

Exercise – 1

Reading Comprehension

Read the following article about a unique lunch delivery business, and then answer the questions on the opposite page.



The Dabbawallahs of Mumbai, India



Babu Paravakar, aged 63, of Mumbai in India is a professional dabbawallah. He earns a living by cycling over 48 kilometres a day delivering dabbas (metallic lunch boxes) to office workers.

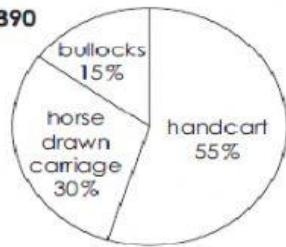
These lunch boxes are collected from the female occupants of homes all round the city and delivered to their relatives at their workplace. The tradition of carrying lunch boxes from private homes to workplaces dates from 1890. In those days delivery was by hand cart, horse-drawn carriage or by other animals, such as bullocks.

Today the main method of transporting the lunch boxes is by 4000 dabbawallahs on bicycles. The distances can be great and many dabbawallahs take their bikes with them on the train. Incredibly, the system works without a single document because in the past most dabbawallahs could not read or write. This meal service is very labour-intensive and low-tech, but there is some evidence that it is changing. The people who coordinate the service have started text messaging and have introduced the facility for ordering the delivery online. It is planned that the business will soon have its own website with information about prices and services. They also hope to establish an internet shop which will sell coffee mugs, T-shirts and other items.

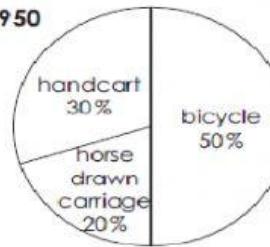
Technically, dabbawallahs are independent, small-scale businessmen. When they first join the business they must pay 30 000 rupees, which guarantees them a monthly salary of 5000 rupees as well as some health care and education for their children. "It is a good job which makes you think on your feet and lasts as long as you remain physically strong," says Babu. "I have 4000 kilometres on my body clock already this year," he adds.

How methods of distribution have changed over the past 120 years

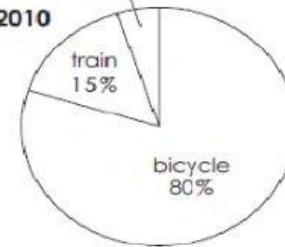
1890



1950



2010



Most dabbawallahs are Hindus, but their customers can also be Muslim, Sikh, Jain or Parsi, religions that each observe different and strict dietary rules, so it is essential that each lunch box is delivered to the right person.

"We deliver about 180 000 lunches every day and we charge 7 dollars a month for the service," says Raghunath Medge, President of the Association. "Only one box goes missing every two months, that is one in six million."

This is an impressive statistic and their business is so efficient that some of the dabbawallahs have been invited to business conferences and to give lectures at business schools.

This unique food distribution service has so far successfully resisted competition from fast food outlets and giant food corporations. People still want traditional home-made food. In addition, it is cheaper for the customers to pay for food to be collected from their homes and have it delivered at work than to go to a restaurant or street stall every day.

Babu delivers his last lunch box right on time at an office block. He has about an hour before he starts collecting the empty containers. As he sits exhausted on his delivery bicycle, he says, "The old ways are the best. It is a privilege to be part of the finest and most famous meals-on-wheels service in the world."

(a) What exactly do *dabbawallahs* do?

..... [1]

(b) Who prepares the boxes for the office workers?

..... [1]

(c) Which **two** means of transport are most commonly used for delivery of the lunches nowadays?

..... [1]

(d) How does a *dabbawallah*'s family benefit from his employment? Give **two** details.

..... [1]

(e) According to the charts, what percentages of lunches were delivered by bicycle in 1950, and in 2010?

1950

2010

[1]

(f) Why is it important that lunch boxes are delivered to the right person?

..... [1]

(g) Why have some *dabbawallahs* been invited to lecture at business schools?

..... [1]

(h) How is the *dabbawallah* business able to compete against cafés and food stalls?
Give **two** details.

..... [2]

(i) What is Babu's next task after delivering the lunch boxes?

..... [1]

(j) Give **four** details to describe the modernisation of the lunch delivery business.

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..... [4]

[Total: 14]