

HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH E- LEARNING:PRE-COVID AND POST-COVID SCENARIO

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ABSTRACT

Distance education platforms in India include many open universities for distance learning. Also correspondence courses are being facilitated for many learners. Covid 19 has changed the scenario in India education systems. The lockdown has been extended till 31 October. Technical and non-technical education is being facilitated through online mode. Teachers have got acquainted with online platforms. The E learning Industry has got a boost in the post covid scenario. Still the pandemic is not under control but the online teaching industry is growing very fast and many platforms with improved features are being launched by the developers.

Keywords: Covid-19, pandemic, learning, software, courses, education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Distance education has helped the students from remote areas to gain the graduation from open universities. Also online teaching-learning methods have helped the students to access the high quality and specialized education. Distance education platforms in India include many open universities for distance learning. Also correspondence courses are being facilitated for many learners. Covid 19 has changed the scenario in India education systems. The lockdown has been extended many times considering the spread of the disease. Technical and non-technical education is being facilitated through online mode. Teachers have got acquainted with online platforms. The online education industry is growing fast and many stakeholders are adopting the online mode. A new dimension is added to the conventional distance learning. Regular courses are also being facilitated through online mode. Knowledge based practical learning is important aspect of modern-day E learning[1]. Learning management system can help in maintaining systematic approach in E learning[2]. There is need to increase the analytical ability, original thoughts and research aptitude of the students. This increases need for global interaction among the educators and the learners. As a result of this, new approaches are being created for online courses[3]. Various E learning platforms for students and teachers are developed in like online teachers Training(OTT), e-Learning Consortium (eLC), Shareable Content Object Reference Model etc.[4]. Systematic instructional design models help in imparting quality education in less time[5,6].

2. PRE-COVID DISTANCE LEARNING AND E LEARNING SCENARIO

Online education is promising tool which can add value to learning. Classroom learning has its own advantages. Many online learning resources are available for students. Before the Covid 19 pandemic, India was in nascent stage in this online learning[7]. Digital education before the pandemic was growing at 55 percent. The learner can access the best learning material and best teachers. Various concepts are better understood by audio visual aids, interactive, educational simulations. Many youngsters spend their time on the social media

platforms. These platforms also can be used for better penetration of digitalization in the students. In 2017, Indian digital education industry was growing at 55 percent, which has grown steeply during and post covid scenario. Two years back the E learning market was 3 billion[7]. It was 39 billion in 2018 and expected to reach 360 billion in 2024. It is necessary to increase the computer, mobile and network penetration in rural and interior region.

Loss in enrolment, need for spread of education, specific requirements of skilled manpower has increased the importance of online education[8]. National mission on education through ICT (NMICT) is significant step towards increasing E learning base. Aakash project launched with the help of Indian Institute of Technology is also significant attempt. The projects for E learning penetration needs to be more focused and concentrated on skill development and enhancement.

The distance education can be traced back to 18th century in US[9]. Most of the open universities follow U.K. model of open university. Many factors such as emerging ICTs, liberalization, privatization and globalization have increased the demand for open and distance learning. Government is involved in 90 percent of open learning which is being taken over by private players. The open learning facilitates anyone, anyway, anywhere and anytime education. There is urgent need to develop adequate skill development amongst the learners. Home based, societal, experimental, resource centre based and specialized resources are various modes of distance learning.

Data security is one of the most crucial aspect in the E learning[10]. It is important to have awareness about cyber security. In case of E learning, one should see the security aspects of the application. Many applications are required to be downloaded with many permissions regarding data and personal information. The institutes can partner with E platforms to make the process fast and effective.

The distance education can be of two types, Synchronous and Asynchronous[11]. In Synchronous method real time interaction with the teacher is facilitated whereas Asynchronous doesn't require it. The earlier one has immediacy. The distance education offers flexibility in terms of time and option a anyone from anywhere in the world can access the distance education.

Globalization of knowledge has been the key aspect and driving force in the enhancement of E learning platforms[12]. The world has become a global village. This has made us realized the need to access the knowledge from the best people in the field. Knowledge sharing has become important part of the learning. Institutes are eager to interact with the staff from other countries or arrange online sessions of the industry experts. All this can be facilitated through various digital platforms. Internet based training is replacing the conventional training. The Indian government is actively supporting these initiatives. Courses like Moocs (Massive Open Online Courses), Moodle, Coursera ETC are gaining importance is knowledge sharing and upgrading. The distance education in earlier days had the same objective. Most of the objectives of distance educations are now being met through E learning. In addition to that many industry-oriented trainings, courses are being conducted and the gap between academia and industry is becoming narrower. The mobile network penetration in rural India can help in improving literacy. Thus these E learning platforms are helpful in corporate sectors as well as public welfare sector. Many awareness campaigns can be carried out through E platforms regarding health, public hygiene, woman empowerment and issues of national interest.

Across the region, income groups, social background, there is uneven spread of education. Various financial, social, geographical barriers need to be addressed for better penetration of higher education in India. The gross enrolments ratio in 2019 was only 15 percent for higher education[13]. Maintaining the quality in higher education is a challenging task. Still a large number of colleges are not able to meet minimum requirement about quality and hence they are finding it difficult to find place among top universities and colleges. Poor infrastructure and lack of qualified faculty is also a problem. According to NAAC data only 30% of the universities and 45% of the colleges were found to be of quality to be ranked at 'A' level". Internet penetration plays a key role in the growth of E learning[14]. It was estimated that the internet penetration rate was 65 percent in urban India, in rural India it was 20-26% till December, 2017. Online education saves time and money. It bridges the gap between education level and industry expectations.

3. POST-COVID DISTANCE LEARNING AND E LEARNING SCENARIO

Covid 19 has disrupted the education systems across the world[15]. Approximately 94 to 99 percent of the schools and colleges across the world have been affected due to COVID-19. It is estimated that some 23.8 million additional children and youth (from pre-primary to tertiary) may drop out due to the pandemic[15]. Distance and online education systems are getting a boost due to proactive measures by many governments. Many universities have postponed learning and teaching until further notice, due to the lack of information technology. The pandemic has shown loopholes in our education system and its vulnerability. The teaching staff is nevertheless working with their personal resources like computer and internet to provide uninterrupted education to the students.

When one talks about online education, it is necessary to remember that the classroom teaching has its own importance and it cannot be replaced. The online teaching can be considered as a supplementary tool[16]. In the post covid situation though, we can hardly dissimulate between the classroom teaching and online teaching. Many of the concepts need experimentation for full understanding. Undergraduate students need to be more interactive during lectures. One of the most important drawbacks of the online education system is that it is becoming more one-sided communication. Also the number of contact hours with the mobile or laptop screen is a limitation.

Many organizations are preparing reports and are emphasizing on the importance of E learning[17]. Various aspects like content preparation, multimedia presentation, quizzes, surveys etc. are being explored. Many schools have adopted WordPress or Drupal for their websites or blogging. If we consider the situation of developing countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, the problem of electricity and internet disturbs almost half of the teaching community[18]. More than 60 percent of students are affected due to these twin problems. The post covid scenario is exposing the loopholes and lacuna in our information infrastructure. The mobile network is not available or is very poor at many rural areas in countries like India, which is one of the few largest economies in the world. India government has been proactive in promoting digital learning[19]. Through initiatives like DIKSHA [the national platform for school education available for all states and the central government for grades 1 to 12], Swayam Prabha TV Channels, National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER), SWAYAM, National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) etc., Indian government is increasing the contribution of digital education in Indian technical

and non-technical teaching. Many schools, colleges and universities have realized the new normal and are working towards planning and infrastructure for online education[20]. It has now become necessity for students and educational institutes to ensure proper infrastructure for teaching learning process and examination related activities. It is important to focus on vulnerable section of the society and provide adequate facilities to them. Also in the pandemic, it is very important to understand emotional problems faced by staff and student due to lockdown[21]. The lockdown rules and restriction can affect the teachers and students mentally and emotionally.

Various countries and their groups have been actively organizing webinars, conferences for awareness of digital education [22]. The need to overcome the technical problems was realized in the fact that only 500 out of registered 2700 participants were able to join the webinar organized for exploring and examining the digital education scenario in Arab countries[22].

Indian higher education system is one of the largest in the world[23]. This education system is dominated by private institutes which are regulated by University Grant Commission(UGC)[23]. In country like India, there needs to be proper distribution of number of institutes across the country[24]. Online education systems can help in overcoming the problems of eastern India where only 4 out of 50 business schools and management colleges out of around 600 colleges are present. Many investors and firms have realized the potential of online education and started investing in this field. Revenue can be generated through subscription of the software, premium users and other packages for E content[25].

4. CONCLUSION

The E learning Industry has got the boost in the post covid scenario. Still the pandemic is not under control but the online teaching industry is growing very fast and many platforms with improved features are being launched by the developers. Various countries are facilitating the E learning tools, mobiles, tablets etc. to the rural and poor students for increasing the penetration of the E learning. In future also, E learning can work as supporting tool for the conventional teaching methods through virtual laboratories, guest and expert lectures, various software, hardware, scientific courses.

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