

# Bizarre solutions to increase Chinese students' online learning engagement

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Setting up a remote camera in children's bedrooms to monitor their online learning when parents are not home? This idea might sound creepy to many, but this was actually one of the bizarre pieces of advice that Chinese education experts suggested in papers discussing feasible solutions to enhance student online learning engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic [1-3].

To cope with lockdowns during the pandemic, the Chinese Ministry of Education initiated the "School Is Out, But Class Is On" campaign to encourage online education in public and private schools in lieu of face-to-face learning [4]. However, when teachers could not physically discipline inattentive students to maintain engagement, as they generally did in traditional classrooms, the online learning outcomes were not ideal.

[According to a recent study on Chinese students' online learning engagement for COVID-19](#) [5], a significant portion of teachers lacked adequate technology skills and the ability to differentiate the instruction to engage the students better. Therefore, many students reported that they were either unsatisfied with online education quality or disengaged during online classes. For that reason, Chinese experts sought help from children's parents to increase their engagement online. The methods include, but are not limited to, "hide and uninstall unnecessary software on the cell phone or PC," "forbid the installation of new applications and unauthorized website visits," and "use remote control cameras to monitor

students' online learning progress" [1-3].

While the effectiveness of these methods is still contentious, many problems can be foreseen. For example, the installation of surveillance equipment in children's bedrooms could jeopardize children's privacy, causing mental health issues and family turmoil; the purchase of surveillance equipment would also impose an additional financial burden on low-income families; the suggested solutions further entail parents to possess a certain amount of information technology skills, which parents might not obtain. These troubles might lead to further issues that complicate the situation.



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**Figure:** Withstand the test, by Xu Jun (Xinhua News Agency). The teacher on the screen, "I'm scared to be a streamer"; the kid, "my eyes are hurting"; the mom, "I'm tired of checking in online." <https://edu.sina.cn/gaokao/gkrx/2020-02-24/detail-iimxyqvz5305901.d.html>

The question is: how can such bizarre solutions emerge in the minds of those experts?

Probably, it is because of the Chinese philosophies of education. In Confucian education philosophy, the teacher is the center of a classroom [6], which has set the tone of the teacher-centered education model in China for thousands of years. In addition to Confucianism, pragmatism is another philosophy dominating Chinese education [7], making education result-driven. A typical reflection is an overemphasis on learning outcomes measured by standardized test scores. Guided by these philosophies, the learning materials are dry, and teaching methods are not engaging, so Chinese teachers have to exert their influence to discipline disengaged students in a top-down, if not intimidating, manner.

In addition to that, the cultural additivity mindset should be counted on [8]. Rather than solving the problem at its heart by changing the teachers' mindsets and improving their abilities to use technology and differentiate instruction, Chinese experts opted to fix the problem by involving more less-relevant people and things. Doing so not only complicates the existing issues but also creates more problems.

The COVID-19 pandemic requires our society to adapt to become fitter with the environment. The Chinese have a famous idiom "the more, the better". However, it is unwise to have it applied in this case.

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