

LETTER

Superficial knowledge acquisition in the digital era: A call to re-embrace books

LOKESH RANA, POOJA GURNAL

Over the past decade, academia has undergone a significant transformation in the manner in which knowledge is accessed, acquired and disseminated. Digital platforms, online resources and virtual learning tools and platforms have undoubtedly democratised education, improved accessibility and enabled rapid updates, along with facilitating learning across geographical and socioeconomic boundaries. These developments have brought substantial benefits to students and professionals alike [1,2].

However, all these developments come with caveats; the overwhelming reliance on digital modes of acquiring knowledge has led to unintended academic consequences. Students increasingly rely on online summaries, short-form content and algorithm-driven platforms for rapid consumption of information [2,3]. Though efficient, such learning is often superficial, fragmented, short-lived and offers little conceptual clarity, critical reasoning or long-lasting retention. This results in a growing disconnect between information acquisition and true understanding, thus posing a serious challenge to the future of academia, research and professional competence [2].

Books have represented the cornerstone of rigorous scholarship as they provide coherence, depth, continuity and a disciplined progression of thought, thus providing an essential contribution towards building a foundation across disciplines. The decimation of standard textbooks reflects not merely a change in medium but rather a deeper shift in academic culture, where convenience and immediacy increasingly replace mastery and reflection [3,4,5].

Recognising this serious concern, the Department of Radiology, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Bilaspur, has initiated a structured "Back to Books" academic programme. This initiative emphasises compulsory textbook reading, guided chapter-based classroom discussions with structured assessments aligned closely with authoritative book content. The objective behind this initiative is not to

reject digital learning but to establish a balance by reaffirming the primacy of foundational knowledge acquisition through books, completed and not replaced by digital resources.

This letter is a call to the wider academic community, across medicine and beyond, to reflect critically on current pedagogical trajectories. Digital technology should enhance learning, not dilute it. The reinstatement of book-based scholarship is not a mere exercise in nostalgia but a necessary step towards preserving academic rigor, intellectual depth and the quality of future professionals. A renewed commitment to books, alongside judicious use of digital tools, may offer the most sustainable path forward for contemporary education.

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