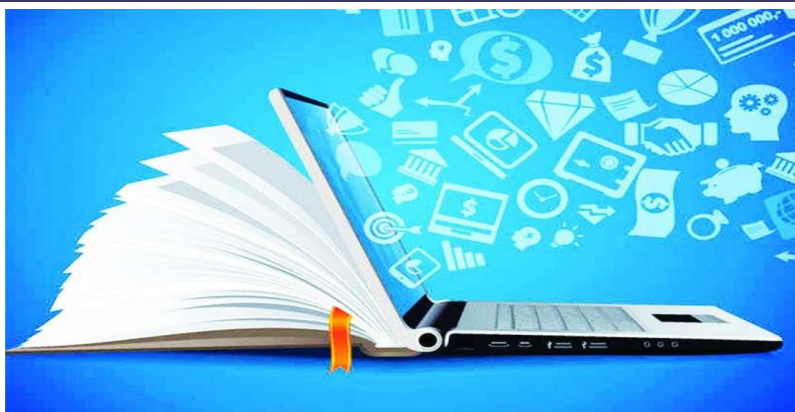




Streamed education is diluted education

Context:

- The COVID-19 lockdown has given impetus to online learning which is being seen as substitution of Classroom learning experience



Analogy of Helmet usage:

- There are broadly two kinds of helmets, namely, one which protects the head and the other which protects the wallet.
- The most significant difference is that of design intentions.
 - 1) One is designed keeping safety in mind, made of durable, impact-absorbing material
 - 2) The other, on the other hand, is designed to get by police fines and is made of quality-compromising, low-cost material.
- Thus, there is a dilution in our conception of a helmet from being a safety gear to protect lives to being a gear to protect us from being fined.

- Something that is of value (helmet as measure of safety) is being diluted into the functional

The University Grants Commission (UGC) scheme:

- In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UGC issued a circular to universities encouraging them to **adopt massive open online courses (MOOCs)** offered on its SWAYAM platform for credit transfers in the coming semesters
- The SWAYAM platform has, however, left out courses in engineering, medicine, dental, pharmacy, nursing, architecture, agriculture, and physiotherapy on the grounds that they involve laboratory and practical work.

Criticism of UGC Scheme/ MOOC-based e-learning:

- MOOC-based e-learning platforms poses danger since it is also being seen as an instrument to achieve the country's target Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education (envisioned to be 30% by 2021; it was 25.8% in 2017–18).
- **Similar to Helmet Usage:** This is another instance of a dilution of meaning (GER numbers over learning) and subsequent flattening of the learning curve
- **Neglecting Physical Infrastructure:** Instead of expanding the network of higher educational institutions across the country and increasing seats, the government plans to make online degree programmes available for students

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- **Reduction of Education:** The scheme views education as a combination of content and consumption, and this diluted meaning is being put to the service of achieving increased GER.
- **Uni-directional:** MOOC-based e-learning platforms tend to reinforce a top-down teacher-to-student directionality of learning whereby the teacher 'creates' and the student consumes
- **Role of Teacher Changed:** The teacher is traditionally considered as an intellectual midwife who facilitates in the birth of students' ideas and insights through engaging in critical dialogue. This interaction will be reduced to great extent in online learning
- **Overlooking Sacred Spaces:** Taking higher education online is much like taking up a sport such as cricket, football or boxing online. One has not actually learnt the sport unless one has engaged with it in one's gully, stadium, field, or ring.
- **Narrow view of Humanities:** Science stream being left out of SWAYAM portal is welcome. However, arts, social sciences, and humanities curricula are considered largely lecture- and theory-based, and, therefore, readily adaptable to the online platform, which is a misconception
- **Loss of inclusiveness:** Classroom and campus spaces offer the potential for solidarity in the face of discrimination, social anxiety, and stage fear, paving the way for a proliferation of voluntary associations
- This could also dilute norms of evaluation, whereby a good lecture might mean merely a lecture which "streams seamlessly, without buffering".

Conclusion:

- MOOC-based e-learning platforms will help us get by with the pandemic just as a "helmet" would help us get by with traffic police waving penalty slips
- Therefore, such platforms must be seen only as temporary arrangements that help us get by under lockdown situations and **complement classroom lectures**.