

PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES IN ONLINE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Technology has become an essential part of our education system with the introduction of new-age digital platforms enhancing the academic landscape in India. At present there is very rapid change in technology, which causes unavoidable changes in education sector also. The research scholar has identified many factors which will uplift online education in India with the help of literature review. She has identified internet penetration, less expensive online courses, easiness of doing courses, learn any course at learner's pace and bridging gap are the key factors for the growth of online education. There are many factors which create a barrier in the growth of online education that include inadequate digital infrastructure, language used in online education. But during COVID situations in India, there is increase in number of online education users, which create large number of opportunities in future education sector.

Keywords: *Online Education, Prospects and Challenges, Digital Infrastructure.*

Introduction

Today, online education is a contemporary and effective tool for increasing the competitiveness among students, meeting the various needs and interests of students, and implementing the concept of continuing education. This determines the significance of studying and describing trends and prospects for the development of online education. This study highlights the directions of the perception of Internet technologies into the educational process. The essence of the concept of online education is that not only students, but also young people who do not have the opportunity to continuing their study with work or who live in areas remote from the regional centers, can get an online education; housewives; military personnel; managers are ready to get a second education. The trends that accompany the development of online education have been identified. Problems of the introduction of online education are insufficient professional training of teachers, reluctance of students, limited implementation of information technologies in educational institutions, lack of a single educational standard for online learning, lack of a favorable environment etc. Promising directions for further development of online education in order to improve its quality were identified. Therefore, there is an intensive development of online education throughout the world. Online courses contain significant pedagogical potential associated with informatization and intensification of the educational process. Online courses in the near future will form a real foundation for continuing education.

Online Education

Online education is a learning platform that totally depends on the internet. Here, the tutor interacts with the students and assists them in understanding the subject they've enrolled for. It provides large number of ways to teach and learn outside of traditional classrooms.

Typically, such classes include audios, videos, text, and animation and more, which makes learning more interesting and exciting. Plus, it creates a rich learning environment that offers enough flexibility.

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Making Online Courses more Relevant

Technology must be attainable to all the students, including students of special needs, students of different learning patterns etc. The most relevant technique for creating an equitable technological experience is to use a platform that have a reachable design of content development stages. To make the online education more effective in India, University Grant Commission has sanctioned higher educational institutions to offer Certificate, Diploma, and Degree Programmes in online mode to the students under the University Grants Commission (Online Courses) Regulations, 2018. It is evident from this reform, that the benefits of online learning have convinced the government to take relevant actions for its advancement.

In difficult time of pandemic such as the Covid-19 that has brought the world to an almost complete lockdown, online education is turning out to be the rescuer in these critical times. Besides, hampering the global economy, the outbreak has disrupted the educational institutions leaving the education sector among the most affected sectors. The pandemic has led to the indefinite closure of schools, colleges, universities, and all extracurricular activities have suspended, ten millions of students have been told to go online to study across the globe. This sudden closure of educational institutions across the globe has forced the online delivery of a huge number of courses. This also makes us wonder whether the future might just have become the present.

Why Online Education Matters?

E-learning tools provide a plethora of educational resources for both educators and students which they couldn't have access to, no matter what their location or status is. A student can learn from the talented professor a continent away and that too in their own preferred time. In a classroom full of 20-30 students, it's impossible to get the attention of all of them. They won't cooperate because they're bored, zoned out, or too focused on the sun outside rather than paying attention to math. Some of the factors that make online education pertinent:

- **Easy Access:** Online education can remove both social and physical hurdles, means if a student was absent in his class, he can access the lectures online if made available.
- **Variety of programs and courses:** are also available on online mode, higher education institutions offer a variety of options for students.
- **Flexibility:** Online courses give learners the freedom of choosing a time of their own. Students can study and work at their own convenience. Course content is available online, and it is not required to make special library visits for this.
- **Career advancement:** Students can adopt online courses and even complete entire degrees while doing jobs, or while taking time for their family. This academic work will explain about any discontinuity or gaps in their studies in their resume also.
- **Teacher Development:** E-learning is not only beneficial for students but also for the teachers as the best educators enjoy the opportunity to learn continuously.

Benefits of Online Education

- **Cost-effective and saves time:** Online courses do not force students to be present in a classroom. They can attend these classes from anywhere in the world. This saves a lot of time and money and gives students a chance to learn better.
- **Offers higher knowledge retention:** To make education interesting and interactive, educators apply different methods like solving puzzles, blended learning approach and more. This increases knowledge retention and the time spent on learning becomes productive.
- **Allows us to track our progress:** One of the best things about online education is that it allows us to track our course progress, easily and efficiently. This is possible as online learning includes an learning management system that opens a window for students to chart their growth.
- **Online education provides a step-by-step explanation process of content for students to understand.** This causes everyone to manage their tasks, as and when they find it convenient. Moreover, online education has become a tool to boost the economy as well. All of this has made online learning extremely successful in India.

Factors Dominate Online Education

- **The emergence of Cloud Computing:** According to Technical analysts, the emergence of cloud computing will be one of the major mode in online teaching that we will witness in India.

The cloud computing technology permits online education providers to save a significant amount of content and data on a single platform, thus making it easier for users and providers to process, obtain, access, and manage information from anywhere at any time.

- **Focus on career skills:** As the world is changing at a rapid pace, the online educational institutions are trying to keep a balance between learning and skills required by enterprises and industry. They are offering new online courses which help students to become well equipped for the jobs of tomorrow.
- **Project-Based Learning:** Project-based learning, allows students to show their skills by developing apps, products etc. Many a time, it requires constant instructor feedback and multiple attempts if a student fails to meet the criteria. Project-based education is the foundation of the curriculum of some online educational institutions. Students create several projects and receive regular feedback to earn a degree. This form of compulsive project-based assessments will enrich subjective sharpness for students changing the face of online education in India.
- **Blended E-learning Programs:** Blended learning - online courses with offline touchpoints, is increasingly gaining popularity amongst individuals and organizations looking to update skills of their employees. This model facilitates discussions and collaborative learning, offers flexibility to learners who have a better completion rate.
- **Collaborative Learning:** Online education in India is being updated with rising interest in digital modes of delivery. While online learning will expand in the internet-matrix the effectiveness of it to keep isolated, remote students engaged with trainers. Collaborative learning has been proposed as a solution. As the term suggests, the methodology is designed to cultivate collaboration and experiential learning. As we know, humans are social animals and learn faster with experience, the class is fragmented into groups. Each group is then given a task to complete with the help of their group members.
- **Metered Learning:** Each of our students has unique learning speeds. Now the traditional styles of teaching are converted into innovative styles of teaching. This can be done with the help of Artificial Intelligence machine learning. In fact, the cooperative exercise is referred to as Adaptive Learning, where students consume content on smart devices. The device shares the learning progress with the faculty along with recommendations on how to customize the curriculum for faster absorption.
- **Government Support for E-learning:** The central Government of India has been proactive in acknowledging and promoting e-learning through its chief public programmes, Digital India and Skill India. The government takes essential steps in proclaiming the significance of internet-enabled learning. SWAYAM (Study-Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) is a government-instituted MOOC platform for classes 9th and above. It has higher level courses to prepare students for specialized skills.
- **Internet penetration in India:** The key factors behind this growth are the boom in smart phone usage and availability of more affordable smart phones. Availability of internet at fast speed and at very reasonable price is the reason for growth in mobile internet user. Because of internet, world class education becomes easily accessible to urban and rural population.
- **Online education saves money and time:** As online education is done through internet, so it can be easily available anywhere, anytime. We can access the content early morning, late evening, at home, in cafeteria, or during journey. As the content is generally preloaded, so we can download the lectures / videos and watch them at our convenience time. Also cost of online education is very low in comparison to face to face education. Also there is a great savings on hostel and transportation fees. Since all the content is available online, so we need not to buy books also.
- **Ease of doing courses for working persons:** Online education offers great opportunity for working persons as they cannot leave their jobs to pursue higher education. Online education offers them a variety of courses to choose from and this can help in finding new career options for them.
- **Gaining recognition among employers:** Today many of the prestigious institutions in India are offering online courses where otherwise admission is very difficult and costly. Online courses done from prestigious institutions are accepted by employers. Employers also understand that

online education requires self-discipline, drive and other skills that they are looking for in a candidate. Right selection of course from right educational institute can help a candidate to make right career growth.

- **Bridge the gap between education and job expectations:** online education is one of the alternatives to bridge the gap between what a job required from their candidates and what the educational institutes are delivering to their students. Online education offers an opportunity to enhance skills through advance courses available in different domains.

Challenges in Online Education

There are a lot of challenges faced by people in online education in India. Some of these challenges are:

- **Insufficient Digital Infrastructure**

Although Government of India is taking initiative to develop digital infrastructure but a lot of work need to be done in this direction. High speed internet and stable power supply are the biggest problem.

- **Limited Social Interaction**

Since online education can be accessed at home or any other place, there is very limited direct interaction with the teacher and people doing the course. 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 is not any campus atmosphere to improve social interaction. So we are not able to develop any social links which are required in the career growth.

- **Credibility of Online Degrees**

Although companies have 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 degree 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.

- **Motivation**

Some students need motivation to get to the class. In case of self paced online programmes, students may delay to complete their course in time limit. The dropout rate in online education is very high. Self motivation and discipline is required to complete the assignments and upload them timely.

- **Language of the Course**

India is a multi-linguistic country, and a huge 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 comfortable in reading, speaking and writing 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.

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 opportunities in online education are:

- **Blended Model**

There will be combination of the offline education and online education in future. This concept of blended learning converge online digital media with traditional classroom methods. It requires the physical presence of both teachers and students, but students have 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.

- **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 will increase for different types of courses in subjects such as culinary management, photography, personality development, forensic science, cyber law, etc.

Conclusion

Online education can change the whole future framework in education if it can be executed in joint collaboration with industry, universities and government. Serious changes in course curriculum are required to bridge the gap so that students are ready to get a job after passing out from their courses. 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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