

# Higher Education and Online Learning: Towards a Culture of Virtual Universities

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## ABSTRACT

Virtual University is a new perspective of higher education it refers to the learning without a real or physical campus, and all the course of university are delivered online. According to Website of the international council for the distance Education (ICDE) virtual universities is "Institutions which offer programs only by electronics means, and which are not Open Universities." Nowadays, due to the rapid development of technology digital change can be seen across the globe. This change has come in all sector of society, one of them is the medium of online learning. Online learning considered as a feature of change forces for higher education in the twenty first century. This online learning method transform learning in digitized form from traditional and also enhance the capacity of distance learning. Increasing access to technology has touched all aspect of life. One of the important aspects is education, digital technology is ensuring its reach in educational field. The impact of technology in higher education is widely visible, now higher education becomes more technocrats. Virtual university gives distance learning further elaboration and overcomes its shortcoming and constraints through virtual medium. The culture of digital universities is gradually developing also in India and it has been going on in other parts of the world since along. People living in rural areas and poor people do not get proper education, in such a challenging situation online learning become even more important. But to make it successful along with online learning its infrastructure will also have to be strengthened such as proper net connectivity and learning gadgets for poor people. we need to create a digital culture of learning that ensures more and more people to have a presence in higher education through virtual universities.

This paper is based on secondary data and main objective of this paper is explore the need and importance of online learning in Higher Education. This paper will also analyses how is the culture of a virtual university developing through online learning.

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## 1. Research Questions-

- How profitable is a Virtual university for student?
- What are the obstacles in the path of virtual universities?
- Is online learning increasing the digital divide in rural area?

## 2. Introduction

This fact is absolutely true that distance learning is the need of time. It is playing an important role in strengthening our education system and ensuring education quality. In present time, we are trying to make higher education available more and more people through digital learning and we have also succeeded to a point .in which efforts are made to ensure access to education in rural areas and economically weaker people. Through these transformative processes of learning. Our education system is gradually moving towards a virtual university. Our government has made many efforts in this direction such as Swayam,Swayamprabha, e-basta, e-pathshala and many more. Already these online learning in various developed and developing countries of the world is insuring education by various online platform such as *Internet Public Library(IPL)*,*Technology Instructions Enhance Learning (TEL)*, *Computer Based Learning (CBT)*, *Web Based Learning (WBL)*, *Mobile Learning (M- Learning )*,*ModularObject Oriented Dynamic Learning (MOODLE)*and many more.

In the recent years we have exponential growth of internet-based learning. The transition to online technologies in education provides the opportunities to use new learning methodology and more effective method of teaching.

The current scenario of education has added to its significance and importance in daily learning process, which we can see clearly in the current education system of India. At present all universities and colleges are being asked to make reading material online so that people can continue their education even during the time of any challenging condition. Therefore, it's clear that it is developing a new culture of learning. It had its beginning as a supportive option for learning but it will may be emphasizing the imperative of online education and it would become mandatory which will be for everyone. Whether it is rural or urban, rich or poor. As we all know that opportunities and challenges are moving together, there are some challenges in these online learning as well mainly on infrastructural and technical skills. But we will also find solutions to these challenges over time and overcome all obstacles in the path of online education through digital learning and create a hybrid culture of education that includes both online and offline learning

This new model of online learning has three components instruction, self-study and collaboration. Where instruction is based on teaching staff, self-study is related to student and collaboration is about the group activity related to learning. In the era of LPG (liberalization, privatization, globalization) all traditional social system have received a new dimension of

change. All social system and methods began to transform. Whether it is educational sector, economic or social. Outlines of changes can be seen in all areas at their levels. In this era the form of education is also becoming digital and as a result of this our education system today is moving towards virtual learning with the help of internet and information technology. The spread of digital education is trying to cover all the areas within its scope whether it is urban or rural rich or poor. Through the online learning participation of students in the educational field will increase and they will get the opportunity for quality education at a low cost. So that the access of education will be very easy for all students. This will promote flexible learning. But the importance of online learning cannot be considered very beneficial at the level of primary education because children have a tendency of group learning and it is necessary but also in higher education where the person is so capable that they can do self-study better. If you have the ability to do self-assessment, then online learning can be considered effective in higher education. Therefore, we are seeing the current trends of education becoming online and virtual which will be an important contributor to the establishment of a quality education system. The main objective of virtual university is to make education accessible and liberal. It also insists on providing equal and quality education to such a section of the population, people who cannot afford the campus physically which can be the reasons for many like college being far away, financial problems and social taboos. The national educational policy of 1986 emphasized distance learning to increase the spread and importance of higher education, and the concept of the virtual university is the digital form of the same. Learning is a continuous process so gradually people will learn digital method along with traditional method of education and will take education in liberal environment. Development of higher education is a strong pillar for socio economic development and social change. Because when a person reaches higher education only then he can contribute to the country's economy and social development through research and innovation. For a country with a large population like India it is a better medium to provide equal and quality education to people on a large number at a low cost.

### 3. Virtual Learning institution in India

1. **Tamil Virtual Academy-** This University which was established on 17 Feb, 2001 which educate the needy through online learning. T.U.V. (Tamil virtual university) offers educational courses in three parts basic intermediate and advance also simultaneously offers BA and MA related courses in local language. T.V.U. features digital library which is rich in the various literature and educational content including books related to the history of Tamil.
2. **BITS Virtual University (Birla Institute of Technology and Science)** -This University runs science and technology courses online and through this it also expands its campus.
3. **Bhoj Virtual University-** This university also conduct its courses in both offline and online. **National virtual institution for peace** –this institution is a unit of national council for skill development and professional education mission registered with NITI AAYOG

government of India. This is the pioneer virtual university to leverage the use of ICT in importing the best possible education all over the country including the remote areas as well as across the world.

### 4. Challenges

Creating a virtual university is not a simple transformation process as it is very challenging to accept changes in traditional learning method and that is happening because of our traditional learning process, our mind set and also many social constraints. We also need a cultural shift in building a virtual university. When people start accepting virtual culture easily and develop technical friendly tendencies, then we can speed up the process of building a virtual university and this process will first convert from traditional medium to hybrid medium and then reach to virtual university. One thing is notable here that Online learning requires strong self-discipline and self-motivation.

1. **Economic challenges** –not enough fund is provided to develop a virtual university and the main reason for this is the tendencies of the people towards virtual university are not so smooth and people are always looking it as a risk factor.
2. **Lack of knowledge and awareness-** there is a lack of information and awareness towards virtual universities, due to which people do not understand its importance and are not able to accept it as a quality and permanent option of learning.
3. **Inadequate infrastructure-** This is a major hurdle in the path of virtual universities, inadequate setup of both software and hardware and lack of proper staff support and gadget and network issue.
4. **Weak mechanism of evaluation-** The lack of a good method of evaluation in online learning puts its credibility at risk. This is also a big challenge for virtual university

### 5. Some important point needs to be noted in order to virtual university-

The most important point access under it online learning has the ability to accommodate a lot of students at one time. Software companies such as real education.com have been created for development of electronic curricular. Such software companies ensure the Access of student in e- learning. It is consisting two points the first is access to resources and second is access to skilled teachers. But in the process of online learning, the issue of network and data definitely affects the learning process because sometimes it happens that students are able to read more easily in offline classrooms as compared to online because network are often weak in online learning. As an alternative to this problem providing learning material in distance learning through CD ROM can provide some solution. But this too cannot be considered a very good option as it lacks updated material and it is not interactive as well. So, need to move towards a better bandwidth connectivity for access in online learning. The second point is curriculum development there are many challenges in developing an online learning curriculum like how to make it interactive and will it be like offline learning or better. So, without developing a concrete curriculum that would make online learning more quality, creating a virtual university would be a challenging

step. The third important point is that of content development, under which expert advice and faculty support is also very important. Then can a virtual university incorporate real campus interaction. Next point is related to accreditation this is also an important issue for virtual university. There are still serious challenges with a vague structure for who will build the curriculum and what will be the standards for this and how will finance be managed. The others point is assessment, marketing, mentoring, pricing etc. curriculum and courses in online learning require a better mentor who can do justice to scientific courses and practical subjects. Because in online learning students cannot be given a degree in such a way without checking his/her qualification. The degree should be provided to the students best of their ability. Another important factor related to virtual universities is that online courses cast should be at a reasonable price, because if the prices of the courses are very expensive, then students will choose the most reasonable and the cheapest online courses instead of quality, which proves to be a great threat to the quality of education.

### 6. Online Learning and Global Scenario-

In various developed countries, we can see that they are becoming more and more empowered in the field of virtual education and strengthening their education system. Massachusetts University has made the syllabus of the university online with the help of open courseware (OCW) so that it can reach the rural and poor people there. Similarly, the world grand university model, universal design for learning (UDL), model object oriented dynamic learning environment (MOODLE), technology enhance learning (TEL), digital library and various mediums of M learning are ensuring reach of everyone to higher education and making distance learning even more relevance. As we all know that online learning presents an innovative form of education which contributes to the quality of teaching and learning in higher education. In present scenario America, India, china and south Korea are

progressive in the direction of e learning and they are trying to do better.

### What is Real Online learning?

Nowadays, we see that in the name of online learning, we start to provide the material of traditional classes through online. But this is not online learning because this online material is not student oriented and the student does not learn better. Therefore, the material of virtual classes should be designed to be student oriented very effectively, so that student can learn well even without teacher. Teacher's alternative cannot be technology but it can definitely be helpful. In India, content quality is not being given special attention in the context of online learning and virtual university. So, we are still far behind in our online learning objective. Another factor affecting online learning is that due to India's diversity, not all education institute are ready for online learning. Rural urban rich poor and marginalized people also a part of this diversity, online learning become more challenging for this vulnerable section. Therefore, some special provision should be made for them, such as providing them data at cheap prices, creating specific learning center in their area and providing learning platform in local language. There are various types of online learning of which the main ones are **asynchronous** online learning (not in real time by recorded video audio), **synchronous** online learning (in real time with instructor) and **hybrid learning** (both online and offline learning).

### 7. Conclusion

Through e- learning, we are moving towards virtual universities which are contribute to enriching traditional learning and trying to ensure equality of learning opportunities. We can see this as a helpful medium of education and as a extend form of education but it cannot be said that it replaces the traditional medium of education.

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