## Online Platforms: A Revolution in Education Systems

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## Abstract

In India, online education has emerged as a significant option to traditional educational institutions due to its accessibility, cost, and flexibility. It also lowers geographical barriers. The article discusses effective examples of online learning and the growing adoption of virtual classrooms. As the number of online learners increases, it is critical to recognize this style of learning in order to keep education accessible and relevant in a constantly changing world.

## Introduction

*"People think of the 'E' in eLearning as 'electronic.' And certainly, it's electronic. But here's a few more E's – Everywhere learning, Everyday learning, Engaging learning, Evolving learning."*

- *Elliot Masie*

Education is the key to social, political, economic, and cultural empowerment. Access to education through online platforms has increased in recent years, particularly with COVID-19. Physical classes are vital for behavioral, cultural, and other elements of education; however, online classes are becoming a driving force in cases of accessibility, affordability, and time restrictions. The purpose is not to compare both platforms but to emphasize the other positive aspects of online education, which can't be denied. Many people discarded online education during the COVID-19 pandemic, but in recent years, it has become more popular in various sectors.

## Origin

In India, online learning began long before COVID-19. In 2003, the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) jointly created the National Programme on Technology-Enhanced Learning (NPTEL). The program offered free online courses and study materials in science, engineering, and humanities fields. For working groups who want to learn something new or continue their education, online courses are a fantastic solution. It is more adaptable; they can fit it into their current schedules and finish the assignments without taking time away from crucial domestic tasks or hours from their current work.

**Why Higher Education is Important**

Higher education significantly impacts society, enabling both individuals and the community as a whole. It leads to personal growth, lower incarceration rates, better health results, and more feelings of empowerment and happiness. Graduates with a college degree also have higher wages and more work options, which helps drive economic growth. Higher education also promotes upward mobility, builds social support networks, fosters critical thinking and civic involvement, and encourages people to give back to their communities. Additionally, higher education significantly impacts economic value and productivity at both the individual and national levels. It directly impacted the different development indicators of any country. Despite various measures launched by the government and other players, higher education enrollment in India has not increased. According to the "Intergenerational and Regional Differentials in Higher Education in India" report, India's low 10% access to higher education is compared to China's 22% enrollment and the United States' 28% enrollment.

**Major Challenges for Accessing Higher Education**

Access to higher education is a distant dream for many. There are several reasons for the poor higher education status in India. Some of the significant challenges are:

1.  **Accessibility and affordability**: One of the most difficult tasks is offering quality higher education to a diverse community. Many underprivileged students, particularly those living in rural areas, encounter severe obstructions to higher education. Course fees are increasing day by day, making it hard for many to enroll. In tier-2 cities, the average pay ranges from Rs 4.01 Lakhs per Annum (LPA) to Rs 5.43 LPA for the minimum and from Rs 7.12 LPA to Rs 11.01 LPA for the maximum. The price of schooling varies depending on the school; private schools in Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities charge monthly tuition fees ranging from Rs 2,500 to Rs 8,000. Despite scholarships, it is very difficult for many to manage the cost. Resulting in the inability of marginalized students to access higher education. Not just universities and colleges but also private coaching centers, which are highly recommended for competitive examinations such as banking, railways, UPSC, etc., require high charges for enrollment.

2.  **Education Quality**: The quality of education is another issue. Even though India has a large number of universities, not all of them offer excellent education. This causes a mismatch between the graduates' skills and those needed by the industry. According to World Economic Forum (WEF) research, the quality of education in India ranks 90th in the world, with critical thinking and problem-solving skills among the lowest.

3.  **Finance**: Higher education in India requires substantial finance, but the government's educational budget is constrained. Many higher education institutions struggle to find financing for research and development, infrastructure, and faculty payments. India's education spending in 2021 was 14.65%, a 0.07% decrease over 2020. India's education spending in 2020 was 14.72%, a 0.28% decrease over 2019.

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4. **Faculty Shortage**: Many higher education institutions face a shortage of skilled faculty members, particularly in specialized subjects. This deficit has an impact on educational and research quality. India faces a severe shortage of qualified teachers, with over 1.2 million teacher vacancies nationwide. Nearly 40% of the teachers recruited by the government are not qualified. A state-by-state breakdown reveals that 88% of teaching positions in India's Odisha state central institutions were vacant—the highest rate among all states. Jammu and Kashmir, and Tripura were the other two states with more than half of the positions vacant. Mizoram and Kerala, on the other hand, had the lowest vacancy rates—15% or less.

5. **Outdated Curriculum:** Many universities' courses have not been updated to reflect changes in society, technology, and industry demands. The outdated syllabus has inhibited the students' creativity and imagination, making developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills more difficult.

6. **Employability**: Although higher education is supposed to prepare students for jobs, many graduates remain unemployed due to a lack of practical skills, industry exposure, and soft skills. In 2024, undergraduates in the MBA domain had the greatest employability rating, around 71%, up from the previous year. The polytechnic domain had the lowest employment rate, approximately 22%.

Online education can provide solutions to most of these issues, and more, along with additional advantages. Students may access a high-quality education via online programs effectively. Their diverse learning methods and experiences aid in meeting their specific learning demands. It promotes every student's education with its numerous resources.

**Some Highlights of Online Education**

There are many online platforms that provide both free and paid courses around the globe. Coursera, Edx, Udemy, etc. are a few of them. In the contemporary era, all the platforms are committed to providing better services than others.

Coursera, an online learning platform launched in 2012 by Stanford professors, offers a wide range of courses, from short, skill-based courses to full-length degrees. With over 7,000 courses, Coursera aims to democratize education by making high-quality education accessible to all. Its unique approach to working with prestigious institutions makes it suitable for beginners and professionals. The platform's ability to meet the needs of everyone who uses it is its distinctive advantage. Furthermore, digital platforms like YouTube and free resources available on different platforms have proven effective in providing study materials and guidance for aspirants like Garima, who cracked the UPSC in 2022. Harshita, another UPSC aspirant, believes that self-study can be a viable alternative to coaching, especially for those with financial constraints. Online resources, including free coaching materials, can be accessed for comprehensive preparation.

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Let's look at some of the advantages of online education.

- **Remotely available**: Earlier, internet connectivity was a barrier in many regions, but now the situation is quite different. Out of 5,97,618 inhabited villages in the country, only 25,067 villages lack mobile connectivity and Internet, according to the Ministry of Communications reply in the Lok Sabha based on Telecom Service Providers (TSP) data. The network coverage and number of internet users are increasing rapidly. Now, people from remote villages can also join online classes.

- **Cost-friendly**: Since online education directly saves the expenses of travel, lodging, boarding, etc., it reduces the expenses. For many from marginalized backgrounds, managing the cost is a major constraint. Also, the course fees are usually lower on online platforms compared to offline platforms. It cut down on the relocation cost. Apart from the paid platforms, many free platforms are also available, which are not possible in offline mode.

- **Education Standard**: The quality of education is negatively impacted by financial constraints, leading to vacancies for qualified faculty and inadequate infrastructure. Online mode reduces the need for basic infrastructure and faculty, allowing for investment in research and development, furthering employment rates and genuine skill levels.

- **Flexibility:** Physical classrooms are limited to the local students, but digital classrooms allow faculty to address not just local students but also the entire world. Even in terms of hiring faculty, there is no boundary, and expert professionals can be hired from around the world. It also allows women to attend classes during the menstrual cycle, reducing mobility challenges for those with disabilities.

- **Environment-friendly: Online learning takes place in virtual settings and uses a lot less energy. Reducing paper waste** promotes the preservation of trees. The decline in travel also lowers air and noise pollution and saves fuel.

- **Government Initiation in India:** According to the New Education Policy 2020, reaching a 50% gross enrollment ratio by 2035 will require digital empowerment and online education. Higher education institutions can benefit greatly from emerging technologies such as virtual reality, robots, machine learning, and artificial intelligence. By making good use of these advancements, it is possible to produce graduates who are competent across borders and meet international quality requirements. In all 46 core universities, technology-enabled and enterprise resource planning (ERP)-based solutions are being adopted.

- **Global Scenario:** In all five regions—North America, Europe, South America, Asia, Asia-Pacific, and Africa—online education is becoming more and more popular. US universities are seeing a decline in enrollment, but India's growth is being driven by national factors and government involvement. The Middle East has been a slow adopter

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of online education because of poor internet penetration, low public trust, and a lack of Arabic online educational resources. Australia and New Zealand are seeing an increase in the popularity of online education programs as they see the potential of this form of learning as a peer and collaborative tool. With the help of official regulations, African nations like Ghana, South Africa, and Malawi are spearheading the online education revolution. Overall, e-learning is gaining acceptance worldwide and is anticipated to continue.

- **Emerging Technologies:** Artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR), and other emerging technologies have the potential to completely change the educational landscape by giving teachers new tools to enhance their instruction and give students a more personalized and interesting learning experience. VR and AI have the power to completely transform education and enhance the educational process for pupils.

Apart from many advantages, there are some significant challenges faced by online education, such as the digital divide, quality assurance, student engagement, etc. Slowly but steadfastly, these challenges were addressed through different means.

The use of virtual classrooms also promotes efficient time management, allowing students to attend classes during mild illness, reducing disease transmission risk, and continues education during emergencies like pandemics. This saves time and money and allows for more crucial tasks to be prioritized. With 9.8 million online learners, India ranks second on online learning platform Coursera's inaugural 2020 impact report.

**Conclusion**

Online education will become a part of everyone's lives in the near future, and we must be ready to adapt. It is no longer just an option but a need. Many of us may be concerned about a decline in employability as a result of the use of technology. Many people opposed the introduction of computer education in India in 1984-85, claiming concerns that it would limit employment, but we don't need to be convinced whether it generates or reduces employment opportunities anymore. There are many students who are witnessing the benefits of online platforms. In the larger picture, online education platforms are bridging the gaps created due to several reasons and allowing the economically weaker section to access quality education.

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