boards:
(Classes 10th and 12th)

Ensuring easy accessibility, security and ease of use for elementary, middle and high school students was as vital as warranting a fair, evidence-based assessment system. SLPS also wanted to ensure that faculty, parents and caregivers transitioned to the online exam-taking process seamlessly. Hence, it leveraged an online proctoring and examination system to plan and execute end-to-end virtual assessments at scale. As a result, 2000 students between classes three to class 12th took glitch-free exams online. Furthermore, no student was deprived of the online exam-taking process. Delighted by the experience of giving exams online, SLPS has chosen to continue using the current platform and proctoring solution for the foreseeable future.

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Kingsdale Foundation School

One of London's most sought-after secondary schools was severely concerned about its admission process and maintaining its academic schedule. It mandated a trustworthy system that addressed its specific requirements for its entrance exams. Thus, the educators narrowed down on a viable value proposition- an online proctoring and examination solution that addressed numerous bottlenecks in conducting online entrance exams with integrity and ease. About 800 students took their tests simultaneously, with evaluations taking only a few hours. There was a significant reduction in human intervention and massive savings in work hours. Buoyed by the outcome, the school has chosen to continue using its existing online exam platform provider for all its annual and mid-year entrance exams.



Don't such stories encourage you to give and take online exams rather than root for a 'zero academic year?'

The delays in conducting exams have been a lingering concern, echoed even by Indian Central Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank. This delay and lack of clarity are gravely burdening the education sector.



Conclusion

If classes are possible online, so are virtual exams. I understand that there's much to learn about implementing these new exam processes. One must, however, understand that going back to the standard setup seems improbable, at least in the foreseeable future. Hence, giving and taking online exams is better than jeopardizing a child's future. So, don't wait and watch!

Every school is seeking innovative solutions to secure its examination systems. And processes like these would give them a competitive advantage. Therefore, you must begin by recognizing potential opportunities to envision an ecosystem that is qualitatively superior to your competition.

Taking tentative steps by conducting non-critical exams such as internal quizzes, mock tests, non-final year exams could be one way to experience the process of hosting online exams first-hand. The other can be taking the hybrid approach - where educators can undertake some aspects of the exam online, and the rest can be administered offline using the traditional brick-and-mortar setup.

**Take your first step
toward the future.
Break the spell and
open your mind
to the fascinating
changes happening
around you.
Are you ready?**

I once read, "Difficulties or challenges do not come to destroy you, but to help you realize your true potential." So, rather than viewing online exams as a hindrance or challenge, embrace the potential they offer. The pressure to innovate amid the current uncertain scenario poses an opportunity for us to rethink our options. If you don't ponder over and sail the tide, you'll likely be left behind as an educator.

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