



Understanding E-Learning Companies: A New Face In The Market Of Private Tuitions

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Abstract: E-learning has a wider scope spreading across various domains like training professionals, e-learning in higher education, online courses, and many more. The present paper focuses only on the online coaching provided by e-learning companies to secondary school students preparing for the entrance examination conducted for admission in higher institutes of education. The paper explores the views of students enrolled in e-learning companies for preparation for the engineering entrance examination and tries to understand the factors that attract students towards e-learning companies and paper also explores teaching and learning practices carried out by e-learning companies. The paper adopts a qualitative approach. Data is collected by conducting in-depth interviews with senior secondary students enrolled in three different e-learning companies. Flexible, user-friendly, multimedia approach to teaching-learning; continuous assessment, and immediate feedback emerged to be the major factors attracting students towards e-learning companies.

Index Terms -e-learning, e-learning companies, engineering entrance examination, continuous assessment

I. INTRODUCTION

Competition could probably be the word that describes the present era most appropriately. The human race has achieved a lot, but still trying hard to achieve some more, a leap more, a step more to remain ahead of others. This race to remain ahead of others can be seen in almost all sectors, be it, health care, tourism, telecommunication, manufacturing, and education to name a few. To move that extra mileage, everyone is trapping the potential of technology. Education is no exception. Footprints of technology in the field of education are wide and clear as seen in the works of many researchers like, Mishra & Kohler (2006); Angeli & Valanides (2009), and many others. Private schools were quick to follow the trend and as a result, many schools started integrating technology in their teaching and learning. The government also took several initiatives to promote technology integration to make education accessible for all. But soon, emerged a new player in the arena of education, it was e-learning companies. E-learning companies are one among the many vendors available in the market of Private Tuition. Even though some e-learning companies work in collaboration with schools and universities, the present paper focuses only on the e-learning companies that provide educational support to students outside school in exchange for a hefty sum of money.

At present many e-learning companies are active in India. Some of the e-learning companies that cater to the needs of senior secondary students preparing for engineering entrance examinations are Byju's, Toppr, Vedantu, Unacademy, Turito, Planceess, and Ask IITians.

e-learning companies offer an array of flexible packages for the preparation of engineering entrance examinations. It includes video lectures, study material, and test series. Students can avail of all the facilities or can choose as per their requirements. They can purchase only the study material or test series. Even some companies provide the facility to purchase any subject-specific study material or test series. To understand

key features of e-learning companies offering outside-school learning support to engineering aspirants, the researcher collected qualitative data from 40 secondary school students enrolled in three different e-learning tutorials.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Private tutoring is not a new practice, it has always been a part of the education system (Zhang, 2014), though its approach may have changed from hand holding of weaker students initially to preparing students for high-stakes examinations in present times (Agarwal, 2015). Private tutoring is a form of instruction given outside school in exchange for fees (Bray & Lykins, 2011). Mori and Baker (2010) have defined private tutoring as private educational activities meant to supplement formal schooling. Malik (2017) describes it as academic activities, employed to reinforce students' learning in subjects taught in schools. Thus, based on these definitions, private tutoring can be described as instructional practices carried outside schools by private entrepreneurs, in exchange for fees, for supplementing teaching practices of the subjects taught in school. Bray (1999) also used privateness, supplementation, and teaching of academic subjects as some of the common features to describe the nature of private tutoring at the global level.

Private tutoring exists in different forms and at different levels of education. It includes home-based tuitions, small group tuitions by retired personnel, university students or temporarily unemployed individuals, and school teachers (Sujata, 2014, Gupta, 2019). Nowadays when the market of private tutoring is at a boom, we see professionals capturing the market of private tutoring, which includes coaching institutes with pan India franchises and faculty graduated from eminent colleges across the country (Agarwal, 2015). This system emerged in the vague of competitive entrance examinations, that senior secondary students appear to qualify for admission in higher institutes of education. To trap the market potential in coaching, e-learning companies have also started venturing into it. Even though e-learning has a wider scope and is spread across various domains like training professionals, e-learning in higher education, and many more; the present paper studies the different aspects of e-learning companies that help senior secondary students in preparation for entrance examinations for admission to higher institutes of education. The paper first covers the theoretical concepts related to e-learning. Later paper explores the views of students enrolled in e-learning companies for preparation for engineering entrance examinations.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To understand the reasons for choosing e-learning companies engineering aspirants to prepare for competitive examinations.
2. To understand the nature of teaching and learning as offered by e-learning companies..

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study attempts a qualitative approach to understand the views of engineering aspirants enrolled in e-learning companies. In-depth interviews were conducted with students to collect the qualitative data.

Sample: The snowball sampling technique was used for selecting participants. Companies do not disclose information related to students and schools do not have any information about outside school activities of students. Therefore, participants were contacted on a personal basis, one participant led to another participant and finally, 40 students of classes XI and XII were selected. Participants were enrolled in three different e-learning companies that offer coaching to engineering aspirants.

Tool: An interview schedule comprising open-ended questions was prepared by the researcher to collect the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Reasons for selecting e-learning companies

Out of 40 participants interviewed, 36 participants joined the e-tutorial in class XI, while four participants were associated with their e-learning company since classes 6th, 8th, and 9th (two students).

Seventeen participants out of 40 were also taking coaching from other reputed coaching institutes in their cities (those providing regular face-to-face coaching at their centers), while 23 participants reported that they were solely dependent on their e-learning portals for entrance exam preparations.

According to students enrolled in face-to-face coaching institutes with big names, they joined e-tutorials for additional help. Students reported that e-learning platforms provide them some quick and easy solutions for their doubts, a quick recap of the topic in an interesting digital mode. Sometimes when they are not able to understand the topic well in their school or coaching classes, videos from e-learning platforms come to the rescue as these videos use three-dimensional (3D) presentations for explaining abstract concepts in science.

Most students preferred it for the content and presentation of the videos, while others preferred it for the test series, which helped them to prepare for monthly tests held in their coaching institutes. It provides them exposure to different types of questions and a time-bound practice for tests in the school and coaching institutes. The key feature that attracted most students was the pop-up video for every wrong answer. If any question is marked wrong, a small video pops up explaining the concept behind that question. This immediate feedback reinforces their learning. The systematic arrangement of test series topic-wise, chapter-wise, subject-wise, and then all India test series was also found to be beneficial by participants. Students can avail the option of increasing the complexity level of their questions according to their level of preparation and to check their progress.

“Questions are presented at seven different levels moving from simple to complex, it gives me an idea about my preparation and motivates me to move to complete the next level. Once done I feel confident that I have mastered that particular topic.”

The mobility and flexibility of this learning approach also attracted participants. Participants could use the resources at their pace, and according to their ease. It supports them by filling the gaps like they do not get to watch television anymore, watching videos related to their subject, provide them some change without wasting any time. Giving power tests, with the clock ticking every second and clearing different levels of the test help them in their preparation as well as provide them some change from routine workbook practice.

“e-learning app gives me the flexibility to learn anywhere anytime. I can revise a small topic even while waiting at the dinner table or while going for my evening walk.”

“When I am exhausted and do not want to read or solve problems, then, I play a video from my app and watch it. It feels refreshing”.

Participants who trusted e-learning companies for their entrance examination preparation and were not associated with any other coaching institutes were associated with the e-learning companies that provide live classes along with learning materials. Participants found the support they got from their e-learning company sufficient for their entrance exam preparations. They get live classes scheduled as per their convenience, study material easy to understand, with lots of questions to revise and practice. Online tests daily after each class, weekly, fortnightly, and monthly tests to keep a check on their progress and a personal mentor to support their learning, creating daily planners, suggesting innovative approaches to improve learning and analyzing their test reports, and also providing psychological support whenever required.

Technology advancement allows e-learning companies to satisfy parents also along with the students. When it allows students to manage their learning by the use of applications where the topic they have covered completely, the topic they have studied but not attempted the questions, the topic that has not been touched at all, the topic that needs more attention and likewise other information are all represented using different color codes, help students to sort the topics and plan accordingly. Similarly, parents get regular notifications about the learning status of their children on their mobile phones.

“My mother does not ask me anymore those same questions again and again. Now she gets all the details on her phone. She gets to know whether I have attended the class or not, given the test or not, marks I have obtained in the test, my overall rank, whether I have completed the topic or not, and my other things related to my learning”.

In addition to this, all India-level test series help them to measure their progress against others.

All these features attract students towards e-learning and parents do not hesitate to invest a big amount in these companies when they see improvement in the learning of their child.

Nature of teaching and learning as offered by e-learning companies

Participants found learning through learning apps from e-learning companies more systematic and tailor-made to their learning needs. Now, the newly added feature of live classes, after the pandemic, makes them more successful. Due to live classes, they feel connected to the instructor and can clear their doubts then and there.

Participants found it to be systematic as it follows a well-defined path of presentation. First, a conceptual video is presented intriguingly covering each topic, to arouse their interest and to keep them hooked to it. Next after the explanation video, they get unlimited questions for practicing the topic learned. And then they attempted the test series from the related topic. Questions are adaptive according to their strength and weaknesses.

“As soon as I finish the video, a set of questions is presented, if I solve them correctly it takes me to the next level otherwise similar questions are presented unless I solve them perfectly.”

Testing is another important feature according to the participants. A set of 10-15 questions is presented as soon as the topic is covered for immediate reinforcement while another set of questions is given to practice that is learned so far, cumulative reinforcement.

Participants were found to be fascinated by the array of tools used for the delivery of the content both in live classes as well as in the videos. Conceptual videos cover illustrations, simulations, derivations, and mind maps related to the concept including problem-solving and theoretical facts from the topic covered in the video.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that e-learning companies have set their foot in the educational market. They are giving tailor-made solutions to the learning needs of students. Maybe they are successful in capturing students' attention, developing interest in learning, and bringing conceptual clarity and self-management of learning; but still, they bear the brunt of private tutoring. E-learning companies run outside school, in exchange for hefty sums of money. This creates social inequality. Rural students, economically weaker students with no power backups, no internet, and no electronic devices would not be able to reap the benefits of this technology-driven form of instruction. To fill this social gap, time demands to take the e-learning platforms to schools so that everyone can cherish the fruit of e-learning.

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