Strategic Analysis of Online Management Education in India

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Abstract

Online education has been a part of the society since the public accessibility of World Wide Web. However it became more popular in the last decade and subsequently gained momentum due to COVID-19 induced lockdown around the world. The present study presents a brief yet comprehensive picture of online education specifically for management courses. The SWOT analysis of online education has also been conducted based on available literature as well as responses from faculties as well as students and necessary strategic suggestions have been formulated.

Keywords: Online education, online learning, sustainable education, COVID-19, management education.

Introduction

The ending days of 2019 saw an outbreak of COVID-19 starting from Wuhan, China. With the passing days, this disease started spreading to various other countries and gradually took the form of a pandemic. In India too, it started spreading in the beginning of 2020, however it gained momentum in the month of March, 2020. As a result, the Government of India implemented a nationwide lockdown effective from 25 March 2020 for 21 days which was extended multiple times till 31 May 2020. The lockdown not only stopped people form movement outdoor but also contained several economic activities with the exceptions to certain essentials (Press Information Bureau, 2020).

Among several sectors that were hit by the pandemic and the lockdown, education is among the worst hit sectors around the world including India (Carrillo & Flores, 2020).In mid March, the schools and colleges were closed by state governments across India.As reported by UNESCO, over 154 Crore students were affected by the pandemic around the globe ("COVID-19 | Over 154 cr. students hit by closure of schools, girls to be worst hit, says UNSECO", 2020). The report also highlights a whopping number of over 32 Crore in India alone (Sharma, 2020). To contain the loss of education, several institutions opted the online mode of teaching as well as assessment. The government also issued guidelines for taking up online teaching so that there should not be a standstill in terms of knowledge gaining. The spread of Corona Virus and extending lockdown presented an alarming situation which led to think about transforming the educational system. Although traditional offline education cannot be replaced by online system (Mishra et al., 2020) but the shift is unavoidable (Carrillo & Flores, 2020).

The usage of online education is not new. It has been in use in some or the other form since the advancement of World Wide Web and percolation of internet into the society (Bates, 2005; Carrillo & Flores, 2020).However, during the lockdown period, online education gained momentum and several modes of online learning became popular among the institutions. However an important question ariseswith the implementation of online teaching about its effectiveness. Hence, the present study talks about the concept of online education, its comprehensive SWOT analysis along with a strategy which could be used for its future implementation.

Literature Review

Young (2006) presented the students' views about online education. Various methods to improve effectiveness of online education have been extracted by the research.

Kim & Bonk (2006) talked about the future prospects of online education. The study listed different factors that could contribute to the success of online learning in the future.

Schroeder, Minocha & Schneider (2010) conducted a SWOT analysis of using social softwares for online learning. Various positive and negative aspects related to usage of social softwares were uncovered in the study which enabled the research to present recommendations for effective usage of social softwares in online learning process.

Santos & Zanca (2018) examined the online transition of business education and highlighted the SWOT analysis from the perspective of students, teachers as well as the institution. The study highlighted ways through which institutions can develop competitive advantage in using online teaching modes.

Mishra et al. (2020) detailed about the online education experience during the lockdown. The research highlighted the policy related to the higher education institutions w.r.t. online education. The study also explained the challenges faced by teachers as well as students during the lockdown in adoption of online education.

Baca (2020) studied the adoption of online study by the students of Ovidius University. The study highlighted various challenges faced by the students.

Hallal, HajjHussein & Tlais (2020) talked about the shift from traditional offline to online classes. The study revealed many important strengths, weaknesses, opportunities as well as threats using which an effective action plan for the universities can be formulated.

Siranjeevi & Pattanwala (2020) also conducted SWOT Analysis of education technology with respect to online learning.

The above mentioned studies conducted different types of researches in field of online education but a detailed strategic analysis along with strategy formulation is missing.

Objectives

The present studyis conducted with following objectives:

1. To understand the prevailing situation of online education.
2. To examine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats w.r.t. online education.
3. To formulate a strategy for online education in management.

Research Methodology

Research methodology defines and describes the methods used for conducting the research concerned. In the present study, appropriate methods have been used to unearth the insights of online education. It is an exploratory study as it performs SWOT analysis of online education which requires in-depth exploration of the subject concerned. However, part of the study would be descriptive as it uses the findings of exploratory SWOT analysis to build the strategy for future. For the purpose of data collection, the primary as well as secondary sources have been used. The determination of strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats was done using the existing literature as well as interviewing various experts and students over the telephone and online meeting. The panel of experts and students were chosen on the basis of convenient sampling where samples were drawn on the basis of personal and professional relationships of the authors. The panel of experts consisted of 8 Assistant Professors, 5 Associate Professors and 4 Professors belonging to different management institutions, while student board consisted of 36 students studying post graduation courses at different management institutions.

Unstructured interviews were conducted so that the conversation would yield important insights eliminating the possibility of respondent bias. The points thus collected were matched with those available in existing literature and were clubbed on the basis of their similarity.

Online Education

Technological advancement has taken education to a next level. The advancement of internet added a new flavor to the education sector for both, the learners as well as instructors. It enabled various institutions to run their courses or training sessions using digital platform either through recorded sessions or live classes over the internet. Institutions like Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University, etc and portals like edex, coursera, udemy, swayam, etc have been running online courses since long. However, with the advent of Covid-19 enabled lockdown across the world, rise in such online courses is quite visible. Not only the online courses but also regular education at different levels witnessed a transition from classroom education to virtual/online education. Platforms like Google Meet, Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, Cisco Webex etc have been extensively used by schools, colleges, universities as well as other types of institutions providing diverse forms of knowledge during lockdown. This transition, although thought to be temporary, opened up the doors for future of online education. Educational institutions in India have been thriving hard for continuing the teaching-learning process despite the

lockdown. They have implemented different modes of online education for their students consisting of recorded video lectures or online lectures or combination of both in few cases. This has opened up doors of possibilities for innovation in education. The online education has been implemented to almost every stream of knowledge ranging from arts to sciences to professional studies. In case of management courses too online education has been implemented by institutions across the country. As management courses include a hybrid curriculum including theoretical as well as practical modules, it is very important to use advanced pedagogy consisting of case studies, group activities, etc. Hence, implementation of online education for management courses requires a very proactive approach. While conducting online classes, the teachers must ensure active participation of students with questions & answers, presentations, discussions etc. The wide reach and applicability of online education inculcates several strengths as well as weaknesses and exposes it to certain opportunities and threats as well. Hence, for ensuring a sustainable future of online education, it is quite essential to strategically analyze its existence and formulate an effective future plan.

SWOT Analysis of Online Education

Based on the literature reviewed and the interviews conducted, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats have been identified w.r.t. management education. These factors would help to strategize an effective future action plan for online management education.

Strengths

1. Flexibility – Online education is considered flexible in many forms (Brown & Charlier, 2012; Cojocariu, Lazar, Nedeff & Lazar, 2014). Particularly in case of recorded online sessions, the learners may listen to lectures; watch demonstrations/experiments etc as per their convenience. The time of their learning, their appearance, the repeated viewings and so on are some of the factors for which the learners can be very flexible which may in turn improve their engagement as well as understanding.

2. Accessibility – When traditional offline learning is considered it is very rigid and limited in its scope in terms of accessibility. The learners need to be at the designated place at the particular time. This limitation is removed by the online education (Demiray, 2010) as the learners may access the content, live as well as recorded, from their place of convenience (Cojocariu et al., 2014; Naresh & Rajalakshmi, 2017). However, the time limitation stays with the live sessions which can be compensated because of the geographic liberty.

3. Participation–Online education increases participation level of even those students who are otherwise less active in offline classrooms. Many students accepted the fact that they face hesitation and anxiety while participating in the offline classes but they are somewhat comfortable with the online means.

4. Exposure–With the removal of time and place limitations, it is quite easy to enhance the exposure of students. They may be given global exposure of things virtually. Online education opens doors for global resources for students at their convenience (Cojocariu et al., 2014; Naresh & Rajalakshmi, 2017).

Weaknesses

1. Limited interaction – Most of the faculty members had the concern about interaction with students. They pointed out that the level of interaction have reduced with online teaching platforms as compared to classroom teaching which obviously will have a detrimental effect on the understanding level of students.
2. Lacks practical experience – The virtual element of online education minimizes the hands on experience of subjects concerned where practical exposure is must (Cojocariu et al., 2014; Naresh & Rajalakshmi, 2017; Siranjeevi & Pattanwala, 2020). Teachers as well as students agreed to the fact that online education is very limited in scope when practical subjects are concerned.
3. Limited assessment & evaluation–A lot of faculty members feel that online mode reduces the scope of assessment and evaluation. Apart from limited assessment mode there is also an issue of monitoring the students. Even a couple of students accepted the fact that many of the students use unfair methods while attempting online examination.
4. Technological knowhow – Online education depends on technological knowhow. Many faculties and even students lack in technical skills required for running different platforms, softwares and applications of online learning.
5. Depends on network & infrastructure – The infrastructure as well as network coverage are very crucial for both, faculties as well as students. The lack of infrastructure and inefficient network support even in urban areas is a great setback for online education in India (Jha, 2020).

Opportunities

1. Enrollment ratio – With the ease of access and flexibility associated with online education, the enrolment ratio of students can be increased (Online higher education enrolment to reach 63.63 lakh by 2022: Report, 2019). Many students dropout due to time constraint arising out of engagements in job or business. In addition, there are people who face financial constraint attached with offline course. These types of students can easily manage their other engagements along with participating in online learning activities at the same time (Wallis, 2020).
2. Career advancement – Online education can provide better opportunities to professionals for advancing their career and growing their skills. The need for continuous growth and development creates a vast opportunity for online education in India as there are a huge number of professionals who would opt for it.
3. Technological development–Technological development paves way for more effective online learning solutions (Cojocariu et al., 2014; Naresh & Rajalakshmi, 2017; Siranjeevi & Pattanwala, 2020). The limitations currently faced by the education industry can be eliminated by appropriate technology (Motschnig-Pitrik & Standl, 2012).

Threats

1. Communication infrastructure – Although technological development is at pace in India, but still there is a lack of appropriate communication network infrastructure at present (Shanmugam, 2011). The availability and access to computers as well as internet is still a luxury to many households not belonging to the upper income class (Jha, 2020).
2. Absence of regulatory body - The universities as well as colleges are regulated by UGC, AICTE and other such bodies which maintains a check over the curriculum being followed and material being delivered also for online courses (Kapadia et al., 2020). However, such regulations are still not widely applicable for freelance online education or for portals providing their customized certificates.
3. Online security & privacy breach – Internet is exposed to cyber security & privacy breaches and events of breach even in government websites have created a panic in people (Bandara et al., 2014; Chen & He, 2013). The online education which uses internet platform for imparting the knowledge is also exposed to such risks (Duball, 2020; Bandara et al., 2014; Chen & He, 2013).
4. Cost – The cost associated with online learning is not small. For some households, owning and accessing IT infrastructure and services is still a dream (Jha, 2020; Cojocariu et al., 2014). It is not just the installation or acquisition cost but also the maintenance cost that bothers not only the learners but also the instructors or faculties.

Strategic Suggestions for Online Education

The critical factors that contribute to the effectiveness of online education are technology, instructor characteristics and student characteristics (Dillon and Gunawardena, 1995; Volery & Lord, 2000). Thus, the strategic plan for effective online education should be made in consideration with these three factors. Based on the SWOT analysis conducted in the present study, following points may contribute to effective online education:

1. The development of advance platforms which could include features like streaming live class, broadcasting recorded class, assessment options as well as specific student interaction option in between a live session with improved security and privacy features.
2. The future of management education can be brighter using a blended approach which includes recorded / live sessions and using offline modes for activities which require interaction and practical exposure.
3. Technical literacy programs for faculties as well as students for enhancing their hands on with the technology.
4. Government can play an important role by Policy formulation, subsidy on specific equipments for students and directing internet providers to introduce betters plans and services for students.

Conclusion

The strategic analysis of online management education in India presents a comprehensive overview of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with the shift towards online learning, particularly in the context of management education. The emergence of online education has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and it has become an integral part of the education landscape. This research paper has shed light on key factors that influence the effectiveness and sustainability of online education in the management domain.

Online education offers several strengths, including flexibility, accessibility, increased participation, and expanded exposure to global resources. These strengths have the potential to enhance the learning experience and reach a wider audience of students, including those facing time or financial constraints.

However, it also comes with its set of weaknesses, such as limited interaction, a lack of practical experience, challenges in assessment and evaluation, and the need for technological know-how. Moreover, it heavily depends on network infrastructure, which is not universally robust, especially in rural areas.

Opportunities for online education include the potential to increase enrollment ratios, cater to professionals seeking career advancement, and leverage technological developments for more effective learning solutions.

At the same time, online education in India faces threats related to communication infrastructure, the absence of a comprehensive regulatory framework, concerns about online security and privacy breaches, and the associated costs.To ensure the sustainable growth of online management education, a strategic plan must be formulated. This plan should focus on technological advancements, a blended approach that combines online and offline modes to address practical aspects of education, technical literacy programs for both faculty and students, and government involvement through policy formulation and support for affordable internet access.

In a rapidly changing educational landscape, the strategic suggestions provided in this paper are essential for fostering effective online education in India. These recommendations can guide educational institutions and policymakers in harnessing the potential of online learning while addressing its challenges and limitations, ultimately providing quality education to a diverse range of students in the country. As online education continues to evolve, these strategies will play a vital role in shaping its future trajectory.

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