# Preparing pedagogy for E-learning courses

## A pilot plan for Tamil Nadu

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Nowadays one hears such expressions as 'Education industry,' 'Education business.' Abhorring, but we have to grin and bear it. No other go. When education has become a big business proposition parents who cough up hefty fees want substantial return on investment. The current crop of students, familiar with computers even at primary level, can easily take to the state of the art teaching aids. However, merely installing computers in schools and colleges is not enough. The whole education system will have to go the e-way in the upcoming decades. There will be e-learning everywhere by the time this century draws its curtains.

At this juncture, E-learning presupposes E-teaching; hence it is incumbent on the academia to prepare E-teachers before launching E-learning in schools and colleges. Earlier supplementary attempts like occasional film shows, radio broadcast, UGC's TV telecast of lessons were attempted; but they were little efficacious. A centralized education telecast system was not effective for various reasons; the main reason being the tradition bound classroom togetherness of the teacher and the taught was not there.

However, the advent of computers replaced glass-slides as teaching aids for science subjects. Seminars and conferences have switched to power point presentations. The presentations have entered classrooms of management institutions. But all colleges offering MBA do not have teachers who use Power Point Presentation in classrooms. There is a clear rural-urban devide in the academia in using electronic teaching aids.

When video tapes came up, some academics wondered whether all education material could be packed into the new mode. Alas, the contemplation suffered infant mortality. Though video tapes had their role in the 1980s as entertainment sources, they did not find place in academia for teaching purposes.

With laptops booming, school and college fees soaring, teaching aids could as well be electronic now. E-learning is possible from primary to university courses. Possible, but can we take up right now? Why did the centralised teaching by broadcast, and UGC telecast fail? This question should open our eyes. That way of teaching was rigid by timing frigid by content. Gathering students at a place at a particular time to receive the centrally injected education was very difficult. It is so even now. But, with E-learning all students across the country could gain. E-tools can be livelier and personalized; hence students will welcome them.

Thus the computer era has accorded us enough scope for variety and flexibility to handle E-tools. Power Point Presentation of texts and visuals is quite handy, for the teacher and the taught. Teachers of the past who relied on chalk and talk, used to keep in mind all that they had to lecture in the classroom. Some teachers considered it beneath their dignity to carry cue cards. They loaded everything onto their mind. Some had hints on hand. Repetitive exercises made the teachers turn out like biped tape-recorders, except the creative lot among them who continued to enrich their knowledge by wider reading and fresh output in the classroom. They were very few.

The Power Point Presentation, I should say, helps the teacher first before it reaches the student, provided the teacher takes it right earnest, with all sense of creativity. Here is a rider. Before he clicks the slides and start explaining, the teacher should have done homework. Along side the PPP, Power Point Presentation, he should not be the fourth P – Parrot, just repeating what is on the slides.

If he has wide and sustaining reading habit, his presentation would be rich and different from others. A monotonous power point presentation will not enrich students in any way. PP has its limitations. Enrichment should come from the studious teacher. If the teacher, slack in avocation, just modifies the hard copy to a soft one, without applying his mind, the ideal pedagogy would be put to shame. In such a sorrowing situation neither the teacher nor the student gains anything. What could be an ideal situation of E-teaching vis-à-vis E-learning?

E-Text Book Societies

There is a Textbook Society in most states to help the government publish school textbooks. That is a governmental body. These committees should be reconstituted with a judicious mix of E-savvy young teachers and much experienced old timers. The committees should have experts for all subjects. The reconstituted E-textbook committees should have as many sittings as required to draw the course content and a basic power point programme for all subjects, besides the requisite reference material.

Then teachers should be given orientation programmes. They should be trained in the new methodology. The participants should be advised to follow the core-presentation model. But they can take creative deviation and help increase the up-take capacity of students. Here the individual's creative role also matters much. The world is not going to be same anymore and the academia will have far-reading changes very soon.

Stage I

The classrooms, in the initial stage, should be equipped with a screen and a projector. A white board can double up for this purpose. The newly trained teachers must use this facility. At this stage one cannot expect all students to use lap-tops. So, stage I is restricted to the E-savvy teacher. Students can take down the presentations and additional information provided by the teacher beyond Power Point Presentations. Stage I conceives E-tool as one of the factors and not as the absolute teaching aid. It matters little whether any student brings to the classroom – Laptops or not.

Stage II

Stage II envisages the classrooms being equipped with PCs. I would advocate a model that I saw recently at Hannan University, Osaka. The desk of the students has three PCs installed. The bench accommodates only two students. While the PC in the middle carries what the teacher projects on the screen, the other two are for the students. They see what is there in the PC in the middle and copy the same on to their PCs. Possibly they copy in the pen-drive also and do homework in their own systems. They need not carry laptops to the classroom, enough if they carry a pen–drive; if needed they can carry a paper file and needed books, just one or two.

Stage III

This is the total E-learning / E-teaching phase. This stage envisages all students carry laptops; each desk is provided with cable consoles for instant copying of what is projected. The

students are obliged to listen to the teachers absorbingly and learn their lessons. Back home they click their computers and revise their course content.

Those who browse find some individuals and groups offering E-learning packages. It is only at the nascent stage and the prompters will consolidate themselves by trial error methods in content development and market share.

However, we have to accord welcome to the initial enthusiasm. It is laudable. How far these packages will be useful, or would they turn just money-spinners will have to be ascertained later. There is no statutory body now to rate and regulate these e-learning service providers. I consider it is the duty of the Government and the NGOs to regulate such private offers to create joint an E-repository.

Stage IV

Examinations could also be conducted the e-way. Question papers could be flashed on the screen. Students can key in answers in their systems for mailing to the central system where the teacher can evaluate answers and award marks.

As a teacher, who defected to other walks of life and then returned to teaching after three decades, I wish to insist on infusing practical bearings on pedagogy by training the teachers first. The current psychological quotients in teacher education courses should stay on; but the new teacher education courses should inculcate all aspects of E-teaching. Brilliant persons should be drafted to teaching profession at the e-turn. They should be motivated to innovate and should be engaged to keep on updating.

When introduced extensively E-teaching can eliminate private tuitions. E-tools offer education at home. Once we introduce as a pilot project in specific locations, E-learning could be extended to almost everywhere. Here again, I wish to state that E-teaching should be accorded priority.

E-teaching, above all, will revolutionise the tradition bound paper-based, postal delivery linked distance education realm. The old system keeps really both the lessons and the students at distance, besides the teacher. The new correspondence courses, fully relying on E-tools will be a boon to distance education students; no hassles in getting by snail mail text book stuff as a torn bunch of papers, after inordinate delay.

E-learning and E-teaching will re-write the teaching/learning methodology in schools, colleges and distance education provided the money of the Education ministry and mettle of the academics joins hands in moulding the future generation that is familiar with computers even from school days.

With the support of the government, the NGOs and computer companies, it is easy to replace the black board, the chalk and talk. What is needed is the will of the rulers to revolutionise the education system. Let them give colour TVs, before the elections. But let them give after the elections computers, not free but at subsidized price in the interest of the rising generation's extensive and effective education by the e-way.

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