# **Offline vs. Online Education**

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## **Abstract**

*Covid-19 pandemic has emerged as the most serious health challenge since the end of 1918 Spanish flu. With the social distancing norms and travelling restrictions at place, the education sector has undergone a radical change. Online education is ubiquitous which has presented new challenges to the learners and teachers alike. Through our paper, we have made an attempt to study the various opportunities and challenges associated with offline as well as online education. Offline education system offers formal learning through classroom-based studies where lessons are taught in a sequential manner along with periodic assessments by qualified teachers. At times it also integrates the use of audio-visual and web-based resources. In the past few years, online education has taken precedence with the improvement of technology and network connectivity. The concept behind online education is to make the learning process interesting and interactive for the learners. It basically acts as a supplement to traditional education. In India where there is already a huge digital divide, offline education is more suitable due to significant numbers of students belong to remote areas with poor network infrastructure. Even the financial condition does not allow the students to own smartphones and laptops. There is also a human touch associated with offline education where learning is not only confined to the walls of the classroom but also to the human interaction that occurs in canteens, libraries, playgrounds etc. Thus, once the situation comes under control alongside the safety guidelines, we should encourage traditional education*.

## **Introduction**

With the emergence of new information and communication technologies (ICTs), the style of imparting education has undergone a lot of changes over the years. It is true that online education brings a lot of flexibility but there are still concerns about its efficacy compared to offline i.e., traditional face to face teaching-learning process. Many researches have been conducted to determine which one is better, but the results obtained are mixed and inconclusive. Trawick et al. (2010) suggested online education results in somewhat lower performance of students. Olson (2002) found little evidence regarding the delivery of education through online and offline mode that has any specific role in the completion of courses by students. Huh et al. (2010) also opined that performances of students are not determined by imparting education either by online or offline mode. Whereas, Detwiler (2008) suggested that online education provides better learning experience. Most of the studies are conducted in the western countries where the economic condition and network connectivity is good with significantly less population and geographical coverage when we compare with India. India is a country of impeccable diversities, where financial condition of people, accessibility to education, network infrastructure and the related factors has so much variation among the population. We see that there is a favourable trend for online education as the data rates have been reduced drastically. This is becoming a new normal on account of Covid-19 pandemic. There are numerous opportunities and challenges associated with modern online education and traditional offline education. In this paper we will discuss and compare the two modes of education i.e., online and offline and how well they can complement each other.

## **Offline Education**

In India traditional education has been shaped by the “Gurukula System” since the immemorial times. In those times, India boasted about the finest universities of the world in the form of Taxila and Nalanda. With the advent of Europeans in the eighteenth century, the western concepts and methodology of education got introduced. Offline education is offered at different levels with the duration of course depending on the scope of study. Both short term and long-term courses are imparted by this mode. Offline education is designed to induce character development and to offer something that is beyond studies. Classrooms act as melting pots of students from diverse cultures, backgrounds and opinions. In spite of this, it leads to building lifelong relationships. The use of ICTs has made inroads in offline education as well. The offline courses have been curated with the use of multimedia features like images, videos, animation etc. This has made the education process interesting. There has been increasing emphasis on the two-way communication between the students and teachers. Students are encouraged to make active participation in the classroom discussion. Regular written tests which act as means of evaluation alongside makes students competitive is a prominent feature of offline education. Laboratory and hands on experience helps the student to become aware about ground realities of the implications of the studies.

## **Online Education**

With the improvement of technology and also due to the government schemes like “Digital India”, online education has gained a lot of prominence in India in recent times. In this difficult period of Covid-19 pandemic, online education has emerged like a ray of light in the darkness. Due to closure of the educational institutions as the extended lockdown at place, there is hardly any alternative to online education. It gives greater flexibility to choose courses and the time of study. It is favoured especially by working professionals to learn specific skills for career advancement or those who want to study solely out of interest. Online education is instrumental when it comes to time saving and money. Commutation can be tiresome and also consumes money. In that way online education offers peace of mind where one can study sitting at the comfort of home. Online education has wider reach. Anyone from any part of the world can learn online as certain constraints associated with offline learning do not exist in its case.

## **Opportunities**

There is a lot of debate going on about online and offline education. Some of the scholars are in favour of offline education whereas some are in the favour of online education. Both of these offer a lot of opportunities as well as certain challenges. We will discuss these in detail. Convenience has emerged to be a key determinant. Unlike offline based education, online education is preferred by people who keep busy. The learning schedule can be tailor made according to the requirements of the learner due to the availability of various MOOCs (Massive open online courses). There are so many portals available like Coursera, Edx, SWAYAM, NPTEL to name a few. Expenses of education are also significantly lower in case of online mode. Feedback is also important in education. The classroom based offline education gives better opportunity to students to give their feedback and clear the doubts because of the face-to-face interaction. Traditional institutions offering offline education are accredited by reputed both private and government agencies. This makes offline courses more credible and offer higher value in the job market. Students get attracted to traditional learning also due to the campus life which consists of canteens, culture events, conferences and sports facilities.

## **Challenges**

In spite of high popularity, online education is still seen only as a convenient way to seek education rather as a replacement to traditional education. The challenge lies in building highly efficient online institutions due to the limited quality accreditations. It will take a lot of time to come at par with traditional institutes. The human interaction is bare minimum in case of online education. The classroom-based face to face learning experience matters a lot when it comes to personality development and building confidence. There is limited scope of extracurricular activities in case of online learning. Study materials are highly specific in the form of electronic medium which is somewhat less impactful compared to books. In our country there are a lot of areas where there is poor internet connectivity and network infrastructure. Moreover, the gadgets required i.e., smartphones, laptops etc. are also expensive. Students with limited financial means face difficulties in securing high speed internet connection and gadgets to access online based education. Online education has limited scope for subjects which involve a lot of practical and laboratory activities. The biggest challenge in the case of online education is the self-discipline, patience and sincerity during the learning process of the learners. As there is very little scope of monitoring by the instructor, students can hardly build a rapport. The human side of the learning process is pretty limited. Offline education has also its own share of challenges. In India the cost of education plays a vital role. The costs of education are low in government aided institutions but have limited seats. Thus, a huge number of students study in the private institutions which charge huge fees. Moreover, lack of transportation means is another challenge for students living in remote locations. There is also a huge manpower requirement in maintaining the campus of institutions offering offline education which contributes to the costs of education as well. Commutation and high education cost are major challenges in case of offline education.

## Conclusions

We have discussed the opportunities and challenges of online and offline education. It is not possible to identify the better alternative of the two because each one has got distinct advantages and disadvantages over the other. Traditional educational systems through offline based face to face classrooms cannot be replaced. Online education is good for specific courses and can act as a supplement to the education process to make it more interactive and interesting. As soon as we return back to normalcy post Covid-19 era, we should move back to offline education.

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