

Home Delivery of Education

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Home delivery of food brings a sense of excitement to us as we look forward to having something different; a variety of food delivered at our doorstep, as per our liking, timing and comfort. We have grown quite used to it by now. But we had not realized that probably soon we would witness a home delivery of a different kind; the home delivery of education.

The home delivery of education has started in the form of online education. Some lap it up, some other accept it, while many resist it, yet we all are consuming it, albeit for a lack of option, given the Covid situation.

Very often, we resist something new not because we know of the lack of merit in the new order but because of our "perceived notion" of what is lacking in a new option. But how do we claim to know what we claim to know without actually living it! What we call our "understanding" are actually our "assumptions." More often, stung by our "discomfort" to come out of our discomfort zones, we look more at the negatives than the values carried by a new path. So is the case with this discomfort with online teaching. But why not look at it as an opportunity than a constraint!

It's a change of course but then change is the only constant, as they say.

Another problem with us is that often we react in terms of either or. One is more important than the other. Why can't we think of things as evolving, the new complimenting the existing, in fact at times strengthening them. What are the major problems with online teaching? Let's discuss them. No, let's discuss the solutions to the challenges. Every challenge has a resolution. There is no challenge that cannot be overcome with a resolute mind, creative adjustments and a pragmatic approach.

Lack of face to face interaction

This of course is a valid concern but it can be dealt with by splitting course delivery into two units where online sessions is followed by a face to face interaction or vice versa.

Solution can also lie in training students and teachers to a different kind of interaction for online classes. Asking and responding to the same questions as in a face to face sessions but in a new way; we don't change the question but change the way of asking and responding. A way driven by technology and the new environment.

Think of the way we developed a working language to work in a global set up with multi-national workforce without face to face interaction. Often we work on projects without meeting our counterparts in person yet achieving set business goals. Also, think of our personal interactions. Given the global village we live in, we have been having a better part of our social interaction through online mode.

Decreased physical activity

Again a valid concern yet not so valid. Times change and so do our ideas of physical activities. Compared to our father's generation, we already have newer versions of physical activities. We have lesser parks, open spaces and tend to spend more time home-bound. As a result, we developed our own ways of physical activities; home gyms etc. Online teaching would propel us towards adjusting to other types of physical activities.

Lack of infrastructure

There is a lack of quality internet facilities across the board. This is a never ending discussion and is true of all existing systems too. Unequitable distribution of infrastructural facilities is always a challenge. Do we have enough infrastructure for the classroom-based studies? Aren't lack of enough classrooms, trained teachers, student-teacher ratio, long distances between schools and homes are recurring issues plaguing our current system?

No system is foolproof. Now, let's look at some probable dividends associated with online teaching.

Lesser travel time

Very often students have to travel long distances to reach schools. An average of two hours a day to and fro to school is not on a higher side. This leads to travel fatigue especially among young children. Imagine them saving this time and putting the saved energy on other constructive things. At the cost of being ambitious, it has environmental benefits too. Imagine reduced number of school buses and other transports on the roads. Lesser traffic can be a welcome by-product of online teaching.

Access to global teaching and teachers

Wouldn't it be exciting to learn Hindi from a teacher sitting in India, French from a teacher based in France and learning Arabic from a

teacher living in Dubai? Access to best teachers across the globe could be a reality through online teaching. Sooner than later, global education from the confines of one's homes would evolve into another education delivery model.

One over another?

It is not an either or situation. One is not more important than the other. Online teaching is not opposite of classroom teaching. On the contrary, it can be complementary and immensely valuable. Lately, a softer version of it is already in practice. Worldwide, some higher education institutions have been practicing alternate paths like blended learning, hybrid learning and flipped classroom model etc. either independently or in a combinations of these. Online teaching thus can coexist with classroom based teaching till it matures to be an independent pathway. Till that happens, it can be used to attend to a part of the whole of the education delivery. It can be used to deliver some courses, few courses or selected courses which lend themselves more closely to this mode o delivery.

So where does the discussion head now?

It should lead to discussing the solutions to whatever teething problems and challenges are there. And what are the big challenges? Lack of face to face interaction, decreased physical activity and lack of infrastructure. Solution lies in addressing all of these. All the stakeholders like students, parents, teachers, administrators, service providers, policy makers and education regulatory bodies have to play our role in this for collective social good.

This greater good lies in creating a robust eco-system around online teaching and learning. Let the service-providers work towards making available strong internet-based technical infrastructure; let government agencies help organize trainings for our teachers to learn the best emerging practices of this new language of online course delivery and teaching. Let the teachers tailor their delivery to a new generation of knowledge seekers. Let parents adapt to a fresher way of motivating and preparing their wards. Let the students prepare to adopt a proactive and driven approach to make the best out of the online learning.

Online teaching is a change of course but then a change is also the only constant. So a resistance is natural too but the wisdom lies in thinking ahead and coopting the change. The proactive approach requires a comprehensive blueprint of how to beat the hurdles and achieve the well laid-out goals towards online teaching.

To conclude, drawing on the analogy of the home delivery of food, the home delivery of education gives you similar options and variety of choices in terms of products and services. Like choosing your favorite dishes, you can choose your own courses; adding variety of dishes - choose beyond the obvious and study interdisciplinary courses or programs; order your portion – decide how many course to study; and finally eat at your own convenience - choose self-paced courses.

It's going to be a delicious meal.

Category: Teacher Development

Subject: Views and Reflections

Board: All boards

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Source URL: <http://www.teachersofindia.org/en/article/home-delivery-education>