

Letter to the Editor

Distance Learning Programs

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Distance learning has increasingly become one of the most desirable ways to obtain a top graduate and postgraduate qualification in highly developed countries. Higher-level learning without attending lectures or seminars is not dissimilar to many students' current college/university experience because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Students can avoid the costs and inconvenience of travelling to get to their university or college, while still benefiting from learning opportunities despite the lack of proximity to facilities and resources at colleges/universities thanks to the internet. Nonetheless, being physically on-site does have benefits, such as increased interaction with other students and academics. A solution could be the provision of hybrid course which would require only occasional visits to campus on savor periods.

With modern technology and the rising standards of educational institutions, it is not essential for tertiary education to be based solely on in-person and on-site models. Even from a distance, comprehensive, high-level learning can be completed by using such resources as television, radio, and especially the Internet. Students can enroll in the courses conducted through an integrated curriculum model using live interaction from home. In light of the pandemic and other challenges to health, such as fine particulate matter (PM 2.5) in the ambient air, among other environmental health hazards, distance learning can offer students a viable and less risky alternative to the way they pursue tertiary education.

Global Health Observatory data from the World Health Organization demonstrates that ambient air pollution is often concentrated in urban areas where PM 2.5 levels are hazardous to health; such areas are often where top colleges and universities are located. Such pollution comes from fuel combustion, both from mobile sources, such as vehicles, and from stationary sources, such as power plants, industry, households or biomass burning (https://www.who.int/gho/outdoor_air_pollution/en/).

Distance learning programs can be also flexible too, such as by shifting school terms from winter to summer in order to lessen the personal transportations requirements of the students. This would certainly also lessen the amount of ambient air pollution caused by temperature inversion (Bovornkitti S. PM 2.5 and I. TMJ 2020;20:2-4)

Distance learning has become so easy and popular that it could open the floodgates to higher-level education around the world.

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