



## Internet Based Education in India: Paradigm in Contemporary Learning

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### ABSTRACT

*Online education is established, growing, and here to stay. It is creating new opportunities for students and also for faculty, regulators of education, and the educational institutions themselves. Much of what is being learned by the practitioners will flow into the large numbers of blended courses that will be developed and delivered on most campuses. Some of what is being learned will certainly improve pedagogical approaches and possibly affect other important problems, such as the lengthening time to completion of a degree. Online education is already providing better access to education for many, and many more will benefit from this increased access in the coming years.*

### Keywords :

#### Introduction & Background

Online education is commonly called e-learning; here, the methodology of learning is unusual as compared to the traditional classroom type of learning. The transfer of skills and imparting of knowledge (method of teaching) in a traditional classroom is purely monopolistic in nature, whereas, every individual has different levels of wavelengths and grasps the subject matter at different paces.

E-learning or online education in India is getting good track because of number of internet users has increased. Almost half the population of India today is below 25 years of age and the number of Internet users are growing continuously. E-learning is also very much popular among young professionals. There is a huge student segment in India in the age range of 16 to 35, who are willing to study online. It is helpful from student and working professional point of view. The size of e-learning market in India is expected to grow to INR 1,092 Crore by this year end. E-learning in India has been classified in three different tiers namely; tier 1, tier 2, tier 3 e-learning. Major players in this industry are TIS, NIIT, EDUCOMP, IBM INDIA, and SKILL SOFT. These Companies provide education to the students and also provides product and solution to other sectors. Some of the well known institutions like IITs and IIMs are also providing e-learning facilities in India.

Beside the said success challenges are still there in few parts of the country and they need to be overcome, such challenges are like; Internet connectivity issue in many parts of the country, connectivity speed, language barrier, dependencies on class room based training, lack of skilled people.

A recent study by Google has found that Indians are second in the world, behind only the Americans, when it comes to searching online about educational institutions and courses. According to the survey, the details of which were released by the online search giant on Wednesday, over 60% Indian students use the internet to research on education. Rajan Anandan, VP and Managing Director of Google India, said, "With over 60 million internet users in India being in the 18-35 age group, education-related search queries are exploding on Google. Our core objective behind compiling the study was to understand the impact internet is having on this young population with regard to education-related decision-making."

Drastic changes are being expected in online education in the next 2-3 years period. The online education market is set to grow to USD 40 billion by 2017 from the present USD 20 billion," Loud Cloud Systems Chief Technology Officer Anil Sonkar said.

India has one of the largest education systems in the world with a network of more than 1 million schools and 18,000 higher education institutions. More than half of the country's 1.2 billion population falls in the target market for education and related services. In India too, technology is used in education. Though the use cases here are more of an experiment or enriching an already enriched student. IIM Ranchi's recent experiment asks its students to stay in hostels while the lectures were delivered to them live online through their laptops. This could be seen as a pilot because no professor would like to deliver a lecture knowing that their students are in their pyjamas across the street in a hostel.

Educomp is a common name you hear in India when the subject is technology in education. Educomp isn't the only game in town. There are several startups which are doing interesting things in the education space. At present, the company offers online education to 1,50,000 users in universities in India and US and hopes to increase the same to 10,00,000 users in the next 2-3 years, Sonkar said, adding it is in talks with multiple universities in India and abroad for providing its solutions.

#### Online Education in India: Opportunities and Scope

Online education in India is gaining importance at a much slower rate than the western world, where most educational activities are carried out online. Tremendous opportunities exist in the untapped rural areas as online education is at its nascent stage in India. Awareness has to be created among the general public in terms of the benefits and career aspects of online education.

Job oriented vocational courses are offered online, enabling students to complete such courses in a stipulated time. One can also prepare for competitive examinations in various fields like engineering, medicine, law, social sciences, etc without having to purchase physical books, thus saving huge amounts of money and space.

Since online courses are student centred and not time bound, it enables blended learning. Online education can be pursued

not only by students, but also by working individuals who wish to pursue extra courses, house wives, business persons, senior citizens, accountants, real estate agents, managers working in diverse fields etc.

#### Advantages to E-Learning Service Provider

- Minimal operational costs as student teacher ratio can be reduced without affecting the quality of education. Hence, companies save cost in recruiting faculties.
- Technical costs are also reduced as virtual devices like live streaming cameras are used which are economical and a single time investment.
- Timings can be set on flexible basis live classes can be conducted at any mutually agreeable time.
- Single faculty or tutorial can train multiple students unlike classroom training which in turn reduces infrastructural costs.

#### Challenges for Online Education

- Absence of internet penetration in rural areas poses a barrier for companies to reach out to the rural masses. Unavailability of bandwidth also hinders interactive programs like virtual classroom connectivity, live streaming, etc
- Rural people are less susceptible to change as their mindset is geared towards a traditional classroom setting.

#### Advantages to Consumers of Internet based Education

- Students can sit at a comfortable place, set aside a convenient time slot, and successfully undergo training.
- Time and money can be saved on travelling.
- It has become a universal method of learning for all, including teachers, students, and parents.
- Interacting with subject matter experts, professors, classmates through online world is much easier, time saving, and affordable. Everyone is just a click away.
- For corporate people, networking is at their fingertips.
- Tuition fees can be reduced due to innovative learning methods.
- All type of information can be obtained through custom web search.
- E-Projects give special attention and exposure to students to cope up with real time practical experiences and develop themselves professionally.
- Some other useful features of online education is that it induces collaborative learning through live virtual classes, discussion boards, forums, games, case studies, online projects, online group assignments etc.

#### Health Related Issues in Online Education

Getting online continuously leads to health hazards like strain in the eyes and other health related hazards like stress, dizziness, etc for middle aged people.

#### Technology Related Issues in Internet Based Education

- Lack of concentration due to change in the medium of education.
- Due to slow connectivity, more time is consumed in navigating through websites and pages.
- Sometimes, content may be outdated and some content may not be updated or missing.
- Mismatch between the course contents and student's requirements.

#### Possible Reasons for Slow Success of Online Education in India

**1. Are we really prepared for Online Learning?** In India there are 100 million+ internet users. But when it comes to usage of Internet, learning is not really the priority of these online users. Online learning competes with entertainment, social networks, ecommerce, news and many other things. We all know learning is a serious engagement that needs some good amount of time allocation. So although, we say that there are so many internet users in India, and out of these there would be some percentage of students online. I think in India we are still in those lingering stages where students are yet to commit themselves for online studies. Just a clarification, joining an online portal or discussion board is not what I count as serious online learning.

**2. Absence of Investment Eco System** Coursera has secured more than \$22.5 million with a model where they are yet to think about monetization. Edmodo has raised more than \$40 million. And here again, there was no monetization model, though things might have changed with their platform model now. There are many other examples - Code Academy, Knewton, Learn Boost etc. We have not seen many such stories in India. Companies like Educomp, Everonn etc have raised lot of money but they are more of an infrastructure/content stories. Education Internet is missing. To be fair to investors, maybe they believe in point one above or maybe they haven't found teams that can execute like some of the American counterparts have done.

**3. Best Product is missing.** I think we are yet to see an online education product (or service) with right user experience that is suitable for Indian students (especially K12). Some of the products are half-baked products released too early to be firsts in the market. Take the tablets for example. There is a deluge of 7 inch tablets from many companies that promise bundled K12 content along with the hardware. Take the best of them all and just try it out, you will know what I mean. Also consider other products like online streaming classes, or factory made animated content available from tens of companies. It is understandable that these companies are trying to crack the market and some will be successful. But in the long-term, things act against because online learning ultimately loses trust from parents, who pays for the product and student, who is the consumer. Scrappy products will make money in the short-term but will lose out in the long run.

#### Conclusion

My thinking says that one day, things will change, this jigsaw puzzle will be solved and some company or set of companies will change the dynamics of online education in India. Future of e-learning in India is very bright. India has a major role to play in the international e-learning services industry. India is already one of the leading IT service provider countries, and it is now aiming to achieve the same position in the IT enabled services. The presence of world-class educational infrastructure and training professionals enables it to be one of the leading e-learning services providers in the world. The education sector is a hot market and continues to be so. As per ASSOCHAM, \$1bn will be invested in the education sector by Private Equity and venture capital firms. Most of those investments will go to firms which marry technology with education

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