

DIGITAL LEARNING: IMPACT ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Life is meaningless without education since it forces an individual to face daily challenges. With the advancement of technology around the globe, the modes of education and learning approaches are changing, and current students are paying attention to online education since it allows them to select what to study, how to learn, and when to learn. Students are flocking to online portals such as edX, Stanford Online, Harvard Extension, Coursera, Udacity, and others to learn from the best teachers in the world. As a result, their diplomas are gaining more and more credibility by the day. These are invaluable resources for pupils who do not have access to a good education. During the COVID-19 shutdown era, online education has exploded all over the world, particularly in India, where educational institutions are in the process of offering online classes, conferences, webinars, and workshops. Online education has some social impacts as there is no confrontational interaction with a teacher or other students and it requires self-discipline and self-direction that not everyone opposes. It is not stated whether online education will replace traditional classroom instruction, but it is believed that online education will continue to expand and become more helpful to society.

Keywords: Higher Education, Digital Learning, Online Teaching, Advancements, Video Conferencing, Impacts.

Introduction

Education is important for everyone since it provides information, confidence, moral values, and problem-solving abilities, changes their personalities, and makes their lives better and more peaceful. Learning is a never-ending process that is essential to everyone's survival. In practically every industry, the world is adapting technology and innovations, and the education sector is no exception. Digitalization has radically revolutionised the approach to education. This chapter focuses on how digital learning alters higher education's perspective and the issues associated with its implementation. Students used to forget digital information in this computer era, and with digital learning, it is more convenient for students to learn anywhere at any time. It gives pupils a platform on which they may efficiently learn while also having access to information from anywhere in the world. As a result, the education sector increased the tendency toward web-based learning to help students improve their learning processes. Educational institutions are establishing new models, such as online degrees and courses with high quality and professional skills that are available at affordable costs, which are particularly advantageous to students from developing nations like India. Although the traditional strategy, i.e., campus-centric, will continue to be the most common, many universities and higher educational institutions are incorporating digital/online education into their campus learning to make it more successful and to improve students' problem-solving skills. However, some platforms solely provide digital education, and students are drawn to these less expensive

online courses since they can learn from anywhere in the globe at a lower cost. They can also customize their curriculum to their specific interests and goals.

Changing Education Imperative

Our existing educational system is not flexible, and does not place a high priority on the development of students' cognitive skills in higher education. In socially disadvantaged communities, there is a lack of quality education and a lower teacher-to-student ratio. One important issue is a lack of financing for research across disciplines, as well as a weak regulatory framework that stifles the creation of good and creative HEIs. In such circumstances, online education can be a blessing, as the entire education system had to change to online education during the COVID-19 lockdown time, which was itself innovative, as India needed to be digital, not just think digital. Every higher education institution was involved in online teaching, hosting conferences, webinars, and professional development programmes to help students understand the latest technological trends. Digital education appeals to today's pupil in a numerous way. They began to study from a variety of sources and developed healthy rivalry among themselves and their peers. The government is also launching a new education policy that will emphasise academic capabilities as well as critical thinking and adaptation skills in order to prepare pupil for technical problems. It is not an exaggeration to argue that e-learning is a "new normal" that is transforming India's educational system, and its significance was underscored by the COVID-19 lockdown, which left no other option but to adopt digital education. Housewives and many students who were not tech savvy utilised video broadcasting platforms like as Zoom, Google Meet, Hangout, Microsoft Teams, and WebEx on their cell phones and tablets. At home, there are also computers for studies. Learners were able to access online books, journals, and research papers thanks to Digital Libraries and Google Classrooms, and social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube aided students by providing online learning opportunities and engaging them through live-streaming and online tutorials.

Traditional Education vs Online Education

The traditional Indian educational system has several problems like, extensive degree programmes and short-term courses, crowded classrooms, low student-teacher ratios, course shortages, and a theoretical rather than practical approach to learning, all of which make students feel inferior and depressed in today's competitive world. Although the COVID-19 lockdown's unanticipated shift to digital learning allows students to access a variety of MOOC programmes, they find these online courses to be more successful owing to the curriculum and professors delivering these courses. They can actually join the programme whenever they want, and if they don't want the certificate, they can take the course for as long as they want. Despite the fact that digital training initially had a poor user experience due to a shortage of instruction on online platforms and inadequate internet access, this new hybrid model of education has revolutionised the way people learn, especially during this epidemic. Millions of people throughout the world enroll in online degree programmes to improve their skills.

They believe that online learning is well worth it because online courses are more convenient and less expensive than their traditional counterparts.

Students can attend multiple online classes from various colleges with an Internet connection, and digital learning takes approximately half the time to complete a course, which is not achievable in a traditional classroom setting, because they study at their own pace. Although the online experience varies by age group, for example, younger students learn more easily through games, teenagers are distracted by other online social media platforms, and professionals can improve their expertise through online programmes while balancing professional responsibilities and study. Some students become more responsible for their studies when learning on online platforms because they are curious and interested in the course they have selected, but others find face-to-face learning more comfortable and prefer traditional methods. To put it another way, if both methods of teaching are combined, good outcomes can be achieved.

Advantages of Online Learning

Online learning and training are simple to use, pleasant, and can be a fantastic substitute for traditional learning, particularly for students who cannot afford traditional degree programmes or who are occupied with employment or other activities. They can learn any course they want and receive a degree in that course from any institute in the world via the internet. These institutions' online courses are up-to-date with new concepts and technologies. People nowadays are more interested in online learning due to the following advantages:

- **Flexibility and Comfort:** Learners can select the course of their choice without having to travel away from home or compete in a highly competitive learning environment. Working professionals can also enroll in online courses to advance their careers without having to leave their jobs. Online training courses only demand an internet connection and a few minutes out of busy schedules, allowing for scheduling flexibility and hard effort. All of the lecture notes are easily accessible through internet platforms; in fact, using Google to search for a course and a university makes it much easier.
- **Mobility:** The only requirement for eLearning is a browser-based registration process that may be completed on phones, tablets, or PCs. Furthermore, the online courses are designed to work on a variety of devices, allowing students to study while on the go. They can submit their assignments and quizzes at any time because they are online.
- **Easy Accessibility:** Learners who take an online course do not need to make photo copies of books or notes; in fact, the books, reference videos, course materials, and examination scores are all preserved indefinitely on their hard drive, and they can access them at any time. After completing the course, they will receive e-certificates in PDF format. As a result, online courses are both efficient and economical.

- **Community & Online Support:** Those with similar learning objectives can join a social media group to exchange questions, ideas, and dispel their doubts. Professional educators are always available to assist their students through community groups and emails. They also provide assistance through online chat and doubt clearing sessions.
- **Progress Report:** In online courses there is no pressure on actual exams, the assessments sometimes are retaken. There is continuous evaluation going on a weekly basis and from here learners can evaluate their performance in the online course. Online courses have a fair scoring system compared to traditional learning.
- **Online Courses Look Great on a Resume:** On a resume, facts from online courses demonstrate a commitment to learning and obtaining new abilities, making students stronger prospects for advancement.
- **Lower Costs:** When compared to traditional courses, online programmes are more cost-effective; in fact, financial aid is available for low-income but clever students, allowing those who cannot afford to pay for college entry to continue their education through the internet. A large number of online courses are completely free.

Disadvantages of Online Learning

Conventional classrooms cannot be replaced by online learning; nonetheless, it can be a complement to an extension of traditional learning. Students' presence is essential in order to create human relationships and operate as a team, which is not achievable with online learning. Students learn how to establish friends, be patient, and overcome disappointment at the institute while competing against other students, which is something that online learning cannot provide. Additionally, group discussions among students occur during classroom activities, but this is not possible with online learning. It is advantageous to a learner's career if he engages in both online and traditional learning.

Challenges of Online Learning

There are some challenges to overcome in order to improve the effectiveness of online learning. Not every student, especially in rural regions, has access to reliable internet and mobile phones/computers, and without regular cyberspace, kids would struggle to participate in digital learning. With increased screen time consumption, some key health issues such as disrupted sleep cycles, impaired eye-vision, back pain, and effects on mental health are also highlighted. However, there may be some technological advancements in online education for which the government can provide support, such as increased bandwidth, online testing support, increased identity verification measures for testing, support for educators creating courses, academic quality measurements, administrators monitoring online student outcomes, and so on.

Conclusion

Learning is important in both work and personal life, and everyone, whether a student or a working professional, places a high value on overall professional development, which is why they continue to participate in a variety of development programmes and courses. Due to the COVID-19 epidemic shutdown, the digital revolution in education is at its pinnacle, eclipsing traditional teaching methods. The Indian school system is developing a digital-ready teaching environment, thus they've begun looking into educational app development to make learning more convenient. The country is expected to lead the change from traditional education to digital education and create more chances in the digital education industry globally to do so. Indian universities are moving their operations and learning procedures online, and the e-learning sector is gaining traction. It is not projected that online education will completely replace in-classroom learning, but it is expected that it will continue to expand and become more helpful to society.

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