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A Study of Perception of Different Students and Other Types of Customers Towards Online Courses

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ABSTRACT

As a result of widespread internet access and technological advancements, online education has rapidly evolved. Different age groups and professional backgrounds have seen changes in the behavior, preferences, and satisfaction of learners as a result of the transition from traditional to digital learning. This study aims to comprehend how various customer segments—parents, teachers, and students—perceive online education in India. The study investigates the advantages and disadvantages of online education, the degree of confidence in digital learning, the significance of internet accessibility, and whether professional associations and employers accept online certifications. Structured questionnaires were used to gather primary data, and inferential tools and descriptive statistics were used for analysis. The results show that while many acknowledge the ease and flexibility of online learning, questions about its efficacy, interaction quality, and value recognition still exist in the job market.

Keywords: Online Education, E-learning, Perception, Student Satisfaction, Digital Learning, India, Online Courses

INTRODUCTION

One of the most effective means of fostering both individual and societal development is education. It is a lifelong process that improves knowledge, develops character, sharpens thinking, and enables people to make significant contributions to the world around them. It is not merely a way to obtain degrees or certificates. Education has been provided for centuries mostly through the conventional, in-person classroom system, in which students attend classes in person, engage with peers and teachers, adhere to a set curriculum, and take part in on-campus learning activities. However, a significant shift in the education sector has occurred with the advent of online learning due to the quick development of digital technology and the broad accessibility of the internet.

The delivery of education via the internet is referred to as online education, e-learning, or virtual learning. Without having to physically be in a classroom, it allows students to access course materials, attend lectures, turn in assignments, and take tests from anywhere in the world. Online education has evolved over the last 20 years from a specialized idea to a widely used choice by educational institutions such as colleges, universities, and even professional training centers. Learners now have access to thousands of courses on a variety of subjects offered by reputable national and international institutions thanks to the growth of platforms like SWAYAM, Coursera, Udemy, edX, and Khan Academy.

The shift in education from traditional blackboards to digital screens has been influenced by a range of factors. The widespread use of smartphones, the availability of low-cost internet access, and the demand for more flexible learning options have made online education an appealing choice. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly sped up the transition to online learning. With educational institutions forced to shut down to curb the virus's spread, they had no alternative but to transition their teaching online. This abrupt change brought digital education into the limelight, impacting millions of students, educators, and parents worldwide.

Although online education presents numerous benefits such as convenience, accessibility, flexibility, and affordability, it also brings forth a range of challenges. Problems like the absence of personal interaction, technological issues, the necessity for self-discipline, and skepticism regarding the legitimacy of online certifications have created uncertainties for many students. These issues are particularly pertinent in a country like India, where a significant digital divide persists between urban and rural regions, as well as among various socio-economic groups. Access to high-speed internet, digital devices, and the requisite technical skills to engage effectively in online learning is not uniformly available to everyone.

Understanding how various client types students, parents, and educators perceive online courses becomes crucial in this situation. Their viewpoints, inclinations, worries, and life experiences can offer important information about the efficacy and prospects of online learning. At the heart of this change are students, who are the main users of educational services. Key success factors include their degree of comfort with online learning, their level of satisfaction with the quality of instruction, and the importance they attach to online degrees. Education decisions are also heavily influenced by parents, who frequently provide financial support for their kids' education. Acceptance can be greatly influenced by how they view online learning in terms of cost, safety, learning outcomes, and potential career opportunities.

The employability and recognition of online education in the job market is another crucial factor. There is continuous discussion about whether employers and professional organizations consider online degrees to be legitimate and comparable to traditional, classroom-based degrees. Although there are still questions regarding the suitability of online learning in fields like medicine, engineering, or law where real-world experience and interpersonal skills are essential, online education has been widely accepted and even encouraged by industry leaders in knowledge-based domains like IT, marketing, finance, and data analysis. Additionally, the Indian government has taken a number of initiatives to promote online learning and digital literacy. Programs like Digital India, Skill India, and SWAYAM are designed to deliver high-quality education to every region of the nation through digital platforms.

It is also important to understand the psychological and behavioral aspects of online education. Learning online requires a high degree of self-motivation, time management skills, and digital literacy. Unlike traditional classrooms where a teacher can guide and monitor students directly, online learners need to take responsibility for their own learning. This self-driven model may work well for mature and motivated learners but can be difficult for younger students or those without support at home.

In summary, one of the most important advancements in the contemporary learning ecosystem is the growth of online education. It offers both possibilities and difficulties that require careful consideration from a variety of angles. As a result, this research becomes pertinent and timely in supporting curriculum design, policymaking, educational planning, and technological innovation. The future of education in India and beyond will be greatly influenced by our ability to comprehend consumer perception as the lines between digital and physical learning continue to blur.

LITRATURE REVIEW

Online learning has quickly become one of the biggest developments in the world of education in recent years. Online learning platforms and digital classrooms have grown as a result of the development of digital technology, the accessibility of internet services, and the growing need for flexible learning options. A growing corpus of research examining the efficacy, acceptability, and perception of online education across different societal segments has been spurred by this shift in the way education is delivered.

1. Online Education's Development and Scope

Online education, also known as e-learning, includes a wide variety of learning formats, such as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), blended learning (a combination of online and offline methods), and fully online degree programs.

Online learning has progressed from a supplementary teaching method to a complete substitute for conventional classroom-based education, claim Sun and Chen (2016). The spread of smartphones and the availability of high-speed internet have been crucial in e-learning's expansion, especially in developing nations like India. Online learning has progressed from a supplementary teaching method to a complete substitute for conventional classroom-based education, claim Sun and Chen (2016). The spread of smartphones and the availability of high-speed internet have been crucial in e-learning's expansion, especially in developing nations like India.

While online education provides more flexibility and accessibility, it frequently lacks the interactive and social elements of traditional education, according to a 2011 study by Anna Ya Ni that compared the efficacy of classroom and online learning. However, many of these gaps are being successfully filled with the help of discussion boards, live video lectures, and collaborative tools.

2. Views and Preferences of Students

An important factor in the success of online learning is how students perceive it. In e-learning systems, students are frequently the main stakeholders, and their views have an impact on learning outcomes, course completion rates, and enrollment rates. Students who choose to take elective online courses have a more favorable opinion of them than those who must take required online modules, claim Smart and Cappel (2006). According to their research, students are concerned about the time needed to finish online assignments and the absence of immediate instructor feedback, even though they value the flexibility and self-paced nature of online learning.

In a study on virtual campuses, Reddy et al. (2001) discovered that 60% of students valued the flexibility of study schedules and 68% of students thought that online education allowed them to build their own knowledge base. Nonetheless, a sizable percentage of students also mentioned the need for additional direction and organization, indicating that not all students are equally adapted to self-directed digital learning.

3.The Difficulties and Limitations of Online Education

Online learning has drawbacks despite its many advantages. The absence of personal engagement and real-time interaction is one of the most commonly mentioned problems. Asynchronous forums and discussions offer flexibility, but they frequently lack the depth and immediacy of classroom discussions, according to Michael

Hammond (2013). This may have an impact on the entire educational process, especially for students who learn best when they interact with others in person.

George Lorenzo (2012) investigated the reasons behind online course dropout rates and discovered that low motivation, ineffective time management, and loneliness were typical causes of student disengagement. In order to guarantee student perseverance and course completion, his research made clear the necessity of organized support networks, such as virtual communities, mentoring, and consistent communication.

4.Online Education in India: Government and Market Trends

India has become one of the largest markets for online education, second only to the United States in user numbers. The government has launched various initiatives such as SWAYAM, NPTEL, and Digital India to encourage online learning across the country. A report by KPMG and Google says the Indian online education market is expected to reach USD 1.96 billion, with about 9.6 million users by 2025.

Platforms like Byju's, Unacademy, Vedantu, and Simplilearn have changed how Indian students access education, especially in tier-2 and tier-3 cities. These platforms offer flexible, affordable, and quality content for school, college, and competitive exam preparation.

RESEARCH GAP

Online education has become a well-liked substitute for conventional classroom instruction over the previous ten years, particularly with the advent of digital platforms and greater internet availability. The efficacy, usability, and academic results of online courses have already been extensively studied around the world. However, the majority of these studies concentrate primarily on institutional or technical viewpoints, such as the development of e-learning platforms, course completion rates, or student performance. A thorough comprehension of how different user groups, notably students, parents, and teachers, view the online learning experience is frequently lacking.

Furthermore, online learning research in India is still scarce and mostly focused on urban areas or individuals with digital literacy. The way that people from various backgrounds, such as those from low-income or rural areas, understand and adjust to online education is not well understood by thorough research. Current literature frequently ignores disparities in access to technology, digital proficiency, and cultural views about remote learning.

Furthermore, few studies have incorporated the perspectives of all major players in the learning process. Although there is student-cantered research, the worries of parents regarding the validity, preparedness of teachers, and long-term career benefit of online learning are not given enough attention. The way that employers in the Indian labour market view online degrees and credentials is also not well documented.

Thus, this study seeks to close these gaps by looking at how students, teachers, and parents feel about online courses, considering both their favourable experiences and difficulties. The research will thus provide more practical and inclusive insights that will aid in enhancing the efficiency and acceptance of online education in India.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

1. To compare how students, instructors, and parents see the efficacy of online education versus conventional classroom instruction.

2. To determine the degree to which various demographic groups are aware of, accepting of, and using online courses.

3. To determine the major benefits and drawbacks that users encounter while using online learning platforms.

4. To analyze the impact of internet access, digital literacy, and technology infrastructure on users' online learning experiences.

5. To assess how much faith and credibility online credentials have among parents, students, and companies.

6. To examine how online learning affects students' academic achievement, motivation, and participation.

7. To offer realistic recommendations for raising the quality, delivery, and accessibility of online education for a wide range of users in India.

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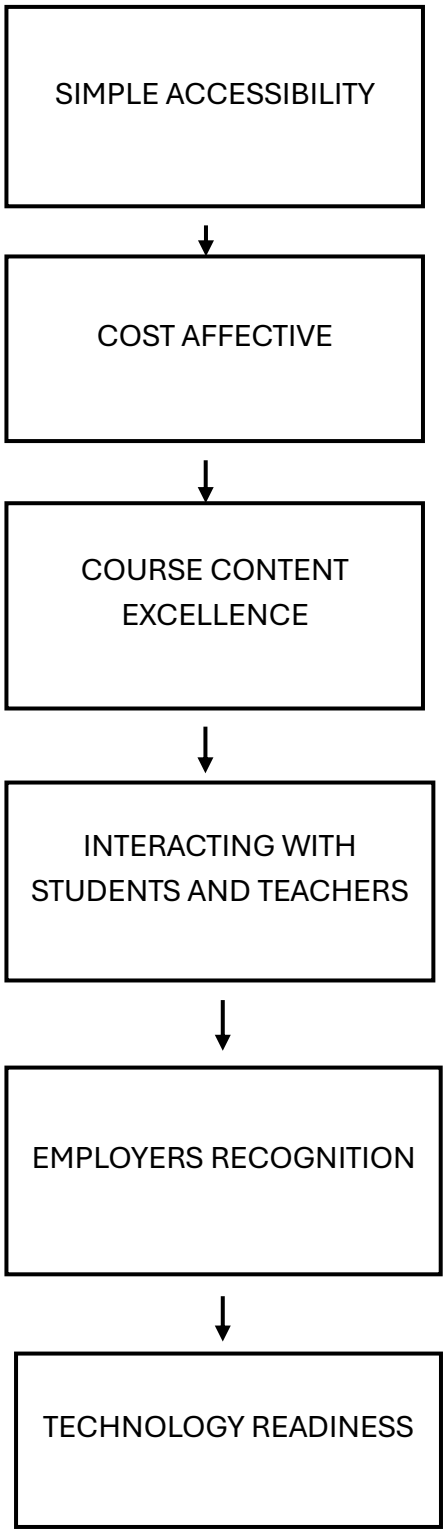
CONCEPTUAL MODEL



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study uses a descriptive research methodology since it effectively investigates what students and teachers think about online education. A descriptive research method enables researchers to gather detailed information about present conditions while they investigate variable relationships without making environmental changes. The study examines student, parent, and teacher perceptions regarding online education through an analysis of its accessibility, effectiveness and credibility aspects.

The research design uses a descriptive approach to uncover how individuals view online education. The researcher utilizes descriptive research to gather extensive information about existing conditions while they examine variable connections without modifying the research setting. The study evaluates how students, teachers, and parents perceive online learning accessibility as well as its effectiveness and credibility.

The research team obtained data through both primary and secondary sources during the data collection process. Research staff conducted a structured questionnaire survey using Google Forms to obtain their primary data sources. The questionnaire was designed with straightforward language to ensure participants could easily respond while using different question types. The researchers combined quantitative data collection for statistical analysis with qualitative feedback collection to examine participant emotional and behavioural reactions. The research survey engaged three targeted groups including students who use online learning and teachers who teach digitally and parents who manage their children's educational activities. The approach delivered a comprehensive understanding of the examined problem by viewing it from multiple perspectives.

The research team used academic journals together with research papers and government reports and educational websites along with published articles as their main secondary data sources. The information from these sources gave the current study a better understanding of present-day online education trends and challenges and new educational approaches. The research methodology enjoyed careful planning yet encountered several constraints during implementation. The study restricted its sample to internet users who could understand English thus excluding many people particularly those in rural areas. The questionnaire's self-administration method could lead to respondent misinterpretations or insincere answers.

The research findings cannot be extended to the complete population because the study employed convenience sampling. The research methodology effectively achieves its objectives by establishing fundamental knowledge of Indian public perceptions regarding online education. The research methodology produced findings that will direct future research and assist policymakers in developing digital learning systems.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPETATION

Descriptive statistics analysis processed the information gathered from 163 participants which included students, teachers, and parents. The analytical goal focused on examining how people understand online education together with their choices and satisfaction levels and the difficulties and advantages it offers. A diverse group of survey participants included people from different stages of life and professional fields and educational levels.

The table uses detailed information to present a concise summary of survey question content alongside participant responses and their occurrence rates along with related proportions.

S.No	Question	Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Awareness of online education	Yes	113	69.3%
		No	50	30.7%
2	Preferred mode of education	Online	65	39.9%
		Offline	98	60.1%
3	Is online education effective?	Yes	60	36

INTERPRETATION:

High Awareness but Low Preference: While a large portion (69.3%) of respondents were aware of online education, only 39.9% preferred it over traditional classroom learning. This highlights the gap between awareness and actual acceptance.

Effectiveness Perception Is Low: Only 36.8% of the respondents considered online education to be truly effective, indicating that a significant majority feel that it lacks depth, discipline, or quality compared to offline methods.

Flexibility and Accessibility as Key Strengths: Among those who preferred online learning, the most valued features were flexibility (56.4%) and ease of access to learning material (49.1%). These findings are consistent with global trends.

Significant Drawbacks The two main reasons given by respondents for not favoring online learning were the absence of a real classroom setting (54%) and the lack of in-person connection (47.8%). This suggests that learning involves a strong yearning for human connection.

Possibility of Filling Educational Gaps: Over half (55.8%) concurred that online learning aids in addressing issues in higher education, such as long commutes and a shortage of seats. This demonstrates faith in its structural value.

Doubt Regarding Job Market Value: A total of 63.8% of participants expressed doubt or distrust regarding the usefulness of online certifications in the hiring process. This suggests that credibility-building and industry-wide awareness are necessary.

Divergent Views on Applicability for School Students: Half of respondents disagreed with the 30.7% who thought online learning was suitable for schoolchildren.

Demographic Profile of Respondents			
Demographic Variable	**Category**	**Number of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Gender	Male	53	32.5%
	Female	110	67.5%
Age Group	16–18 years	53	32.5%
	19–21 years	78	47.9%
	22–24 years	32	19.6%
Occupation	Student	138	84.7%
	Teacher	13	8%
	Parent	12	7.3%
Education Level	10th Pass	14	8.6%
	12th Pass	40	24.5%
	Graduate	67	41.1%
	Postgraduate & above	42	25.8%

INTERPRETATION:

The survey revealed that a majority of the participants (67.5%) were female, suggesting a slight gender imbalance, which might be a result of the online format of the survey.

The age group that stood out the most was 19–21 years, making up 47.9% of the respondents. This aligns with the fact that students were the main focus of this research.

An impressive 84.7% of those surveyed identified as students, which directly supports the study's emphasis on understanding learner perceptions.

When it comes to educational backgrounds, the qualifications were quite varied, with a solid representation of graduates (41.1%) and postgraduates (25.8%). This diversity adds credibility to the analysis of opinions on online education.

FINDINGS

Online education is a well-known option, but it doesn't seem to be the favourite choice for many. A survey revealed that while 69.3% of people are aware of online courses, only 39.9% prefer them over traditional classroom learning.

When it comes to education, traditional classrooms still reign supreme. About 60.1% of respondents Favor offline education, appreciating the structured environment, the physical presence of teachers and peers, and the enhanced engagement that comes with it.

There's a common belief that online education falls short in effectiveness. In fact, 63.2% of participants feel that online learning isn't as effective as in-person classes, often pointing to the lack of interaction and self-discipline as major drawbacks.

However, one aspect that many find appealing about online education is its flexibility. A significant 56.4% of respondents love the idea of being able to "learn anytime, anywhere," and 45.3% appreciate the chance to learn at their own pace.

There is scepticism about the value of online certificates. Only 36.2% of respondents liked to think that online degrees are valued the same as traditional degrees in the job market, many were indifferent or disagreed.

Mixed views about whether online education helps students develop skills. 39.9% of participants agreed that online education is a successful way to help students develop skills, however, nearly the same number of participants (35.6%) disagreed indicating some scepticism about online learning that is practical.

CONCLUSION

The shift from conventional classroom-based learning to more individualized and technologically based online learning defines a major change in education in the 21st century, and this research paper sought to examine and help understand the beliefs and attitudes of different categories of customers, specifically students, teachers and parents toward online education.

Even though levels of awareness and popularity of online courses grew rapidly, acceptance and preference towards online education appears to be a multi-faceted problem, both psychological and practical.

Evidence from the data analysis and the response data shows that online education is known to a majority of the respondents surveyed (approx. 70%) and that awareness of online education doesn't always lead to preference or satisfaction. The majority of participants still prefer traditional offline education, partly due to the structure of the curriculum, real-time interaction and a classroom environment. Several respondents simply do not have the belief that online education can deliver the personal touch and feedback loop, engagement and level of discipline that is essential for effective learning.

The research also unveiled a number of challenges that were faced by both students and educators. Many of the respondents identified challenges such as lack of access to high-speed connectivity, insufficient technical skills, screen fatigue, and low motivation. Teachers in particular had to deal with not only modifying teaching styles and adapting to online tools but also making sure that students continued to learn in the online interactive space. Parents acknowledged the implications of attention span and interaction with peers, and even noted an increased use of gadgets in online classes.

Despite the challenges it poses, there is a clear signal that online and virtual education is here to stay. The majority of respondents (over 60%) were confident that online learning will continue to expand and develop as part of the mainstream educational system. Additionally, online models will especially resolve concerns in the higher education system relating to limited college spaces, high fees, and geographical location. Thoughtful planning, improved technologies, improved instructional design will allow online education to either supplement or replace more traditional learning models.

SUGGESTIONS

Create More Blended Learning Models (Hybrid Education):

Educators and learning facilitators should study and adopt hybrid educational models that blend learning solutions - online and face-to-face - to offer the best of both worlds - the flexibility of online and the interactivity and discipline of a face-to-face classroom.

Make Online Learning More Interactive:

EdTech companies and educators need to start finding ways to make online courses more engaging and attention-grabbing, utilizing features like live spaces, student-teacher video calls, interactive quizzes, and breakout discussions.

Offer Comprehensive Digital Teaching Training Programs:

There now needs to be developed significant teacher training program offerings to prepare teachers to successfully transition to remote digital workout platforms. This means preparing teacher with not just technical skills, but digital learning space management and student engagement approaches.

Enhance Digital Digital Infrastrucutre for Rural Learning Conditions:

Public and private partnerships will need to enhance access to affordable internet services and technology devices-especially to low-income and rural areas of the country to resolve issues of equity and access in the digital divide area

Increase Recognition of Online Certifications and Credentials:

Recognizing the value of accredited learning, stakeholders need to promote quality online courses and instill awareness among authors and employers. Educational institutions should develop partnerships with industries to ensure their online delivery meets current employment management requirements.

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