A virtual nudge to ensure proper roll call

Amrita varsity’s project addresses rural school absenteeism

Student and teacher absenteeism is a major problem in the public education sector, especially when it comes to rural schools.

But, it seems, the Amrita Vิद्यापीठम has developed an effective strategy to address this issue through its remote-monitoring project implemented at 18 study centres called Amrita Rural Education Centres in Uttarakhand's Rudraprayag and Uttrakhand districts.

As part of the Amrita Rural India Tablet Education (AmritaRITE) programme, teachers at the participating study centres were given tablets and 2G SIM cards for online connectivity.

Students were given tablets with educational content, which could be connected to the teachers' tablets through Bluetooth.

Apps

The teachers' tablets have a couple of apps, including WhatsApp, installed to check attendance and act as classroom monitoring tools, while the study centre works in close collaboration with the local government schools.

"Monitoring schoolteachers is challenging, particularly in remote, rural areas that lack infrastructure and resources. Methods like maintaining attendance registers or physical inspections have not proven to be very effective, and teacher and student absenteeism remains high in the Indian hinterland. Android tablets, loaded with apps to gather and send data, along with WhatsApp, form a user-friendly platform to get real-time data about the teachers' activity and eliminate both teacher and student absenteeism," said Prema Nedingad, Director, Amrita Center of Research in Analytics & Technologies for Education.

While teachers use the apps to send daily attendance reports of students along with performance reports, there are cluster coordinators who monitor educational activities, conduct surprise visits, distribute tablets for WhatsApp communication, and collect information from each of the teachers.

"With this approach, significant improvement has been noted among students. For example, at Udaipur in Uttarakhand, only 24.8% of Class III students could do math at grade level in an assessment conducted in February 2016. In September 2017, as many as 75.3% of students could complete math assessments, showing a big leap," said Ms. Nedingad.