Digital Economy

Covid-19 - Increased Demand for Digital Learning Solutions

The corona crisis is making itself felt in the classroom, with schools closed. Digital learning providers are offering innovative solutions to meet changing education requirements.

Apr 09, 2020

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Video Conferencing for Pre-School Children

It is half past nine in the morning in Germany. The first video conference has just begun. The 12 participants can see the other participant faces and they start talking. Their parents are present, in some cases both mothers and fathers. They sing children's songs, do children's yoga and read a story about the fireman together. This is the kindergarten group of a Berlin daycare center where the educators are making virtual appointments using the same video conferencing tools normally reserved for adult use.

Starting in the last week of March, the virtual meetings have already established themselves. And just like the parents and children in this Berlin day nursery, many in Germany are trying out new digital learning and communication tools as a result of the restrictions on movement put in place to combat the coronavirus disease.

Digital Apps Bringing Children Together

A number of web- and video conferencing tools have become household names overnight as working from home has become the new norm for many millions of people around the world. Similar tools are being used to bring children together during the lockdown – one prominent example being the NemBørn [↗] tool that digitally connects children, parents and daycare centers, thereby ensuring that everybody know what is happening and what the little ones and grown-ups are learning with and from each other.

Emergency Digital Pact for Schools Funding

Germany's Federal Government has approved the release of EUR 100 million for primary and secondary schools as part of its existing "Digital Pact for Schools" program (Digitalpakt Schule [↗] in German only) in order to combat the immediate effects of the Covid-19 crisis. The EUR 5 billion initiative, put in place to help schools upgrade their digital infrastructure, is part of the country's broader digital transformation objectives. The emergency funding has been made available to ease the transition to "home learning" using cloud platforms and solutions.

The Hasso Plattner Institute (HPI) School Cloud, a learning platform developed exclusively for schools, has also received extra federal funding as part of the new measures. The HPI school cloud will be made available to all schools which cannot use a comparable platform solution provided by the state or school authorities. Working in partnership with Alliance for Free Education members Wikimedia Deutschland e. V. and edu-sharing.net e. V., HPI will oversee the integration of learning content in the learning cloud of the school cloud.

Growing Demand for School Digital Learning Solutions

Demand for school digital learning platforms and solutions is growing. The current situation has only thrown a spotlight on the very real need for a radical overhaul of digital infrastructure in Germany's school education system. The individual federal states are reacting at different speeds to make digital teaching services easily available to all schools. Some states are ahead of the curve in this respect, while others are effectively playing catch-up in terms of digital learning provision.

Remote Learning Solutions Opportunities

Digital learning in schools was a major presence at this year's LEARNTEC trade fair for digital learning in January. Germany's Bitkom digital association has repeatedly highlighted shortcomings in Germany's digital progress to date, hampered in part by the country's federal system which sees educational competences decided on an individual state basis. Nordic countries, as part of a project initiated by education start-ups and "Education Nation" (Estonia), have made a number of remote learning solutions ⧉ freely available across Europe to support teachers and parents in the current difficult situation. Digital learning solutions providers who make their apps and solutions freely available to schools and educational establishments in Germany may well be permanently integrated into the country's education landscape after successful test phase completion. Similar opportunities also exist for international companies in the college, university and further education environment, as they too address the current situation and the country's changing digital learning requirements.

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