

Physical versus Virtual Learning

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Abstract: *In this world of rapid technological advancement, our lifestyles also has changed a lot and life is getting more comfortable with new technological advancements. These facilities and advancements also have created new ways and means of learning through online platforms. In these few years, a lot of educational institutions including schools and colleges have been conducting online classes in a virtual platform. With the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 December and its rapid spread forced the world to opt for an online dependence for anything and everything. The educational sector also adapted online facility as means to facilitate teaching-learning and most of the educational institutions including local schools introduced this virtual platform to overcome the shortcoming caused by lockdown across the globe due to the threat caused by Covid -19 pandemic and global health crisis. Thus online learning became very popular and is helping all the educational institution to cope with the demands of the educational field to ensure that the learners should receive quality education as they received through their traditional physical classroom. Learning in physical space where the teacher and students together engaged in a face to face mode is familiar to humankind from time immemorial. This article, discusses and compares Physical classroom with the virtual classroom and their learning experiences.*

Key Words: *Physical classroom, Virtual Classroom, Online learning, Education, Internet.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Technology is the result of human need and innovation. In this world of rapid technological advancement, our lifestyles also has changed a lot and life is getting more comfortable with new technological advancements. These facilities and advancements also have created new ways and means of learning through online platforms. In these few years, a lot of educational institutions including schools and colleges have been conducting online classes in a virtual platform. So, what is meant by online learning? Online learning is the learning that takes place with the help of internet and is also often referred as e-learning. However, online learning is one among the various types of 'distance learning' - an umbrella term for any learning that happens through correspondence either through printed materials or through virtual platforms. This goes beyond the geographical boundaries. Teaching-learning process away from physical classroom has a long history and is available through different means such as e-learning, computer assisted learning, through the use of different online applications etc.

1.1. The objective:

The objective of the present study is to understand and evaluate advantages and disadvantages of both physical and virtual classroom and to acknowledge the need and significance of online learning during this lockdown.

2. METHODOLOGY:

Extensive study of literature available both in printed and online media are made to make comparison of both physical and virtual mode of learning.

2.1. The Present Scenario:

With the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in December 2019 and its immediate rapid spread forced the world to opt for an online dependence for anything and everything. UNICEF reported that millions of children across the globe are at high risk of harm as their lives are centered on digital world during lockdown in the COVID-19 and they are exposed to potentially harmful and violent contents and at greater risk of cyberbullying. Educational sector has adapted online facility as a means to facilitate teaching-learning and all educational institution including schools introduced this virtual platform to overcome the shortcoming caused by lockdown across the globe due to Covid -19 pandemic and global health crisis. Thus online learning became very popular and is helping all the educational institution to cope with the demands of the field to ensure that the learners receive quality education as they used to receive through their traditional physical classroom. The Covid-19 pandemic and health emergency resulted in a global crisis in connection to the extensive lockdown across the globe. Schools were shut down and children are out of the classroom and school premises. Education has changed drastically and all who engaged in the educational field made a shift into online teaching-learning in a virtual space. In this context of a 'global paradigm shift' many are wondering whether this mode

of teaching-learning will continue to exist in the education field even after the pandemic period and if so, what would be its impact.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Lee and Tsai (2011) conducted a study with an aim to investigate student's perceptions of three aspects of learning namely collaboration, self-regulated learning and information seeking in both traditional and online learning. The findings in terms of student's education level, graduate students perceive higher levels of capability and interest in some of the aspects.

A study by Marzie, Kathryn and Edward (2010) explained student's perspectives, online courses have many advantages and benefits, they are flexibility, use of time in better ways, and are fitting in their life style. Participants of the study opined that the quality of inline programmes is as good as traditional one and they also pointed out the need to incorporate both online and traditional one as a mixed programme.

Lin and Zane (2005) conducted a study and the findings indicated that social interaction is strongly correlated to learning enjoyment, effectiveness and the likelihood of choosing another course in online mode. So it is necessary to improve social interaction in online courses so that the learning would become more enjoyable, effective and one would want to choose another course in the same mode.

John and Maltby (2004) made a study to examine and compare student perceptions and performance in both traditional and online delivery. Findings of the study indicated that a majority of students preferred traditional classroom and they believed that such lectures as having better educational values; 70 % of high achievers, even though they perform well, and 56% of all students have the opinion that the least advantageous aspect of online learning was the ability to assimilate difficult concepts.

3. THEORETICAL DISCUSSION:

Learning in physical space where the teacher and students together engaged in a face to face mode is familiar to humankind from time immemorial. In physical classroom students have a healthy learning experience with their friends and they enjoy the warmth of friendship and fellowship. In physical classroom teachers and students do have face to face interaction. The teachers are able to understand the learning needs of the students and can encourage and motivate them. Interactions of a teacher with a particular student are 'one-to-one, which enable them to establish an 'I-thou relationship', which is very effective. This personal rapport is impossible in the virtual realm. Through classroom interactions students learn to become more disciplined and they learn to respect others especially the teachers. As school being a miniature society, students come to know various public etiquettes which are helpful for a community living. Also they become aware of the tradition, manners and ethics which are accepted by the other members of the society. School is a place where the students feel free to express themselves as they are, with all their strength and weaknesses. In the midst of friends and peers they develop their identity and they mould their life principles which are expressed and approved in the company of their peers. It is a place to try out behaviours freely without any block or hesitation and thus it is a space for behaviour modification. More over school is an apt place to learn values for a healthy and harmonious living. Even from the early childhood onwards students are exposed to a plethora of values which are very much needed for a person throughout his/ her life for a better community living. Some of the important ones are, give and take of respect, sharing, caring, truth, honesty, trust, love, compassion, empathy, kindness, team spirit, co-operations, and the list is endless. The values and models teachers showcase through their day to day dealing make an impact among the learners to mould their character, which are not possible to impart through an online platform. Learning not only from teachers but also from friends and surroundings happens in the physical set up of education. Thus schools have a pivotal role in the character building of the students. The school is a place where all students create their sweet memories which have a life time impact on an individual. Effective teachers can easily identify where the students are weak, who all need help and support and they provide it through intervention at the right time. In physical setting children are exposed to various traditions, cultures, festivals, languages and so on.

Online learning provides increased opportunity to a single person with the help of the device which he/ she uses and access to vistas of information available in the internet with the help of the technology. The learners also will learn to use the technology available and accessible with them. Online learning strategies have broken constrains of the learner regarding the geographic boundary. The proliferation available through internet based learning made it popular. People of all ages, all living conditions can have access according to their need and interest and online learning can be personalized according to the interest of the learners. In this age of lockdown online learning provides a virtual space to the learners to satisfy their learning needs. In the absence of physical classroom online learning is a big solace and ray of hope for future. Online learning thus take over the needs of the academic world to some extent. Let us think about the role and significance of online learning in our present day lockdown context.

Travel time before and after school which had been wasted, especially in the traffic jam, were cut down and can be utilized fruitfully for various causes. Teachers are given the freedom and flexibility to organize and manage their classes and are able to control and manage class without much distractions. Because of all these, they are able to

complete their syllabus in a faster pace in virtual classroom than the physical one. The power point presentations and visuals provided in the online classes make the students more interested in the subject which enable the learners to think what they are learning in a new way. There can be facility to recap on what was taught in the class and to revisit presentations and visuals after class hours, thus, students can regain what they missed out in the class session. During this hard time of pandemic online is the best option to continue learning by keeping physical distancing is a needed measure to prevent transmission of the virus.

Flexibility and convenience are the two attractive features of online learning. A person can access these courses in a 24X 7 basis. Online learning can be done at any time, at any place and at any age as long as you have internet connectivity and the corresponding device to get the access. The facility to acquire new skills and knowledge whenever and wherever as individual wishes to get gives great opportunities for learning than ever before. Even if you are residing in a remote place you can access and learn the virtual platform. If you are person having a very busy schedule, you also can learn in odd hours according to you convenience, when others are not awake. Even if you are in an old age and want to study something you can do it. Online learning is possible if you have a need and interest in learning. It allows you to learn at your pace that is, if you want to complete the course with less time or in a long span. To succeed in an online course in a virtual space you need to have some self-discipline. You don't have anybody in teacher's role to remind you, motivate you and support you. You have to login and do your work, being lazy, undisciplined and uninterested will cause quickly fall behind. By taking online courses, you gradually become responsible of your learning and become stronger in self-discipline, which often translates into other fields of your life and can influence you throughout your life to become self-disciplined person. Like physical classroom in virtual space there are provisions of discussion fora and is less intimidating. That is, even those students who are not comfortable in public speaking can share thoughts with others without hesitation or shy. Even though online learning might help the students to enhance learning during this pandemic and lockdown period, it also has certain flaws which cannot be ignored. Online learning cannot provide students the luxury of enjoying the campus and its beauty and not having the privilege to spend time with their friends not only in the classroom but also in the playground and cafeteria. Students are not able to enjoy the outdoor sports, games and other extracurricular activities which they are always longing for. Sitting in front of the screen, alone throughout the class, sometimes cause boredom in the learner. Technological flaws, poor internet connectivity, power failure etc. often disrupt the learning session which teacher cannot be controlled. Distracted and passive learners cannot be identified in the virtual space.

4. ONLINE LEARNING DURING LOCKDOWN

Education is one of the most affected areas during lockdown. The crisis demanded to shut educational institutions and as result children are forced to stay at home. As the lockdown extended from days to weeks and weeks to months, the situation compelled educational sector to find alternatives and many institutions have come up with the idea of virtual classrooms by using various programmes such as Zoom, Google meet, MS Team, YouTube and so on for students in their respective grades in order to save time. Educators, parents and students found this option as an appealing one for the time being. In response to the demand and significance, online platforms extended their services and many offered free access. When we examine the present context of health crisis online option is the best choice even though people acknowledge the uniqueness of physical school experiences. These online courses are easy to access throughout the days with minimum cost and are flexible to fit in to the lifestyle of people with physical distancing. Researches revealed that online learning is effective in terms student's retention, time saving, revisiting the lessons, skipping unwanted ones etc. Children especially those who are in lower grades need a structured physical set-up as they want physical presence and motivation from teachers. Also they would become easily distracted if they are unattended. There are some challenges while using this mode they are:

- Self-discipline of the learners matters a lot as time management and learning etc. under the sole responsibility of the learner.
- Social interaction and peer interaction are minimum through chat box and telephone calls.
- The unexpected and unplanned transition from physical to virtual mode of learning without sufficient technical skills, poor internet connectivity, bandwidth etc. resulted in poor user friendly learning experience.
- For people who don't have access to digital technology and internet facilities, this option is not worth and feasible.
- There are subjects which need practical sessions and for such courses online platform is not effective.
- The message and lessons we get from these are even in the midst of crisis and adversities; we should be able to find opportunities and alternatives for successful living. There are people who believe that the transition in this pandemic period could be a catalyst to take teaching- learning process to an online platform to create a new normal in teaching –learning.

5. Recommendations:

- Teachers and learners should get orientation to make the virtual mode more effective.

- Teachers should include provisions for more interaction
- Along with audio, more visuals should be added to get attention and effectiveness.
- Have good internet connectivity and sufficient band with
- Try to minimize technical lag
- Try to include discussion fora and group tasks
- For post Covid period a blended learning could be used for the teaching learning process.

6. CONCLUSION:

During the Covid -19 lockdown, online learning turned out as a new normal in educational sector. At the present context of virus threat and health risk, educators, teachers, parents and students found this as a choice of learning. Online learning has many benefits when compared to the traditional face-to-face mode of learning. Thus online learning is an effective mode of teaching-learning especially at this point of time. Even though some beneficial aspects are there in the online learning, we cannot ignore physical classroom and its benefits. For the Post Covid period a combination of both these two modes of learning will be more effective than overemphasizing and following any one of these.

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