

E-Learning in Rural Areas: Opportunities, Challenges, and Future Directions

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INTRODUCTION

There have been many challenges regarding the education of students in rural areas, recently there has been a change in this and children in rural areas are studying up to 10th-12th. Still, efforts are being made at the government level to overcome all these challenges such as lack of infrastructure, untrained teachers, poverty and language barrier. Mid-day meals are provided in government schools under the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, uniforms and books are provided free of cost. Due to free and compulsory education under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, children in rural areas are also studying, but when the Corona wave came to us five years ago, the whole world came to a standstill and online education had to be considered in India as well, since then everyone has been asking this question, will it be successful if we want to provide online education in our country, especially in rural areas, like other countries? Of course, during the Corona period, education was provided to some extent through various apps using the parents' mobile phones, but there were many obstacles in that too.

A situation had arisen where it posed a threat not only to the educational development of children but also to their social development. It affected both teachers and students, but if we want to bring development at all levels in our country, and if we want to take our students to the global level, and if we want to keep our children in different competitions, it is necessary to consider online education along with formal education. It is certainly necessary to provide some options of online education for new challenges and to keep rural students in the era of competition, which has been considered in this research paper.

OBJECTIVES

- 1) To study the impact of online education on educational development.
- 2) To know the challenges faced by effective online education in rural society.
- 3) To find solutions to improve online education. Methodology - This research paper is completely based on primary and secondary sources. For this, various journals, books, as well as information on the internet, etc. have been used.

Online education - Online education is education provided through a digital platform. In which students acquire knowledge and skills on the internet through electronic devices like computers, laptops and tablets or mobiles. In this education, students can easily get any information and knowledge from anywhere in the world. In the 21st century, technology has made great progress, the Internet has started developing rapidly in all fields, the Internet has also benefited the education sector to a large extent. Brief history- Since 1950, classes based on slide projectors and televisions were in use and the world's first examples of online education can be found in the University of Illinois in the United States in 1960. At that time, the Internet had not been invented, but students were studying from computer terminals connected to each other to create a network, and later in 1984, the University of Toronto started the first fully online course. In 1986, the Electronic University Network was established, and three years later, the University of Phoenix became the first educational institution in the world to start a fully online collegiate institution, offering both bachelor's and master's degrees. This is where online education really started and spread. In the early 1990s, the Open University in Britain was one of the first universities in the world to start online distance learning, and currently, the Indira Gandhi National Open University in India is the largest university in

the world with about 40 lakh students studying. (Swamik Sarkar 1920) Although online education was at the university and college level, its importance was increased from primary school, which is why it was only after Covid-19 that we started thinking about online education for school students.

IMPACT OF ONLINE EDUCATION ON EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Education is no longer limited to traditional classes; the education sector has brought about a significant change in online education in the last two decades. Many positive effects of online education are being seen, the information about it is as follows-

1) Flexibility and convenience - Online education gives flexibility to the individual regarding time and place, we can learn according to our time, and we can acquire knowledge from any place in the world, and if some professionals want to do a course, they can complete it online while maintaining their business. Be it a housewife or any student, they can easily do an additional course and there is no age limit, it provides flexibility and convenience of lifelong learning, which encourages skill development.

2) Less need for infrastructure - With online education, a person does not need to go anywhere physically, so there is no need for transportation expenses, all these additional expenses required after reaching the class, are reduced due to online education. Books, curriculum, materials, etc. are all available online, due to which digital literacy and technical skills increase. That is, online education is less expensive than the traditional teaching method, but it becomes more comprehensive and cost-effective.

3) Variety of courses available - Online courses on everything from spirituality to commerce, fashion, art, painting, philosophy, photography, etc. are immediately available on your screen. The answer to every question can be easily found online.

4) Increasing accessibility - In Covid-19, we saw that 'Physicswala' coaching classes have become a coaching class with a turnover of several crores in just three-four years. Even today, the craze for this coaching class is the same, which shows the importance of online education.

5) Personal learning ability - The student can learn according to his academic speed and ability, using options like recorded lectures, quizzes, interactive modules, etc., the student can understand difficult subjects, due to which the student can get personal learning in a better way, increase his own learning ability. Courses are available on platforms like SWAYAM or MOOCs for free or at low cost, which also gives a good boost to educational development. If education is easily available to students in rural areas, then the education gap between rural and urban students will definitely be reduced and rural students can also progress very well, develop various skills and of course help the nation through it.

CHALLENGES IN EFFECTIVE ONLINE EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS

Although online education is a very effective medium, it has a good impact on educational development, in our country there are still many challenges in taking online education easily in rural and remote areas, the discussion of which is as follows -

1) Network problem - Internet facilities have reached everyone, but the problem of network is found in rural areas to a large extent, even if someone wants to talk on the phone, he has to go to a high place where he can catch the network, that is, those who have a mobile phone cannot take online education due to network connectivity or sometimes students do not get audio sound properly, sometimes the video is not visible properly, many such problems arise for the student.

2) Electricity - Even today, there is a problem of load shedding in rural areas and people in remote areas remain deprived of electricity connection for a couple of days and there is no guarantee that they will get regular electricity. If people in rural areas are facing such problems of electricity shortage, then online education for rural students will be wrong. Therefore, the government should focus on how to ensure regular electricity supply in rural areas.

3) Smartphone - In rural areas, only 35% of parents have smartphones, and along with that, they also have problems with internet and network, and they cannot recharge the network, and in such a situation, when there are two or three children in a family, it is not possible to provide mobile phones to all children for online education. Due to this, many students were deprived of online education, which we have experienced during the Corona period. That is, due to poverty, not all students can take online education.

4) Language barrier - Education in rural areas is done in the mother tongue and online educational content is mainly available in English. Children studying in regional languages find it difficult to understand it. Therefore, these children do not turn to online teachers. This is a big challenge for us.

5) Lack of educational environment - In rural areas, most of the population is engaged in agricultural business, so children do not get an educational environment at home. There is no one at home to solve the problems faced in online education, and children cannot learn concentratedly due to the responsibilities and environment at home, that is, in rural areas, student parents and sometimes teachers cannot solve the problems of students due to low digital literacy.

At such times, it becomes difficult for students to run educational apps, attend virtual classes, or solve online assignments, that is, there is a lot of availability in online education, but many challenges like poor connectivity, lack of equipment, financial shortage, lack of digital literacy are seen in rural areas, due to which students feel indifferent about online education.

SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE ONLINE EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS

Bringing rural children into the flow of education as much as possible, making them self-reliant by doing various courses, online education is a very good option for this. Online education also costs less, such as saving on travel expenses and lower tuition fees. This option is very useful for reducing the gap between education in rural and urban areas. But there are many challenges for online education in rural areas, the following solutions to improve them are-

1) Development of infrastructure - Efforts are needed to increase internet connectivity in rural areas. It is necessary to encourage the opening of maximum cyber cafes in every village, so that online education will be convenient for rural students.

2) Electricity - Some efforts need to be made to regularize electricity supply. This will make it easier to take online education.

3) Digital literacy - Training programs for students and parents should be organized on a large scale, the government is implementing many different initiatives, such as providing free tailoring courses, free beauty parlor courses, etc. On the same lines, if computer courses are also provided free of cost or if some schemes like scholarships are launched for such courses, then parents of students in certain villages will become digitally literate and it will definitely be used for online courses.

4) Teacher Training -

Along with students and parents, such training programs should be organized for teachers working in rural areas, so that they can create videos of the subjects they teach and send them to the students. Moreover, it should be made compulsory to create facilities in schools and colleges to use the presentation. Many government schools have facilities, but they are not used. For this, the government should give strict regulations.

If the use of online education can be increased in primary and secondary schools in maximum way, then surely these children can continue to be inspired by online education and do different courses in colleges or after completing their education.

5) Curriculum material development - Considering the rural areas, materials should be made available in regional languages, interactive, attractive videos, animations and how they can be easily available should be considered. Just like the school education systems in other countries, that method should be considered in our country too. It is necessary to include all those methods. Some offline materials can also be made available through mobile phones, it should also be considered, if the online education curriculum and courses are prepared in regional languages, students in rural areas will also participate easily.

6) Participation of the rural community - By bringing together the rural Gram Panchayat, Sarpanch, Police Patil, Rural Development Officers, as well as doctors or other professionals settled in the villages, and getting their participation and guidance to encourage the students there, if this is done in such a way, maximum people will know the benefits of online education, awareness will be created about it and definitely rural students will participate in it. Digital India is a government initiative, which is promoting digital literacy, online services, and people will also understand how to use it. There are portals like MOOCs and Swayam from universities, colleges, similar portals can be made from schools or for rural areas, through which students will develop, but more efforts are needed for this.

CONCLUSION

There is a dire need for online education in rural areas, even after 75 years of India's independence, the desired change has not yet been made in the educational sector in rural areas. Only if online education is increased, these students will be able to get a better life, the problem of unemployment in our country can be reduced to some extent.

Mental problems like depression, anxiety, addiction are also seen in rural children, if good quality vocational education and skill development is provided, all these problems will definitely be eliminated. For this, infrastructure is more important to implement online education in rural areas. Besides, if multi-dimensional solutions, innovative initiatives, community participation are strengthened, there is no doubt that the right results will be seen in rural areas too.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Starting online education in rural areas will help reduce the educational gap between urban and rural students.
- 2) There are many challenges in rural areas, to solve which changes are necessary at all levels such as government, schools, colleges.
- 3) It is necessary to increase some facilities for these children by considering the financial situation of parents in rural areas. 4) Increase internet connectivity, Wi-Fi facilities.

5) Parents, teachers and educational institutions must work together for the education of students.

6) Virtual classes, schools should be started in rural areas.

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