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How has online learning impacted higher education?

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, universities were unable to teach face-to-face as before, and teaching activities shifted from face-to-face to online. Online learning, which had been present before, has been developed on a large scale. With the rapid growth and popularity of the Internet, the impact of online learning on higher education is gradually increasing. Online learning offers a more flexible approach to teaching and learning, helping students save money on tuition, in addition to expanding the number of students on a larger scale.

First of all, online education offers flexible teaching methods compared to traditional education. Online students can self-assemble, help each other, organize online and on-site discussion groups (Bonvillian & Singer, 2014, p. 2). This is a great way to exercise students' thinking and, what's more, it not only enables them to learn knowledge on their own, but also contributes to the development of good qualities. Joseph Delengowski states that students prefer flexible instruction when it comes to learning. This is because students cannot always focus on one long duration and remember all the knowledge imparted by the teacher (Bidwell, 2014, p.2). In a traditional classroom, students can only focus on the teacher's lecture and ask questions only after the teacher has finished, and during this time, the distraction of the questions may affect the students' listening effectiveness. On the other hand, a flexible teaching style will allow students to be more active learners, perhaps by learning a piece of knowledge and applying it, or by gradually strengthening their understanding during discussions, thus helping them to master what they have learned. Penny E. MacCormack also stated that online learning can provide opportunities for students and instructors to interact and study certain classroom material in greater depth (Flaherty, 2020, p.2). In addition, for art students, the flexibility may be more evident. A professor at New York University teaches a drama course by allowing students to use Oculus Quest headsets to achieve a virtual reality performance (Taparia, 2020, p. 2). Correspondingly, a music professor at Stanford University teaches students to learn a software that allows musicians from all over the world to create and perform music together via the Internet (Taparia, 2020, p. 2). This is quite impactful for art student because they all know that it is necessary to use equipment with their studies, and most art equipment is kept in schools, lack of equipment will not be able to study. By using software to enable online simulations, it will be possible to achieve a similar effect to face-to-face lessons.

Second, online learning can save students money on tuition. Some universities offer degrees for students online. For example, Georgia Tech offered an online master's in computer science in 2014, and the cost of the degree program is only $7,000. The normal face-to-face program tuition is about 6 times that (Taparia, 2020, p. 2). Correspondingly, the University of Illinois launched an online MBA course in 2015 with a tuition of $22,000, which is only a small part of the tuition of most business schools (Taparia, 2020, p. 2). This is undoubtedly very attractive to students of modest means, as they will no longer be discouraged from pursuing their studies because of the high cost. In addition, for students who are poor and do not have scholarships, a large number of free online education platforms provide them with learning opportunities. An example is the MOOC, which provides free access to higher education (Bonvillian & Singer, 2014, p. 2). In this way, poor students are also able to study without financial pressure and receive a higher education certificate. In this respect, online learning makes a breakthrough to traditional education. Because we have always had the stereotype that education is fee-based, adding a touch of aristocracy to it. Online learning is truly low or even no threshold, which is also a subversion of the education industry, and may also be a direction for the future development of education.

Finally, online learning expands the number of students at scale. Online learning has grown fast in colleges, particularly in non-selective and for-profit institutions, with comparable results (Dynarski, 2018, p.2). Online learning allows people to learn without having to think about time and money - in other words, if you want to learn, you can join in. For example, a free course offered by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology had more than 134,000 applicants this semester (Taparia, 2020, p. 3). Likewise, Kaplan University is another major online service provider with 7.8000 enrolled students (Bonvillian & Singer, 2014, p. 1). This advantage is also unmatched by face-to-face teaching. With face-to-face classes, the number of students is necessarily limited by the size of the classroom, the amount of equipment, etc. Large classrooms and too many students make for a mediocre classroom experience. With online learning, you don't have to take this into account. Even if there are more students watching an online course, the student is only facing a screen, and there are no other distractions. This is why online students can expand the number of students.

After COVID-19, students will return to campus. But online learning will still exist and continue to grow. That's because online learning has many advantages that traditional education does not. Online learning offers a more flexible approach to instruction, saves students' tuition overhead, and expands the number of students. By combining online learning with traditional education, the field of education is sure to make great progress.