

A Study on Opportunities and Challenges Ahead for Electronic Learning in India

Ketan Mulchandani*

**Assistant Professor, Pioneer Institute of Professional Studies, Indore*

Abstract

The term Electronic Learning or e-Learning is being used in India rather rarely. Electronic education is going to become the dominant form of education in the India. A lot of effort is being devoted into furthering the work methods and communication among students and professors, aimed at bettering the quality of this kind of studying. Moreover, further development of Electronic education in the future will depend on the advance of technologies and the Internet. . It integrates a number of terminological notions in the sphere of application of modern information and communication technologies in education such as multimedia, education on the base of web-technologies, etc. Teachers and learners must realize that new opportunities are offered by modern on-line communication. The study has tried to explore the advantages and disadvantages of electronic education in India. The study also tried to reveal the challenges ahead for the electronic education in India and provide suggestions to resolve and fostering the growth of the Electronic Education.

Introduction of Education Sector in India: In India, education is the key to the task of nation-building. It is also a well-accepted fact that providing the right knowledge and skills to the youth can ensure the overall national progress and economic growth. The Indian education system recognizes the role of education in instilling the values of secularism, egalitarianism, respect for democratic traditions and civil liberties and quest for justice.

There is a huge demand for up gradation of education as India is expected to have a surplus of 47 million people in the working age group by 2020. As a result, both the formal education sector (including K-12 and higher education) as well as informal sector (including coaching institutions, pre-schools and vocational institutions) are witnessing rapid growth.

Market Size: The market size of Indian education sector is expected to increase to Rs 602,410 crore (US\$ 95.80 billion) by FY15 on back of strong demand for quality education, according to a report by India Ratings. Indian education sector's market size in FY12 was estimated to be Rs 341,180 crore (US\$ 54.20 billion). The sector grew at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 16.5 per cent during FY05-FY12.

India's online education market size is set to grow to US\$ 40 billion by 2017 from the present US\$ 20 billion, said Mr. Anil Sonkar, Chief Technology Officer (CTO), LoudCloud Systems.

The private education sector is estimated to reach US\$ 70 billion by 2013 and US\$ 115 billion by 2018, according to a consulting firm Technopak. Realizing the fast growth of education sector in India, many private companies are looking for relevant acquisitions and alliances in this space. Major investments are being seen in the areas of pre-schools, private coaching and tutoring,

teacher training, the development and provision of multimedia content, educational software development, skill enhancement, IT training and e-learning.

Investments: The education sector in India is also considered as one of the major areas for investments as the entire education system is going through a process of overhaul, according to a report 'Emerging Opportunities for Private and Foreign Participants in Higher Education' by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC).

The education sector has attracted foreign direct investments (FDI) worth Rs 4,483.06 crore during April 2000 to July 2013, according to the data released by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP).

Some of the major investments in education and training sector in India are as follows:

- The UK-based University of Northampton has tied up with Madras University to offer a Master's degree in International Environment Management. The course will allow students access to online courseware put up by the University of Northampton
- Ecole hoteliere de Lausanne has opened a 67,000 square feet campus in India to tap into the growing demand for skilled hospitality professionals in the country. Located in the newly developed Lavasa township near Pune, Ecole Hoteliere Lavasa will offer a four-year programme
- Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies (NMIMS) has set up a centre for manufacturing excellence in collaboration with UK's Warwick University. The centre will offer specially designed Master's and Doctoral programmes
- CFA Institute, the global association of investment professionals, plans to set up office in India for its CFA and Claritas programmes
- India's first ever aviation university would come up at Rae Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh (UP). The Rajiv Gandhi National Aviation University will commence training of aspiring pilots, aircraft engineers and cabin crew in September 2014
- Tech Mahindra has established an engineering college in association with the French university, Ecole Centrale and Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University (JNTU)
- EuroKids, education service provider in the pre-school segment, launched 'EuroVarsity', a virtual university aimed at providing programs to develop teaching skill sets. The first course to be offered is a certified teacher training course, 'diploma in early childhood care and education'

E-Learning: E-Learning is nothing but the use of technology to connect teachers and students who are physically miles apart. The training can be delivered by a number of means. In the past, these have included the use of mainframe computers, floppy diskettes, multimedia CD-ROMs, and interactive videodisks. Most recently, Web technology (both Internet and Intranet delivery) are being used. Future trends are looking at training delivered on PDA's and cell phones. This new, form of education is called, m-Learning or mobile learning. It is especially useful for organizations that operate from multiple offices and require a training solution that connects people at all locations, at any time and provides a standardized set of instructions and e-Learning to foster 'enterprise transformation' and enhance ROI. This could mean helping executives in gaining new competencies, launching new products or services or enhancing skill sets. The

additional revenue generated or the return on investment (ROI) is used as the metric to measure the success of e-Learning in such organizations.

Different types of e- Learning: There are fundamentally two types of e-Learning:

Synchronous training

Asynchronous training

Synchronous, means “at the same time,” involves interaction of participants with an instructor via the Web in real time. For example – VCRs or Virtual class rooms that are nothing else but real classrooms online. Participants interact with each other and instructors through instant messaging, chat, audio and video conferencing etc and what’s more all the sessions can be recorded and played back. Its benefits are:

- Ability to log or track learning activities.
- Continuous monitoring and correction is possible
- Possibilities of global connectivity and collaboration opportunities among learners.
- Ability to personalize the training for each learner.

Asynchronous, which means “not at the same time,” allows the participants to complete the WBT (Web-based training) at their own pace, without live interaction with the instructor. Basically, it is information that is accessible on a self-help basis, 24/7. The advantage is that this kind of e-Learning offers the learners the information they need whenever they need it. It also has interaction amongst participants through message boards, bulletin boards and discussion forums. These include computer based training,(CBTs) modules on CD-Rom’s, Web based training accessed through intranet (WBTs) or through well written articles and other write ups. Its advantages are:-

- Available ‘just in time’ for instant learning and reference.
- Flexibility of access from anywhere at any time.
- Ability to simultaneously reach an unlimited number of employees.
- Uniformity of content and onetime cost of production.

A new form of learning known as blended learning is emerging. As the name suggests it is an amalgamation of synchronous and asynchronous learning methods. Using both online training through virtual classrooms and also giving CD’s and study material for self study is now being increasingly preferred over any single type of training.

Advantages of Electronic Learning

Convenience and Flexibility:

Schedule Flexibility: Students can access their course at any time, from anywhere they can log on, in most cases. This means that parents, working students, and professionals on the move have the option of attending classes no matter their work schedule. Students only need a computer and Internet access to take online classes.

Ease of accessibility: Courseware can be accessible for students when they need it. Students can review lectures, discussions, explanations, and comments. Individuals can also share notes with each other to help facilitate community learning.

Range of options: Students may be able to choose from a wider breadth of degree programs. Some online colleges develop and offer degree programs that might not yet be available through nearby public or private institutions.

Students control study time: On-campus courses are typically scheduled in a more rigid format, with shorter classes running 50 minutes, and others running longer. Night classes may last for nearly three hours. One of the benefits of online education is that students may not have to sit for long periods of time. Lessons can be paused when needed, and notes read at will.

Student enrichment:

Chance for interaction: Online courses may be less intimidating than the brick-and-mortar classroom setting, and could help to increase student interaction. By allowing everyone to have a voice, shared ideas grow diverse as well. Students can also think longer about what they want to say and add their comments when ready. In a traditional classroom, the conversation could have moved past the point where the student may be willing to comment.

Online communications: Instructors can be more approachable in the online setting. Students may feel more comfortable talking openly with their teachers through online chats, emails, and newsgroup discussions rather than face-to-face. Online correspondence also cuts out having to wait for office hours that may not be convenient for either party.

Time to absorb material: Positive results are reported for students enrolled in online classes, according to a study by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE, 2010): "on average, students in online learning conditions performed modestly better than those receiving face-to-face instruction." Using over 1,000 empirical studies, the DOE found that time was the additive that helped students perform better. The report noted benefits in studies in which online learners spent more time on task than students in the face-to-face condition.

Cost-effective choices:

Money saving option: Students may be able to save money by not having to physically attend classes. Online courses may help individuals cut down or eliminate costs of transportation, babysitting, and other expenses incurred by attending classes in a traditional setting.

No more expensive textbooks: Some web-based classes may not require physical textbooks, as reading materials may be available either through the school's own library or their partnerships with e-libraries and other digital publishers. E-textbooks might offer substantial savings for students, adding up to hundreds of dollars a year.

Opportunities for convenience, cost-effectiveness, and student enrichment are just some of the variables that have contributed to online learning's growth. Distance education has gained steam in these areas, and advocates are continuously looking to improve upon these as well as other facets of the experience.

Disadvantages of Electronic Learning

Employment - Student may find that employers as well as institutions of higher learning are less willing to accept degrees, transcripts, and certifications from online programs as they are for their more traditional accredited programs in a face-to-face environment. While the acceptance of the quality of online learning is growing, there may still be some who think the quality of an online education is not the same as one gained in a physical building.

Communication/Less Interaction - Most, if not all, of your communication and interaction with your instructor and fellow students will be through electronic medium including email, chat rooms, discussion boards, or perhaps Skype or online meeting technology. Not having access to the visual cues, body language, and non-verbal communication of a traditional program could make it difficult to discern true meaning. Online learning can limit the amount of public speaking practice and team work that are so much a part of in class presentations, group work, and discussions.

Course Availability- Not all courses of study are available online. If you're interested in an unusual field or one that requires lab work, you may find it difficult to find a suitable source for an online education.

Access to Instructors - Another disadvantage of online learning is that Instructors will not be on hand or "on campus" and easily accessible to answer questions. While they may be available on email, that's not the same as having access to a living, breathing person and to be able to ask questions during a break or after class.

Technology - While technology tools and the Internet infrastructure are becoming more and more stable, there are still instances when technology fails. Servers may be down, or you may experience periods when your connection to the Internet is interrupted. Hard drives fail, and email may get caught in spam filters and never be delivered. It's important to backup important class information and make certain that you have alternative ways to communicate.

Working Alone - Working alone can isolate a student, making it easy to put off or neglect course work or drop out of an online class completely. It takes a certain amount of internal motivation to continue when you're pressed for time and don't have fellow students to talk with and help to motivate you along the way.

More Disadvantages of Online Learning

- For many online classes, there is the potential for less interaction with faculty and other students.
- Students may have limited access to the online instructor
- Another disadvantage of online learning is that students may find the lack of non-verbal communication that is a part of traditional face to face learning difficult to get used to.
- Fewer networking opportunities.

Future of E-learning in India

E-learning is not only limited to K-12 and higher education but has a wide scope and has been benefiting corporations by saving travelling cost, time and efforts. Corporate training has gained popularity across the globe with the adoption of continuous improvements in technology and rising demand for technically skilled workforce.

Over the period, the online education sector has witnessed many private equity and venture capital investments due to the growing demand for digital content in schools and online courses. Furthermore, online courses are now being provided by foreign universities.

According to the research report, "**India E-Learning Market Outlook to FY'2018 - Increasing Technology Adoption to Drive Future Growth**", the market is estimated to grow at a CAGR of 17.4% over the period FY2013-FY'2018 driven by many factors such as increasing government initiatives to promote e-learning, increasing adoption of technology, shortage of quality education, convenience and cost factors and others. With an inclination in the adoption of e-learning method to facilitate talent management in corporations, the demand of custom e-learning content and technology would increase, thereby increasing the overall growth of India's e-learning market in future.

India e-learning market is likely to showcase a gradual positive growth in the coming years. Indian e-learning content market is expected to grow at a CAGR of 18.4% from FY'2014-FY'2018. The strong government initiatives pushing the student enrolments in higher education and distance learning will keep on propelling the market expansion.

Conclusion:

Today's next-generation e-learning has been recognized as a cost effective, efficient and effective training delivery method. Future e-learning encompasses the use of Internet technologies for learning, including both formal (e.g., virtual classrooms) and informal learning (self-paced instruction) by using different applications such as user-generated content, web and computer-based learning and digital collaboration. The rapid increasing in number of internet users on smart phones and tablets fueling this market is one of the reasons.

To overcome the challenges and make the most out of the advantages, online instructors should be visible in the classroom and let students know that they are aware of what the students are doing. Students that are not participating should be contacted by the instructor to help reestablish a sense of personal connection. When students are missing assignments, an effort should be made on the part of the instructor to find out why and to offer assistance. Instructors should remember why the student signed up in the first place and work to help the student achieve his/her goals.

References

- <http://www.worldwidelearn.com/education-articles/benefits-of-online-learning.htm>
- <http://www.elearning-companion.com/disadvantages-of-online-learning.html>
- <http://www.indiaprwire.com/pressrelease/education/20130828234207.htm>

- <http://www.gc-solutions.net/resources/articles/types-of-e-learning-and-what-suits-me-best/>
- Nishikant Waikar —Healthcare: e-learning in India-A time for booster dose||, www.themanager.org
- Garrison, G. Randy, and Anderson, Terry. (2003). E-Learning in the 21st Century: A Frame work for Research and Practice. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.