tpo_7

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? It is more important for students to understand ideas and concepts than it is for them to learn facts. Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer.

Communal online encyclopedias represent one of the latest resources to be found on the Internet. They are in many respects like traditional printed encyclopedias collections of articles on various subjects. What is specific to these online encyclopedias, however, is that any Internet user can contribute a new article or make an editorial change in an existing one. As a result, the encyclopedia is authored by the whole community of Internet users. The idea might sound attractive, but the communal online encyclopedias have several important problems that make them much less valuable than traditional, printed encyclopedias. First, contributors to a communal online encyclopedia often lack academic credentials, thereby making their contributions partially informed at best and downright inaccurate in many cases. Traditional encyclopedias are written by trained experts who adhere to standards of academic rigor that nonspecialists cannot really achieve. Second, even if the original entry in the online encyclopedia is correct, the communal nature of these online encyclopedias gives unscrupulous users and vandals or hackers the opportunity to fabricate, delete, and corrupt information in the encyclopedia. Once changes have been made to the original text, an unsuspecting user cannot tell the entry has been tampered with. None of this is possible with a traditional encyclopedia. Third, the communal encyclopedias focus too frequently, and in too great a depth, on trivial and popular topics, which creates a false impression of what is important and what is not. A child doing research for a school project may discover that a major historical event receives as much attention in anonline encyclopedia as, say, a single long-running television program. The traditional encyclopedia provides a considered view of what topics to include or exclude and contains a sense of proportion that online "democratic" communal encyclopedias do not.

Now listen to part of a lecture on the topic you just read about. The communal online encyclopedia will probably never be perfect, but that's a small price to pay for what it does offer. The criticisms in the reading are largely the result of prejudice against and ignorance about how far online encyclopedias have come. First, errors: It's hardly a fair criticism that encyclopedias on line have errors. Traditional encyclopedias have never been close to perfectly accurate. If you're looking for a really comprehensive reference work without any mistakes, you're not going to find it—on- or off-line. The real point is that it's easy for errors in factual material to be corrected in an online encyclopedia—but with the printed and bound encyclopedia, the errors remain for decades. Second, hacking: online encyclopedias have recognized the importance of protecting their articles from malicious hackers. One strategy they started using is to put the crucial facts in the articles that nobody disputes in a 'read-only' format, which is a format that no one can make changes to. That way you're making sure that the crucial facts in the articles are reliable. Another strategy that's being used is to have special editors whose job is to monitor all changes made to the articles and eliminate those changes that are clearly malicious. Third, what's worth knowing about:

The problem for traditional encyclopedias is that they have limited space, so they have to decide what's important and what's not. And in practice, the judgments of the group of academics that make these decisions don't reflect the great range of interests that people really have. But space is definitely not an issue for online encyclopedias. The academic articles are still represented in online encyclopedias, but there can be a great variety of articles and topics that accurately reflect the great diversity of users' interests. The diversity of views and topics that online encyclopedias offer is one of their strongest advantages.

Summarize the points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they oppose the specific points made in the reading passage.