

MAKING EDUCATION ACCESSIBLE

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Education and related issues

A teacher conducting an online class. | Photo Credit: [S R Raghunathan](#)

Access and affordability continue to plague teachers and students alike one year after the COVID-19 outbreak. Teachers, administrators and policymakers are all working, but the results are not encouraging. People at both ends of the classroom seem to be going through a mere exercise with precious little to show for their efforts. How much of learning is happening is anyone's guess. Exams have lost their credibility. The cost to health with continuous exposure to screens and the dent on financial resources are significant for both teachers and students. Online learning seems to be a case of working mindlessly, rather than working smart.

With physical classes out of the reckoning, access to education is now almost exclusively online. Internet penetration in India is 50% and that reveals one reason for the less-than-efficient achievement in the online education sector. Every single teacher-educator and student, even in the metros, has experienced poor connectivity. In the rural areas online access remains an aspiration. What happens to that child in the village government school, eager to learn but with no proper access to the Internet? Even if there is a selfless teacher who is willing to use his/her mobile hotspot, how much can he/she spend? The government has a solution right in its backyard.

Also read | [Study highlights online education woes](#)

The Government of India owns the airwaves. Prasar Bharati is India's broadcasting corporation handling both radio and television in India. All India Radio (AIR) is blessed with 470 broadcasting centres which cover 92% of the country's geographical area and 99.19% of our population. Doordarshan (DD) handles television, online and mobile broadcasting across our country and the world with 34 satellite channels, 17 well-equipped studios in State capitals and 49 studio centres in other cities. With such resources, AIR and DD can be used to broadcast lessons, given that education is one of the three functions of the two agencies under the Prasar Bharati Act. These two agencies can be reinvented to cater to the needs of the education sector.

Educational broadcasts for classes 10, 11 and 12, to begin with, can be done over AIR and DD in the ratio 4:1 (four hours of radio and one hour of TV). Those courses which need demonstration and where seen/observed physical activity is important can be broadcast on TV. This calls for some training and some effort, but it can be done.

There are two benefits from this: one, we will be able to reduce for our teachers and students the strain of having to stare at their screens endlessly; and two, with AIR and DD being free, the heavy drain on financial resources will be drastically reduced.

Also read | [Pros and cons of online education, from a student's perspective](#)

Policymakers should make it a point to involve teachers in their planning. Training can be provided by a set of master trainers over a month for teachers who will turn into scriptwriters and programmers. These teachers can also be taught to create appropriate tools for evaluation over radio and TV. The Central and State educational boards should be roped in, to support, monitor and provide feedback to improve the system.

If regular radio is not enough, we also have digital radio spawning FM stations leased out to

private players for a fee and several FM stations that are run by NGOs, universities and such agencies. My suggestion is this: let the AIR devote four hours (per class) to educational broadcasting and let DD undertake educational broadcasting for an hour (per class). With these two public broadcasting services combined in the ratio of 4:1 (per each class), we will be able to serve the entire student population of our country.

Amid online classes, schools devise digital detox routine

Another suggestion that the government could consider is to ask Internet Service Providers to provide many hours of free Internet usage to teachers and students. This will not be easy but the government should call the shots and take a decision that is in the interest of the people.

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To reassure Indian Muslims, the PM needs to state that the govt. will not conduct an exercise like NRC

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