
ONLINE EDUCATION IN INDIA: A POST-PANDEMIC ASSESSMENT OF CHALLENGES AND EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

In India, there are a lot of challenges and opportunities for online education. We have identified key factors which will boost online education in India. We have identified internet penetration; low cost of online education, ease of doing course, initiative by government, employer's recognition and bridging gap are the key factors the growth of online education. The prolonged lockdown disrupted the teaching-learning activity of the students. In order to ensure continuity in learning, most of the academic institutes moved online. However, this tectonic shift was sudden and abrupt which created another set of issues and challenges for every stake-holder involved viz.

Keywords: Online education; importance; advantages; Disadvantages; Challenges and opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

With educational institutes closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has been encouraging online education to achieve academic continuity. Most high-end private and public institutions have made the switch smoothly using online platforms such as Zoom, Google classrooms, Microsoft teams, etc., while many still find it a herculean task. The challenges of online education are multifaceted. It is time that we Indians, as a society, understand the realms of online education – in India. Online education has a great scope and all those having time limitations are turning towards it. Many top universities, organizations and the colleges are accepting the online education system. Online Education is affordable for students and also flexible as they can learn from their comfort place. Online education has no age bar and anyone can do the course from anywhere. According to the recent survey after United States, India is the second highest country for the online enrolment courses all over the world. Online education in Indian schools can enhance the quality of the education. United States have started providing the online education to the Secondary School and they are finding it as effective. Many foreign universities are offering the online degrees so no need to go to the abroad for further education. Many top Indian universities like Sikkim Manipal, Symbiosis, IIM, IGNOU and Annamalai University are offering online distance education. They offer courses like MCA, MBA, MSc, BA (Hons), Retail & Digital Marketing, BBA etc. The fees of these online courses are affordable for students. Online education saves money on the lectures & conferences. Also they conduct online exams time to time. Classroom education is not suitable for everyone as in classroom there are some students whose grasping power is high and there are some who are always back. Also some students require more detailed information in classroom education, but not possible. But in online education students can get more detailed information and also can concentrate. In classroom education teacher can't give personal attention to each and every student. In classroom education not all students are active, some are energetic but some just sit back. Classroom education has a limitation on the number of students, but for online education thousands can enroll for a course. For online education there is no need to stand in a queue to get an admission. All those working professionals or a business professional who wants to do a professional course or wants to study further to improve their skills can enroll for the online education. Online education is getting more popular in the working professional as they don't have the time to attend the regular classes. It's best option for them. They can enroll for online course for any time of the day.

The government is supporting online education in India because of its potential to improve education quality and reach through the Digital India initiative. Government of India in Association with Ministry of HRD has initiated a programme named SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active –Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) that is designed to achieve the three fundamental objectives of Education Policy i.e., access, equity and quality. The main objectives of this effort are to take the quality teaching learning resources to all, including those who cannot afford. This program SWAYAM seeks to provide education to those students who are not yet aware of the digital revolution taking place and are still not able to join the mainstream of the knowledge economy. Nearly 2000 online courses are offered through Swayam and approximately 150 million students across the globe are enrolled in different courses.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dr. Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank, Minister for Human Resources Development tweeted on 10 April 2020 that e-learning platforms launched by MHRD received a footfall of 1.4 crore during the first lockdown (Ministry of HRD, 2020).

Richa Choudhary, a young professional at Niti Aayog has outlined suggestions to embed technology in curriculum (2020).

Harjiv Singh has predicted several advantages which online classes are likely to have in years to come: 1) improvement in access to learning, 2) democratization of information and knowledge, 3) inclusiveness of learning to grow and 4) the parents' contribution in bettering the course and content to begin (2020).

Bulbul Dhawan has very happily noted that even a number of government schools have gone online to ensure continuity in learning (2020).

According to a report by Google and KPMG, the online education market in India at the end of December, 2016 was \$247 million and it will reach \$1.96 billion by 2021. Also India's online education market is the second largest market after US. The findings of the report also states that the paid user base for online education services will also grow at least by six times i.e. approximately 9.6 million users by 2021.

IMPORTANCE OF ONLINE EDUCATION

1. Flexible Schedule
2. Everyone Can Gain The Education
3. Keep Up With Changing Trends
4. Vast Choice Of Syllabus
5. Learn Whatever You Want
6. Lower In Cost
7. Learn At Your Swiftness
8. Improve Technical Skills
9. Internet penetration in India
10. Online education saves money and time
11. Ease of doing courses for working professionals
12. Initiative by Government of India
13. Gaining recognition among employers
14. Bridge the gap between education level and industry expectations

POSITIVE EFFECTS OF ONLINE EDUCATION

1. Efficiency
2. Accessibility Of Time And Place
3. Affordability
4. Improved Student Attendance
5. Suits A Variety Of Learning Styles
6. Advanced teaching techniques are used to teach
7. Convenient
8. Affordable fees
9. Can choose the class timing as per your timing
10. More Revision
11. Saves Time & Saves Money [No Travelling]
12. More concentration and less disturbances

13. Video presentations helps students to understand quickly
14. Webinar
15. Mock tests
16. Videos
17. Counseling
18. Internet penetration
19. Smartphone penetration
20. Flexibility of time
21. Quality education
22. Immediate results
23. Government initiatives
24. Study material
25. Affordability

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF ONLINE EDUCATION

1. Inability To Focus On Screens
2. Technology Issues
3. Sense Of Isolation
4. Teacher Training
5. Manage Screen Time
6. To may miss the face-to-face interaction with the instructor and among students
7. To may prefer to attend traditional classes with an instructor who teaches and guides them through the course
8. To find access to the necessary technology challenging and the availability of technical support limited In addition, some administrators and instructors who do not understand the workload may display a negative attitude toward online education.

OPPORTUNITIES IN ONLINE EDUCATION

Change in technology is offering many opportunities for all stakeholders in the online education sector which includes entrepreneurs, education providers and learners. Some of the factors offering different opportunities in this domain include:

1. Mobile Learning

According to a report in Stastia (2018), in the year 2017 there were 320.57 million people who accessed the internet through their mobile phone. This figure is projected to increase to 462.26 million by the year 2021. The surge in users is credited to availability of 4G internet and smart phones at very low price. Going forward, IAMAI hopes that the National Telecom Policy (NTP) 2018, which is focusing on new technologies like 5G, will promote better quality data services at more affordable prices and help address the digital divides that will promote internet penetration in the rural areas through mobile internet. According to report by Zenith, mobile devices will account for 73 per cent of time spent using the internet in 2018. So the vast majority of students in future will have access to e-learning through mobile phones.

2. Investor's Interest

A large number of entrepreneurs are venturing into online education as this is expected to see an uptrend in the next 5 years thanks to the Digital India campaign, the cultural importance given to education and falling mobile data prices. The Chang Zuckerberg Initiative has invested \$50 has invested \$8.2 million in Eruditus, and Kaizen Management Advisors and DeVry Inc. have put in \$10 million in EduPristine. Khan Academy is a non profit organization which receives financial support from philanthropic organizations like The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Google and Netflix founder Reed Hastings.

Online learning platform Unacademy also raised \$11.5 million of funding led by Sequoia India and SAIF Partners; and Eruditus Executive Education, a provider of executive education programmes, had raised \$8 million funding from Bertelsmann India Investments. So, the online education sector will continue to spark more interest among entrepreneurs, investors and attract more funding.

3. Blended Model

There will be convergence of the offline education and online education in future. This concept of blended learning combines online digital media with traditional classroom methods. It requires the physical presence of both teacher and student, but student has some control over time, place, path, or pace. This model will take advantage of both face-to-face classroom practices combined with computer-mediated activities. In future, there will be virtual classrooms where face to face offline pedagogy will be aided by digital courses on practical knowledge and soft skills.

4. New Courses

Today the most popular courses in online education are related to IT which includes subjects like big data, cloud computing, and digital marketing. But in future demand for different types of courses in unexpected subjects such as culinary management, photography, personality development, forensic science, cyber law, etc. will increase.

CHALLENGES IN ONLINE EDUCATION

There are a lot of challenges faced by people in online education in India. Some of these challenges which need to be overcome are:

1. Insufficient digital infrastructure

Although Government of India is taking initiative to develop digital infrastructure but a lot need to be done in this direction. High speed internet and stable power supply are the biggest problem. India stands 89 worldwide on internet speed and stability. According to the report of World Economic Forum, only 15 percent of the households have access to the Internet, and mobile broadband remains accessible to very few i.e. only 5.5 subscriptions for every 100 people. Further, currently reach of broadband is just about 600 corridors, largely in and around the top 50 to 100 Indian cities, leaving rural areas with poor connectivity. 5G networks technology is the requirement of today's which will increase the speed of downloading the data.

2. Limited Social interaction

Since online education can be accessed at home or any other convenient place, there is very limited direct interaction with the teacher and other people doing the course. According to Dharendra Kumar (2010), especially those courses which are self paced, there is very less discussion among the peers. Most of the discussion takes place through e mail, chat room or discussion groups. There isn't any campus atmosphere to improve social interaction. So you are not able to develop any social links which do help in the career growth.

3. Questionable credibility of degrees

Although industry has started recognizing online degrees, there are still a lot of fraudulent and non-accredited degrees being offered online. The number of scam operators is rising who are offering fake certificated which does not have any credentials. These scams not only losses the credibility of the online certificates but also the faith of prospective employer in online programs.

4. Motivation

Some students need the push to get to the class. In case of self paced online programmes, student may procrastinate. The dropout rate in online education is very high. Self motivation and discipline is required to complete the assignments and upload them timely. If you have difficulty working independently, staying organized and meeting deadlines, you might struggle in an online program.

5. Language of the Course

India is a multi-linguistic country, and a vast majority of the population comes from rural areas. The content offered by most of the online courses is in English. Hence, those students who are not able to speak English struggle with the availability of language content. Hence, it is the duty of computer professionals, educators, administrators, language content creators, and content disseminators, to sit together and give a viable framework and standard solution to the learners knowing only Indian languages.

CONCLUSION

From last 2 to 3 years the online education has changed the quality of education and is far better than earlier. There are some online education service providers in market who are providing the education at free of cost. Seeing the increasing demand for the online education, many business competitors are entering this market. But

all those providing the quality education will only survive in future. Also there may be still more various courses in online education and with lots of options. The demand of the online education will create more employment for the lecturers in the future. Still Indian parents are not finding the online education as more important than the classroom education. Government should create more awareness to change the trend. It would be premature to state that online classes should become a new way of teaching-learning process. Online sessions may be used to complement classroom teaching but cannot be used to replace classroom teaching completely in the way in which the technology enthusiasts want it to be a new normal post Covid-19 Pandemic unless a mechanism is devised to address the issues and challenges presented by the researchers. Education process needs to be changed by making it more practical with the use of technology. Also course should be designed in different language to increase their reach and more opportunities for youth of rural India. Innovations are required to design ways to increase the social skills of online learners.

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