THE DYNAMICS OF ONLINE LEARNING

Dr. Chitra Krishnan[1], Capt. Dr.V. Parimala Venu[2]

[1]Assistant Professor of English, Department of English, GITAM School of Gandhian Studies, GITAM (Deemed to be university), Visakhapatnam.
Email:ckrishna@gitam.edu

[2]Associate Professor of English, Department of English, GITAM School of Gandhian Studies, GITAM (Deemed to be university), Visakhapatnam.
Email:pvallams@gitam.edu

ABSTRACT

Traditional brick-and-mortar learning is rapidly adapting itself to the changing scenario in new ways. Although face-to-face learning has been the standard mode for centuries, online learning is quickly becoming popular. With the growing demand for flexible learning options, colleges, universities, and other knowledge providers are offering courses that can be accessed anytime, anywhere. Online learning has been given stimulus with the rapid advancement of technology which is equipping students with various choices. Users of this mode of learning study at a pace that is comfortable to them, and have access to diverse resources. Online learning offers both synchronous and asynchronous learning. While synchronous learning refers to education in a real-time setting, asynchronous learning occurs through online channels. Blended learning is an alternative option and uses both synchronous and asynchronous learning. Technology has helped to recreate the feeling and experience of a physical classroom, and works to assist the learning process in many ways. However, online learning can pose some problems such as lack of access to fast internet connections, technical glitches and connectivity issues. Though traditional education remains the preferred choice of instruction, the dynamics of the changing situation in today's world deem it necessary to offer infinite options for learners worldwide.

The veracity of the statement that change is the only constant has been proven true over time, and particularly in the current scenario. Traditional brick-and-mortar learning is rapidly adapting itself to the changing times in multiple, innovative ways. Traditional classroom education is without a shadow of doubt, the most befitting method for schooling children, teenagers, young adults, and sometimes even older adults who may have decided to continue their education. Thus, diversity is the hallmark of online students. It is said that an in-person classroom goes a long way in developing cognitive and social skills, and discipline, besides improving fitness and mental attentiveness. Classroom notes also aid with the in-depth study of varied subjects, and dispel fears regarding exams. Even as all these factors have helped to make the traditional classroom the most popular form of learning over the years, online education is fast gaining ground.

The concept of distance learning first appeared on the horizon in the guise of correspondence programs that were immensely popular with people who could not attend an educational institution in person. Over time, and with the advent of technology and Internet, learning methods have evolved in countless ways to disseminate knowledge. Thus, the definition of online learning encompasses the attainment of knowledge via technology that is enabled by the internet. The expression 'online learning' is often interchangeable with the term e-learning, and is an umbrella term for instruction that occurs over spaces without the restrictions of a traditional brick and mortar classroom that requires the learners to be physically present. With the growing demand for flexible learning options, colleges, universities, and other knowledge providers are in the race to offer courses that can be comfortably accessed by learners at any time, and from anywhere in the world. The syllabus of online courses is streamlined into smaller, more versatile portions called micro-learning. Most online courses do not mandate stringent admission requirements which makes them much sought after. While learning in physical classrooms continues to remain the prevalent system of education, the new dynamics of virtual learning is here to stay as the order of the day, especially in the current situation prevalent around the world. Though there are differences in the two modes, these disparities converge together with ingenious technologies that are dawning on the scene every day. Online learning has been given impetus by the rapid growth of technology, and is now a part of the basket of offerings of many institutions around the world. Online learning has provided alternatives to many people from different walks of life to advance their education and careers while simultaneously balancing home and work. In the wake of the pandemic, learning institutions have pushed frontiers to take the online classroom to the next level. In traditional learning, the teacher or the facilitator controls the flow of knowledge, executes written or oral exercises, and tests various theories taught in the classroom. However, given the changing face of the knowledge centre, attending classes today is no longer restrained to a single-option but puts forth a diversity of flexible schedules. Online classes are tailor-made and come to the rescue of employees who wish to take courses to get promotions or higher-paid jobs. It gives them the convenience of doing courses at a time suitable to them either from their workplace or from their homes, and save money and effort.

E-learning is often self-paced which means that the learners can finish the requisite coursework as per their convenience but meet the deadlines set for submission. While this offers tremendous flexibility, there is a certain amount of discipline ingrained into it. The result is an increased engagement with the knowledge being disseminated. The type and nature of online courses too are varied and tailor-made keeping in mind the learner's personal interests and professional requirements, accessibility to the internet in order to avail the programs, and affordability. The programs range from graduate courses to post-graduate programs, short courses, certificate programs, Doctoral programs and more. This variability is unique for it takes the students' needs into account by way of both time and syllabus. This mode of learning requires students to login to a learning management system, or LMS which is a software that provides a virtual platform to enable the effective delivery of educational content. This platform helps them gain admission to the curriculum, resources, course material, grades, and feedback from peers and teachers. The students are also able to be in touch with the course instructor and learner support services for any help or clarification they may seek. However, online learning is no longer considered an easy option since its requirements are far more rigorous and learners have to work hard to keep distractions at a minimal level and push themselves to meet deadlines for submission so as to keep up with their peers. Since students possess learning differences, this issue can be addressed with the use of online resources that provide information on various topics of study, and eBooks. Such online resources are also helpful to students who find it challenging to be in tandem with the teacher's instruction and cannot comprehend immediately at the time of instruction. This gives them more control over their lessons as they can learn at a speed comfortable to their understanding. In a traditional classroom, given the paucity of time, it is difficult for a teacher to give extra attention or customize teaching for an individual student. Individual differences do not permit a linear learning pattern. Online learning allows learners to revisit their lessons repeatedly. It helps them to re-read the chapter content, listen to audio recordings, watch the video replay of the class, or even check external links to get additional clarification or information. This contrasts with the setting of a traditional classroom where students are passive learners and restrained by a time frame. Online education helps students become active learners since they are better equipped with several choices to study in a manner that is not only

comfortable but furthers their understanding and knowledge. Most online courses too follow a time-bound format. Students need to read the relevant course material, participate in discussion forums after logging in, and complete allotted assignments due within a stipulated time. However, some students may find it challenging to stay inspired since online learning entails studying from their homes, and this might necessitate more self-motivation than in a traditional classroom setting where teachers and peer pressure nudges them to finish their assignments.

Further, online learning helps to hone time management skills in learners because although they have the flexibility to learn according to their convenience, they cannot afford to fall behind the class. Flexibility, however, provides a customized learning experience since online learning is not a universal approach but one that incorporates a tailored experience which is the need of the hour today. This allows students to take in smaller doses of information for better assimilation, for, "the need of today is for content to be delivered in bite-size pieces to stay in step with the mobile age." (Timothy) It puts them at ease and is convenient for them. The high level of personalization leads to improved results for they have access to diverse materials such as videos, eBooks, discussion forums, and online tests that can be availed of at any given time, and from any part of the world, and this helps to improve lesson assimilation. Any learner is assumed to have a certain degree of knowledge. However, in the event of the learner not being either well-versed with this knowledge or unable to further their education, online learning is a boon for it offers learners an opportunity to study through synchronous and asynchronous learning. While synchronous learning refers to online education that is offered as a real-time event, asynchronous learning occurs through online channels with no real-time interaction, making online learning extremely dynamic.

Synchronous e-learning refers to a learning situation wherein the learner and the teacher collaborate simultaneously. This ability to participate in real-time learning and joint interaction with fellow students and teachers lend it the term synchronous. Learners and facilitators meet on a specific virtual platform at a particular time, and it is a concerted event that also makes provision for instant feedback. Synchronous classes mimic a traditional classroom in which the teacher and the learners adhere to a specific schedule till the end of the course. This not only promotes team work but also hones presentation skills in learners and boosts their confidence. The learners feel more participative and there is no isolation since they are in touch with their classmates and teacher. Several online classes use software that facilitates video conferencing, allows attendees to be grouped into breakout rooms or assigned spaces where they can discuss and participate in team activities virtually. Educational platforms such as MOOCS (Massive Open Online Courses) do not need a teacher to mediate, and do not have any limitation to the number of participants who wish to take a course. Synchronous learning offers classroom engagement with the same benefits and level of knowledge that is obtained from a traditional classroom without paying for the costs incurred in a brick-and-mortar environment. Learners can conveniently switch from synchronous to asynchronous learning to complete their courses via the internet, and also be able to easily access course materials and resources. However, fast internet connections are needed for online meetings causing inconvenience to learners who may not own a computer or find it difficult to access the Internet. Also, technical glitches and connectivity issues can affect the quality of the meeting. This is where asynchronous learning steps in to offer a solution to counter these problems.

In asynchronous learning the learners and teacher do not engage in any real time learning process. This type of learning includes pre-recorded video lessons or webinars that teach key concepts which can be repeatedly viewed by learners so as to learn these concepts well. However, the learners must meet the deadlines set for the submission of assignments. Asynchronous learning is student-centred and makes use of online learning platforms and tools outside the realm of the traditional in-person classroom. The asynchronous form focusses more on the program details such as the curriculum, methodology and the medium of content delivery. It operates on the underlying premise that learning can happen across different periods of time, thus creating fluid spaces that are convenient to learners. This contrasts with synchronous learning where the learners and their instructors need to be present at the same time and place. In asynchronous learning, a learning course is set by teachers and students to navigate this path as per their suitability. However, feedback and clarification for queries are not instantly available in the asynchronous medium. This lack of interaction could result in lower

levels of motivation and engagement in the learners. Since asynchronous learning is a solo journey, it needs self-discipline and focus in order to complete the necessary course work. Blended learning is an alternative option that explores both synchronous and asynchronous learning. The blended learning curriculum combines in-person and online learning, and crafts a cohesive learning environment where the learners enjoy the freedom of both channels. Since students have unique learning styles, a blended approach is likely to be more conducive to tackle this than the traditional classroom teaching experience. Nevertheless, whatever be the form of eLearning, it is ultimately technology that bridges the geographical divide between learners and teachers, and empowers participants to become self-learners.

The usage of the right tools helps to recreate the experience of a physical classroom. There are myriad technologies that assist in the learning process with the use of video conferencing that includes features such as digital whiteboard, screen-sharing, polling, playing videos, chat box, among others. PowerPoint Presentations enrich the learning process with the use of images, audio, and video aids, and these in turn generate a greater visual impact and understanding. Learning Management System (LMS) is a software that delivers personalized courses to students. Artificial Intelligence is making technology more ubiquitous and proactive, thereby helping learners to be successful in their online mission. As technology evolves, more significant offerings are being added to the pipeline, and a teacher not only teaches and assesses but also dons the hat of a mentor. Thus, E-learning finds a conduit through numerous channels in the form of text, numerical data, images, audio, and streaming videos.

Despite the giant strides that technology is taking, traditional education continues to reign supreme and remains the preferred choice of the medium of instruction since physical interaction with the teacher not only motivates students to learn but also helps in the development of various life skills. In a physical classroom, the teacher moves around freely to individualize the teaching-learning experience as students have different aptitudes and bring them together for various activities. A physical classroom is an energizing and dynamic platform that is difficult to replicate in a virtual classroom. Remote learning could be fraught with myriad problems such as unfamiliarity with technology, lack of access, unstable internet connections, incompetence at typing out responses quickly, time lags, and technical malfunctions. However, given the dynamics of the changing scenario in today's world, it offers endless and seamless options for learners worldwide. It provides for a unique learning experience. Online education streamlines critical aspects of teaching, and integrates many formats to improve the quality of courses on offer. Indisputably, online resources provide access to resources and information in different portals which can all be accessed from a single device, and this inimitable feature is another reason why this method of learning is fast gaining monopoly over other modes. Thus, it is apparent that all these reasons have unified to contribute to the rise of online learning. Online learning is here to stay, and will provide world-class instruction to learners anywhere in the world at any time of the day or night as long as they have access to the internet. It continues to be a work-in-progress, one that continues to challenge the new frontiers of learning, and keeps incorporating new tools to elevate the learning experience.

REFERENCES

[1]. .Dani, Vishal. "Is Online Education Better than Traditional Education?" 30 January, 2019,kitaboo.com/is-online-education-better-than-traditional-education/#:~:text=In%20a%20traditional%20teaching%20model,peer-to-peer%20collaboration.

[2]. Bates, A. *Technology, E-Learning and Distance Education*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge. 2005.

[3]. Bartley, S. J., & Golek, J. H. "Evaluating the Cost Effectiveness of Online and Face-to-Face Instruction." *Educational Technology & Society*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2004, pp167–175.

[4]. H Li, J. Masters, "ELearning and knowledge management in the early years: Where are we and where should we go", *Knowledge Management and eLearning: An International Journal*, vol. 1, no.4, 2009, pp. 245-250.

[5]. Timothy, Anand. "Personalized eLearning: The Personalization Wave In Online Learning." March 2, 2016, https://elearningindustry.com/personalized-elearning-personalization-wave-online-learning

[6]. http://www.indiatoday.intoday.in/education/story/digital-learning-taking...india/1/774514.html

[7]. Benson, A. (2002). Using Online Learning to meet Workforce Demand: A Case Study of Stakeholder Influence. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 443–452.