

## EDUCATION IN DIGITAL ERA

**Rajeshwari Rai\***

Oracle India Pvt. Ltd

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2017

Received in revised form 6<sup>th</sup>

June, 2017 Accepted 24<sup>th</sup> July, 2017

Published online 28<sup>th</sup> August, 2017

#### Key words:

Education, Digital learning, Internet, Online, Remote, Rural

### ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the transformation in the way education has been imparted and its reach across the globe since digitalization and the rise of high speed internet accessibility from anywhere in the world.

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## INTRODUCTION

Until recently education was confined to the four walls of a classroom in schools and colleges. One could not think of getting access to top-class lectures from reputed universities such as Harvard and IITs. Children in rural parts of developing countries had no access to quality education. They could only dream of pursuing higher education. This paper explores how all this has dramatically changed thanks to the digital revolution.

### Online Learning

Pursuing higher education for people from low income group was always far-fetched. Through government support they could manage to complete secondary schooling and were forced to discontinue studies due to economic pressures. Education was always confined to schools and colleges and everyone were not fortunate enough to make use of this. However online courses has defied the concept of classroom education.

There are many online coaching tutorial portals such as Coursera, Analytics Vidhya, and Edx that offers high quality courses in various technical fields for very less cost. Many short, beginner level courses are offered free of cost. Lectures and course materials of high-end universities such as Cambridge are available free online. Gaining knowledge has become very easy and affordable. As per the data collected by US. Government's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), nearly 75% of top-ranked schools offer online degrees in fields such as business and health.

Education and engineering are also fast becoming popular for studying online (1).

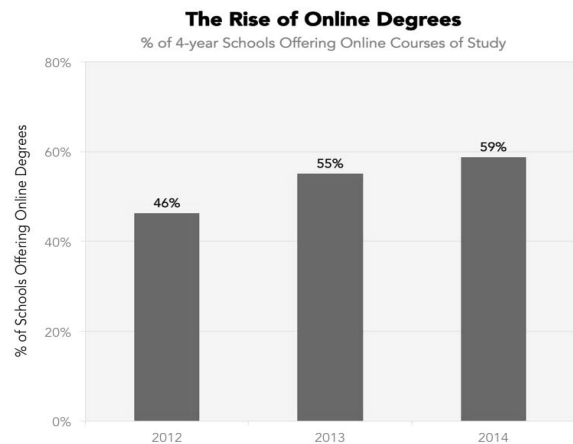


Fig 1 The Rise of Online Degrees (1)

Learning has become inexpensive and easily accessible through the online medium. People from any location can access courses offered by top institutes at reasonable costs. Most short term and intermediate level courses are offered absolutely free. The only requirement of these courses is good internet access and computer. High-speed internet access is required for continuous streaming of the videos, to download soft copies of the course materials, and for real time interaction with the tutors.

### Open online courses

Most courses offered online are open and free to use. The term Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) has come into limelight after the popularity of digital learning. MOOCs

\*Corresponding author: **Rajeshwari Rai**

Oracle India Pvt. Ltd

provide interactive user forums to support discussions among students, tutors and fellow learners. MOOC has changed the way distance education was imparted. Several top universities and private teaching institutes emerged with affordable and free online courses. These courses provided quality learning for the students along with valid certifications that became a value-add for students (2).

The number of people registering for online classes through portals such as Coursera, Udacity, Udemy, and edX has substantially grown since 2012. The popularity and usage of these online learning portals are surging at a quick pace and is expected to remain so in the coming years. It has been observed that the students registering for these courses are spread across the globe. There are students from United States, United Kingdom, India, European countries, Russia, Australia, and Canada.

Educators too find it very convenient to be part of this digital revolution. It only takes initial time and effort to create the lecture videos, which can be reused several times by multiple students. Teachers only need to update the course content once in a while and provide answers to student's queries. This is also achieved through the online medium. Hence lecturers and professors find MOOC very appealing.

### Rural Education

Developing countries such as India will gain greatly as getting access to schools and affording quality education is a major concern to rural India and for people of low economic background. Lack of trained teachers for government schools and lack of basic amenities such as stationery, clean toilets, and proper classrooms make learning a miserable experience for children.

Availability of quality education through the online medium has changed this and children can dream of bright future. Youngsters are now more technology-driven and know how to harness the power of digital medium for their benefit. Virtual classrooms and flipped learning are taking over classroom teaching. Through collaborative learning students can practice and share their experiences with people across the world, which has made learning fun and refreshing.

Government has initiated many e-learning programs to promote the reach of education to rural and remote parts of India. It is easy to get quality tutors to deliver well-designed courses through the online medium to lakhs and thousands of students no matter of their location. Students can interact with the educators online and get one to one coaching as well. They can easily clarify their queries and refine their work. This is applicable both ways i.e. teachers also can collaborate with experts in different fields and enhance their knowledge and skillsets. They can upgrade their skills and gain niche certifications through the digital medium (4).

### Imparting online education in rural areas

Digital learning seems to be a feasible solution for educating people in rural and remote locations. However unlike urban areas where infrastructure for digital learning is mostly available and can be easily upgraded, it is not the same for rural locations. These are some of the challenges faced in this regard:

- Huge investment required to get the basic amenities for this facility which are computers and high speed internet access.
- Teachers have to be trained on computer skills and the methods required for facilitating this kind online training.
- Students have to be made tech-savvy and trained for the usage of computers.
- Digital content has to be translated to regional languages.
- Cost-effective methods has to be adopted for setting up eLearning hub such as projectors with big monitors, speakers, etc.

Many organizations such as Mantra4Change (5) are taking up the task of training teachers through their Teachers' Learning Centre programs. Here teachers and school leaders who are engaged with teaching children from rural areas and low income groups are given training in the latest trends and developments in the education sector. They are given skill training on digital teaching and how to make this initiative useful for children.

The understanding level of rural and urban children might vary due to skills, learning ability, availability of resources and access to other facilities. Due to this the curriculum for rural students must be prepared with these considerations. Rural children should be taught competent facts in simple and innovative methods. Teachers must be trained to empower these children with confidence and capability to face the world with superior education.

### Future of Digital learning

The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and IAMAI has reported the dramatic growth in the number of internet users since 2001. As per their report 40 million Indians spend around 40-45 hours over the internet every month. By 2020 it is estimated that the internet economy will grow substantially high (3).

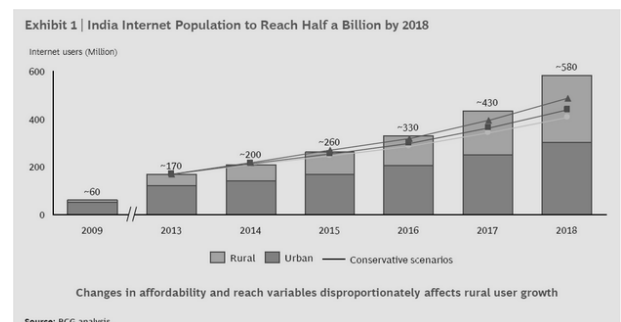


Fig 2 India Internet Population Growth (3)

Digital education can continue its success only if technology is integrated well with the education system. Importance has to be given to digital infrastructure, good internet access, quality course content, and affordability. Learning should be made useful, interesting and fun. Through technology educational practices such as assessing tests, providing feedback to students, updating syllabus, and working on capstone projects can be enhanced effectively (6).

Education is the doorway to career. To qualify for a job some of the key criteria considered are excellent education and skills. Most online technical courses offer internships for students through which students gain valuable experience of

working on projects. Real time projects can be made part of the curriculum to build confidence in students to face interviews.

Most companies does not give priority to degrees earned via distance learning. This will prove a major setback to the progress of digital education. Public and private companies should recognize virtual certifications and degrees earned from authorized universities and institutes as valid. This will enable and encourage a number of working professionals to continue their education through distance learning.

### CONCLUSION

Digital education has opened doors to harness the power of learning in a new way. With the support of good infrastructure quality education can be delivered to remote and rural parts of world. People of all ages and economic background can access courses from top universities across the globe. Educators can teach at their convenience and can interact with students easily online. Students can get certifications, accumulate prevalent skills and gain valid degrees through the medium of online learning.

Support for imparting online education is very much essential to make this a continued success. Governments, private sectors, and teachers should work as a team to take this venture forward. Children deprived of quality education should be able to benefit from this initiative. It has to be made cost effective and targeted at specially students of low income group. Digital learning has the capability to transform the lives of people and eradicate illiteracy. This factor has to be utilized well to bring in the change that can in turn change the future of the world.

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#### How to cite this article:

Rajeshwari Rai (2017) 'Education in Digital Era', *International Journal of Current Advanced Research*, 06(08), pp. 5088-5090. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24327/ijcar.2017.5090.0650>

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