

A Study of Awareness about Online Learning Courses among Rural Youths

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ABSTRACT - Information and technology tools are significantly contributing to enhance knowledge and skills. It has made learning easy and accessible. A learner can enrich his/her learning experiences by supporting physical classroom learning with online learning courses. Now a days, online learning courses are available at wider level. These are the results of the initiatives taken by government as well as private educational institutions. Online learning courses have crossed the limitations of regional boundaries. Online learning courses have provided access to globalized education through which a learner can enhance his/her knowledge and skills. The present research study examines the awareness about online learning courses among rural youths. The study found that there is an urgent need to create awareness and motivation among rural youths about the online learning courses which are available either free or with minimum charges on authentic and valid platforms and can contribute to enhance their employability skills. This will contribute to social, cultural and economic development of rural area.

Keywords: *Rural youth, online learning courses, knowledge.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning is a continuous process. Learning helps to gain knowledge, to develop skills, to acquire morals and values and contributes to the overall development of an individual, society and nation. Learning is of two types formal learning and informal learning. An individual takes formal learning when s/he receives guidance and trainings through educational institutions. It is well planned, structured, target oriented, systematic. Formal learning is conducted in an organized manner by respective teachers or trainers through face to face or online learning mode. Whereas informal learning is self-directed, unorganized, unstructured and unintended. It happens naturally. An individual learns by both ways of learning. Formal way of learning plays a vital role in the acquisition of knowledge, development of skills, inculcation of morals and values. Availability of formal education to all is important to create educated society. Hence, education to all is a prior concern of each nation. While talking about human capital development S. McGuinness [1] states, “the various transitions that young people make between school and work and the decisions they take regarding their human capital development have substantial implications for their future life prospects.”

Various efforts are continuously taken by the government, social organizations, volunteers, educational institutions to bring each individual to formal learning. Developments in information and communication technology have contributed a lot in spreading education at different corners of the world. These developments have supported physical classrooms. While describing the role of internet in rural

development T. Deb [2] writes, “With significant advancement in technology such as Internet can help realize ‘knowledge for development’.....Ability to access computers and the internet has become increasingly important to completely avail the benefits of the economic, political and social development of the world. It is increasingly becoming a disability for those people who are unable to access internet.”

A learner can learn by taking physical classes or can enroll to online learning classes. Authentic online learning platforms are available through which a learner can acquire valid certificate after successful completion of a course. Significant advancement in information and communication technology has supported to enrich learning experiences and to increase competencies of the learners. It is drastically changing learning environment in which a learner can smartly takes learning to enhances his/her employability skills. It is increasingly becoming an easy mode to enhance personal growth. M. S. Gupta [3] rightly points out importance of skill development with a comment, “...general education, skill learning-hard, soft and generic along with lifelong updating and upgrading of education and skill are central pillars of employability and essential for sustainable enterprise development.”

B. K. Mitra [4] describes the importance of online learning for the learners who are eager to develop their skills and carrier but not able to afford quality campus education. He states “This is where Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) SCORES. It has the powerful potential, for the less fortunate, to turn their silent skill, career aspirations and dreams into a reality.” Due to globalization the demand

of skilled workforce is increasing. To satisfy this demand imparting quality education is must. In this regard, G. Ramesh and M. Ramesh [5] advise, “For ‘Advantage India’ to work, and for India to be competitive in the world arena, several educators and employment consultants have suggested that we re-double our efforts in educating our college students and young professional in the virtues and basics of soft-skills.” Humburg and Velden [6] identified “six trends which are at the core of the changing role of graduates in economic life. These trends are the knowledge society, increasing uncertainty, the ICT revolution, high performance workplaces, globalization and the change of the economic structure”. This has raised the expectations of skilled workforce. Government of India works on skill development of workforce and initiated some programs e.g. National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (NMEICT) and Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM). The NMEICT Mission Document [7] clearly indicates the need of such missions to sustain a high growth rate of economy through the capacity building and knowledge empowerment of the people and for promoting new, upcoming multi-disciplinary fields of knowledge. SWAYAM [8] seeks to bridge the digital divide for students who have hitherto remained untouched by the digital revolution and have not been able to join the mainstream of the knowledge economy. According to Sun A. and Chain X. [9], “we can well anticipate that online education will continue to increase its presence and influence higher education through a vigorous process of reshaping, refining, and restructuring”.

Utilizing physical and online learning resources develops learners’ abilities and expands access to information. It may result into the overall growth of the learners. But at the same time, it may create a gap between the learners who take benefits of online learning courses to enrich their learning and the learners who are not able to take benefits of online learning courses.

Online learning courses helps in sharing global knowledge and expertise to increase the levels of efficiencies and competencies. Considering the importance of online learning courses, the present research study is conducted with a view to examine awareness of online learning courses among rural youths.

Objectives of the research study

- To study the awareness about online learning courses among rural youths.
- To examine whether rural youths have taken benefits of online learning courses.
- To find out problems of rural youths in getting benefits of online learning courses.
- To study the importance of online learning courses in the skill development of rural youths.

II. RESEARCH SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The present research studies awareness among rural youths about online learning. The role of villages in adapting new paths of learning is crucial in rural development. With this view, rural youths were selected as the target respondents for the study. Youths perform major role in nation’s development. Educated and skilled workforce can give good performances which in turn can result into wellbeing of the society. Considering the role of youths in development, the present study examines their active participation in online learning courses.

This research study is based on primary data collection. The primary data had been collected through survey. A questionnaire was designed for the survey. It covered the questions related to online learning courses that are made available at various platforms to enhance learning experiences. The survey was conducted in total 20 villages from Mulashi and Purandhar, Tahasils of Pune Districts of Maharashtra, India. A purposive sampling method was used for the data collection. 18 to 30 years of age group people residing in these villages responded to the questionnaire. Total 100 responses were collected from the respondents and analyzed.

III. ONLINE LEARNING COURSES

Online learning courses provide a wide range of knowledge and skills. These online courses are run by various educational institutions. These courses are either paid or freely available. A learner can join the course as per his/her area of interest and need. S/he can successfully enroll to the course after fulfilling its eligibility criteria. These online courses are supportive to increase the knowledge and skills acquired through physical classes. Online learning courses provided by authentic institutions supply proper study material, assess the learners, issue course completion certificate and handle learners’ queries systematically. Online learning courses offered by national as well as international educational institutions are easily available.

The present study is an attempt to study the awareness among rural youth about the initiatives taken by government of India under National Mission of Education through Information Communication and Technology (NME-ICT) as well as online learning courses available on other platforms. The study also examines their knowledge about e-Pathshala, e-PG Pathshala and other online learning sources.

A. Initiatives taken by government of India under National Mission of Education through Information and Technology examined in the study are as follows:

i. National Program on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL)

Seven Indian Institutes of Technology (Bombay, Delhi, Kanpur, Kharagpur, Madras, Guwahati and Roorkee) along with the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore initiated this program in 2003. In this Phase-I, online courses covered five core disciplines of engineering, namely, civil engineering, computer science and engineering, electrical engineering, electronics and communication engineering and mechanical engineering and developed 235 courses in web/video format. In Phase-II (2009-14), an additional 600 web and video courses were developed in all major branches of engineering, physical sciences at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and management courses at the postgraduate level. The students can enroll to these courses as per their requirement and fulfillment of eligibility criteria for the selected course.

ii. Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM)

This is a program, launched by Human Resource Development Ministry (MHRD), government of India in 2017 under Digital India. It works on providing access, equity and quality of education to all. It covers the courses taught from class 9th to postgraduation. These courses are available free of cost to any learner. It provides video lectures, reading material, self-assessment tests and online discussion forum for clearing doubts.

iii. e-Pathshala:

It is an initiative jointly taken by the MHRD, Central Institute of Education Technology (CIET), New Delhi and The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). This was launched in November 2015. It provides learning material for class 1 to 12 in various forms such as textbooks, audio-visual resources, periodicals, supplements etc. which can be accessed by students, teachers, parents or any user.

iv. e-PG Pathshala

It is an initiative taken by MHRD under NME-ICT which is executed by University Grant Commission (UGC). It provides e-content of various subjects covering all disciplines of social sciences, arts, fine arts and humanities, natural and mathematical sciences etc.

B Importance of online learning courses

- The emerging digital revolution has extended access to globalized knowledge.
- Online learning courses cover wide range of knowledge streams.
- These courses are user friendly.
- They are supportive to physical courses.
- They contribute to increase the learners' level of competencies and efficiencies.

- A learner can access study material from anywhere and anytime and can complete the course in given period.
- A learner can avail experts' guidance.
- A learner can register to online course of his/her choice by fulfilling its eligibility criteria.
- These courses help to reach education to all and to bring them into knowledge economy.
- These courses contribute to increase learners' confidence and morals.
- Easy access to knowledge helps to develop knowledgeable society which can contribute to nation's development.

IV. FINDINGS

The findings of the research are as follows:

1. 3% respondents have detailed information; 4% respondents have little information where as 93% respondents have no information of NPTEL and SWAYAM.
2. 2% respondents have detailed information, 17% respondents have little information whereas 81% respondents have no information of e-Pathshala.
3. 2% respondents have detailed information; 9% respondents have little information whereas 89% respondents have no information of e-PG Pathshala.
4. 1% respondent has detailed information; 7% respondents have little information whereas 92% respondents have no information of any other online learning resources.
5. 3% respondents have completed course from NPTEL whereas 97% respondents have not taken any course from NPTEL.
6. 2% respondents have completed course from SWAYAM whereas 98% respondents have not taken any course from SWAYAM.
7. 4% respondents have completed course from other online learning resources whereas 96% respondents have not taken course from any other learning resources.
8. The analysis of responses indicates that most of the respondents are far away from online learning courses due to the following reasons:
 - Lack of guidance about how to access online learning.
 - Lack of interest and motivation to use various learning platforms for personal development in the forms of knowledge and skill.
 - Lack of general awareness about the benefits of online learning courses.
 - Lack of computer skills in accessing online learning courses.

- Lack of knowledge about how to register to online learning courses, how to access study material, how to attempt assessment tests etc.
- Lack of infrastructural facilities such as smart phone, laptop, computer, internet connectivity etc.
- Fear of English is one of the major obstacles in accessing online learning courses as most of these courses are developed in English language.
- Poverty, lack of confidence, absence of instructional support etc.

These are major hindrances in joining online learning courses.

V. SUGGESTIONS

1. There is a need to create awareness about National Mission of Learning through Information and Communication Technology Program initiated by government of India.
2. Counselling sessions should be organized in the villages to motivate rural youths to join online learning courses.
3. Training and guidance sessions should be organized to inform the process of online learning courses.
4. Various means of communication should be used to spread awareness about availability of online learning courses either free or with minimum certification charges at various authentic platforms.
5. Focus should be given on developing the competency levels of English language to remove fear of English.
6. Emphasis should be given on developing literacy of information and technology tools.
7. Digital library should be made available in the villages to increase access to digital learning resources.
8. Infrastructural facilities should be made available to rural youth to access online learning courses.
9. Efforts should be taken to solve learners' problems in availing online learning courses.
10. Community engagement should be increased to equip rural youth with essential learning skills to develop their employability skills.

VI. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the study shows that maximum rural youth are far away from the online learning courses. They have poor knowledge of online learning courses and their importance. Majority of the rural youth is passive in online learning scenario. Due to lack of guidance, interest, motivation and support, rural youths are unable to get advantage of online learning platform made available for them. Lack of infrastructural facilities, absence of computer literacy and fear of English are some of the major obstacles for rural

youth to reach at online learning courses. The study finds that there are certain difficulties in increasing number of beneficiaries of online learning courses meaningfully from rural sector. It is necessary to provide easy access to quality education to produced skilled rural youth who can contribute in the development of rural economy. Collaborative efforts taken by the government, Non-Government Organizations, business organizations, local governance and community, volunteers will contribute to bring rural youths to online learning courses. This will help in social, cultural, economic development of rural area. Rural youths' active engagement in online learning courses will give a positive new look and view to rural area.

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