



The 24/7 Classroom: Blended Learning for a New Era

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Abstract:

We are gearing up for advancement with the modern network at our disposal. Proper utilization of the technology is in our grip. Minimizing the generation and geographical gaps is our primary objective. We are a pioneer in this venture. Our limit is the sky. We can explore the knowledge of a group of knowledgeable personalities with vast experience in their respective field. They are already with us and ready to volunteer their expertise at any time in this project to educate a large mass of knowledge-hungry people in our country. We like to excavate and unmask our vast hidden knowledge base, such as the introduction of "Sriniketan" by Rabindranath Tagore and others. For this purpose, we will encourage our students to learn our classical languages, in which the treasure of knowledge remained locked in ancient books throughout India. We can foresee that Blended Learning Mode - a style of education in which students learn via electronic and online media, as well as traditional face-to-face teaching. - getting success, and we are presenting a gift of Neo-Modern Digital India to our nation. Addressing the accessibility gap in higher education across diverse regions and demographics, this study examines the extent to which open-and-distance learning (ODL) is viable for reaching students at the grassroots level and presents an overview of blended learning for the new era, outlining its challenges and prospects.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Cloud-based classroom, Digitalization, GER.



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Introduction

By harnessing the potential of blended learning through digital universities, we can bridge the educational divide and empower marginalized communities. This innovative approach can provide high-quality education, flexibility, and accessibility, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable education system. As Gokhale's visionary words continue to resonate, 'What Bengal thinks today India thinks tomorrow,' we can reimagine this to 'What India achieves today in education, the world can aspire to tomorrow, thereby transforming the nation's human capital into a global force for progress and development.

Objective of the study

To cope with the difficulties of the formal higher education system, there emerged a growing need for open distance learning. This study aims to determine the extent to which open distance learning (ODL) is effective in reaching students at the grassroots level and to provide an overview of blended learning in the new era, outlining its challenges and prospects.

Main Discussion

Literacy in India is a key to socio-economic progress, and the Indian literacy rate is 74.04% (Literacy Rate Census 2011 State-wise, Highest & Lowest, 2025). Despite government programmes, India's literacy rate increased very slowly. There is a wide gender disparity in literacy rates in India: the effective literacy rate (age 7 and above) in 2011 was 82.14% for men and 65.46% for women (Women and Men in India 2022, 2022). The low female literacy rate has a dramatically negative impact on family planning and population stabilization efforts in India (Sahu et al., 2015, pp. 50-54).

The rate varies worldwide, with developed nations having a rate of 99.2% (2013); Oceania having 71.3%; South and West Asia having 70.2% (2015), and sub-Saharan Africa at 64.0% (2015) (Adult and Youth Literacy: National, Regional and Global Trends, 1985–2015, n.d.). Over 75% of the world's 781 million illiterate adults are found in South Asia, West Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, and women represent almost two-thirds of all illiterate adults globally. The institutional framework of higher education in India comprises universities and Colleges. As reported in 2015, India has 799 universities and 38,498 colleges. There are three types of universities: Conventional Universities, Deemed Universities, and Institutions of National Importance.

Higher education in India suffers from several systemic deficiencies. As a result, it continues to produce an increasing number of unemployed and unemployable graduates, despite emerging shortages of skilled workers across an ever-growing number of sectors. The issues can be broadly categorized into structural and pedagogical challenges. Structural issues include income and gender disparities in enrollment, a predominantly urban higher education population, poor governance, insufficient funding, and the lack of accessibility for rural populations. Pedagogical problems include poor-quality faculty and teaching, a general lack of student motivation and interest, and obsolete teaching methods.

On the whole, India has an enrollment rate of 9%, which is similar to that of other lower-middle-income countries. The population enrolled in higher education is largely urban. Rural enrollment in higher education is very low. There is also a disparity in higher education enrollment by gender.

A few of the many reasons are -

1. Though regulatory agencies set fees to cover an institution's expenses and a basic surplus, many institutions have been charging fees that make the venture profitable. These mushrooming institutes are much more glamorous and less qualitative.
2. There is a massive gap between those who leave school and those who enroll in higher education, which needs to be bridged. This gap occurs due to—
 - a) A long distance to be covered to reach the higher education institute.
 - b) Expensive for many to get a car or hire one to get to the institute regularly.
 - c) Due to conservatism still prevailing in many areas and caste, religion, the girls are deprived of higher education.
 - d) Many have to earn money for family maintenance, and especially girls have to take care of younger family members after completing their education. So they cannot avail themselves of higher education at their own convenience.
 - e) It is also difficult for people with physical disabilities to attend college regularly.
 - f) Students with special needs also find it challenging to meet the requirements of higher education in the so-called inclusive setup, which remains only a theory.
3. Lacking a common platform: In India, apart from UGC (University Grants Commission), there are several regulatory bodies, such as AICTE, MCI, BCI, NCTE, and those under state governments. These individual bodies move along different paths, creating various hurdles, such as exams and teaching methods for students. So we need to bring all the important regulatory bodies onto a common platform and develop a shared understanding and strategy for managing the change.
4. Lacking sufficient faculty: A shortage of quality faculty is proving to be a significant stumbling block to the transformation of higher education in India. This has created a shortage of almost 56 percent in the higher education faculty talent pool; such a deficiency will prove a significant stumbling block (Around 56.18% of professor positions unfilled in leading Indian universities: report, 2025).
5. Lack of new teaching methods: The Indian higher education system has been using the lecture-and-board method for several years. This has turned ineffective and insufficient in many areas. Additionally, there is a lack of identified teacher learning and development needs that should be addressed through education. There are no approaches such as mentoring, spot visits, practical educational tours, or involvement in research projects with peers.
6. Development of teachers: Finally, there is no syllabus for integrating development concepts such as emotional competencies, life skills, and information-savvy skills. Educational institutions often lack the emphasis on learning outcomes rather than content teaching. Many institutions never take the initiative to collaborate with international institutions to gain exposure to digital learning methods or technologies.

7. Accountability and performance of teachers: At present, there is no mechanism to ensure the accountability and performance of professors in universities and colleges. This is unlike at foreign universities, where peers and students evaluate college faculty performance.
8. Problem with pedagogy: Pedagogy and assessment are focused on input and rote learning; students have few opportunities to develop a broader range of transversal skills, including critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem-solving, and collaborative working.
9. Infrastructure problem: Inadequate infrastructure. In India, many universities lack adequate infrastructure or facilities to teach students. Even many private universities are running courses without classrooms. Internet and Wi-Fi facilities are still out of reach for many students.
10. Lack of teacher involvement in administrative issues: Most professors and higher authorities do not participate in education-related activities. They stick to their own growth and teaching only.

To address the difficulties of the formal higher education system, there emerged a growing need for an open distance-learning mode. The primary objective of the ODL is to provide knowledge and skills to those who did not have access to learning. The basic purpose of the open universities is to provide instruction to the learners at their doorsteps through various media and technology (UNESCO, 2002)

The concept of an open learning and distance education system focuses on open access to education and training, enabling learners to be free from the constraints of time and place and offering flexible learning opportunities for individuals and groups. The advantage of technology in distance learning is that students can watch lectures before coming to class and engage in more interactive activities during class. It also allows for consistent delivery of content, as online videos can be prerecorded and shared with the rest of the class.

E-Learning can support learning processes, collaboration, flexibility, and the distribution of education and training, as well as the evaluation of content and skills in distance learning. Previously, the open universities were more often used by young matriculated students who had not gained a study place at a “proper” university. However, nowadays, students are more often adults in professional positions who want to enhance their qualifications, skills, and competencies via e-learning by enrolling in web-based courses. These adult learners may be driven by distinct motivations, such as career advancement, transitioning to new fields, or personal enrichment. Tailoring e-learning programs to these varied goals can make them more effective and engaging. It is suitable for eliminating face-to-face training and development costs, both in monetary terms and in terms of productivity loss, as learners spend time away from their daily activities and jobs to participate in face-to-face training sessions. E-Learning courses are available 24/7, location-independent, and provide practical, efficient training for learners in geographically dispersed areas and across time zones. Some students may require digital literacy to participate successfully in everyday life, which is increasingly mediated by technology. To offer relevant learning experiences in distance learning, lecturers need to develop new skills and knowledge about technologies.

Distance learning students can care for their families and incorporate instruction into online courses, which can afford them the opportunity to work while raising their families and pursuing their full-time jobs. Distance learning can also benefit students because of the flexibility it offers in

when and where they can engage in their learning. ICTs can enable distance-learning institutions to provide distance-learning platforms, enabling many students situated far from the centers of learning to educate themselves. Generally, it is believed that e-learning was designed for purposeful and disciplined students, because there is no direct contact with the lecturer, which may increase the demand for them to work independently. Distance learning in higher education can teach students skills and competencies for professional development, such as self-study, planning and organizing, time management, problem-solving, taking responsibility, working under pressure, and being creative and innovative.

However, there are a few challenges for open distance learning, such as -

1. The high cost of information and communication infrastructure, and the dearth of technical expertise, are possible challenges in distance learning.
2. Sometimes the study material or open content developed is challenging to follow, which reduces learners' enthusiasm for their studies.
3. The lack of a precise quality assurance mechanism may result in unclear standards and, consequently, poor quality in distance education.
4. In distance learning, marginalized students, such as the impaired and the economically disadvantaged, may be further excluded from educational practices when ICT is used. Some students may not be able to afford technology if it is not free or subsidized. These students are also often unable to use the ICT due to institutional failures to comply with legal and technical requirements for impaired students. To address these challenges and promote digital equity, a brief plan can be put in place. Establishing community Wi-Fi hubs in underserved areas can provide much-needed internet access.
5. Additionally, offering device subsidies or rental programs could ensure that every student has the necessary tools to participate in distance learning. By implementing these solutions, the educational system can help reduce the digital divide and ensure that all students, regardless of background, have equal opportunities to learn. There is growing concern that distance learning is compromising the quality of education, partly because one key challenge is the lack of appropriate interaction practices.
6. Language barrier is also a problem in distance education.
7. Another challenge for distance learning in higher education is how course content meets the expectations of students seeking career growth and personal and professional development through distance learning.
8. Problems caused by the lack of direct contact between the student and the lecturer.
9. Problems associated with feelings of alienation and isolation from the student community.
10. Problems associated with anxiety and concerns regarding the education process and learning results.

Why Digital University

The higher education system needs to overcome barriers such as insufficient teachers, limited student intake capacity, and high dropout rates to reach students at the grassroots level and increase

the gross enrolment ratio (GER). A large number of students are regularly deprived due to a lack of association with livelihood, and the nation is losing not only the maximum merit every year but also its human resources. A digitalized external support system for students who cannot afford the fees of private tutors, or even the cost of other educational fees. Thus, a blended learning mode is needed to provide free higher education to 30 to 40% of students from BPL backgrounds, and a concession will also be given to meritorious students based on their merit. Blended learning is the practice of integrating both online and in-person learning experiences. In contrast, an online course involves 100% online course delivery with little or no face-to-face sessions. Blended learning combines these elements, with face-to-face class sessions accompanied by online materials and activities, creating a combination of live and online learning -

- Blended learning is more efficient.
- Blended learning makes education more accessible.
- Students can pace themselves.
- Teachers can become more engaged with their students.
- This method is more fun for everyone.

Practically, we believe that NEP 2020 is a Milestone in the Indian education system, especially for students in rural areas of India and for students in underdeveloped countries.

By the end of 2020, the pandemic had devastated the global education system. It taught everybody the difference between open distance learning and the concept of Digital University, which has some unique features unlike the so-called ODL system of education, for example: direct interaction between the teacher and the taught, multimedia applications specifically for lab-based subjects, PowerPoint presentations, different visualized applications, door-step classroom catering, etc. The importance of online classes was first felt worldwide during pandemic times. Surprisingly, we found that without appropriate technological knowledge, this online teaching procedure falls on deaf ears in many cases. All this happened because most of the HEIs did not know the difference between a digitized education system and the digitalization of the education system. Effort is needed to provide a digitalized external support system for students who cannot afford the fees of private tutors, even their other educational fees.

Significant features of the Blended Mode of Learning through Cloud-Based University:

1. The broadness of the Digital University Education System allows HS pass (+2) students for entry into UG Courses (Certificate/Diploma/Degree) and any bachelor's degree(only degree holder) student for entry into Master's degree. The only criterion is their passion for the subject (s) to be taken. In addition to degrees in traditional subjects, there are opportunities to learn local knowledge through digital media. Any person interested in Indian native knowledge and skill can come into contact through the courses designed by local classical celebrities. Moreover, multiple entries at various points in their study programme are possible only at our University.

2. Every digital programme has "four quadrants" - Video Lectures, E-Content, Discussion Forum, online student-teacher interaction, and self-assessment. "Learners' engagement" is proposed to be monitored by tracking their participation in discussions and assignments.
3. The admission will be entirely online. Once admitted, the student will receive any support needed. Our lectures will be available 24/7 for students so they can attend their classes at their convenience. This conception is constructive for students engaged in livelihood. "The Classroom – which never sleeps" is our mission.

Added values

- Age will be no bar(to follow the NEP guideline for Adult Education).
 - The completion of the course is not time-bound.
 - In the actual application of the CBCS method, education will have no classification into Science, Arts, and Commerce—the degree to be given based on the core subject one studies.
 - To enhance skills, the University will take care of its students and arrange different market-oriented skill enhancement courses (free of cost).
 - Campus less 'e-campus', an effective idea to build up a healthy relationship among the University, Teachers, and Students.
1. Know our Nation: The University will design its UG and PG syllabi in a special format to make the world conversant with Ancient India's rich heritage in Science and Technology, Economics, Classical Cultural fields, Astronomy, Architecture, Metallurgy, Logic, Mathematics, Surgery, Medicine, Mineralogy, etc.
 2. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) compatibility: The objectives of Digital University are expected to help increase the GER rapidly due to its advanced technology. Only through this University can we easily reach out to dropout students and encourage them to resume their studies. We can uphold women's education, Adult Education, education for persons with disabilities, and education for the economically weaker sections of society. It is projected that these efforts could raise the GER from 27% to 35% within five years, thereby enhancing the educational landscape in alignment with the NEP (India needs 86 million higher education enrolments by 2035 to meet NEP goals, says new report, 2025).
 3. Anti-Reservation: Digital University refuses to accept any barriers in the name of imparting knowledge to one and all. Hence, no caste or class-based reservation is accepted. Nevertheless, nearly 50 percent of the seats will be reserved for the economically weaker section. It shall be considered as the 'Best Effort' of the institution.
 4. Education and Employability: No education can be completed without its application in the job market to sustain the livelihood of the incumbent. Digital University will seek assistance from the public sector to ensure the placement of each of its students.
 5. Service to the society at large: Being endowed with advanced technological applications, even after maintaining a host of most qualified teachers for a particular course to the maximum possible number of students, Digital University is committed to serve the community by

contributing the surplus amount of annual turn-over to the Welfare Fund of the government of India with some sorts of conditions for the shake our students' interest.

6. Education and Employability: No education can be completed without its application in the job market to sustain the livelihood of the incumbent. Digital University will seek assistance from the public sector to ensure the placement of each of its students.
7. The UG and PG degrees will be awarded upon completion of a defined number of credit points. The credit points will also comply with UGC requirements. A student can earn credit in their own interest and at their own pace as a game. The credit point will be saved in the Credit Bank for future utilization. There is no time limit for completing a course. Learners must earn a defined number of Credit Points to obtain a degree. A student can relax and complete the course in their own time. Credit will be earned through a fully proofed Online Examination System, built explicitly for our esteemed University by our strong technical team.
8. Heritage Enlightenment: In this University, we excavate our rich heritage knowledge alongside traditional Western knowledge. It can be said to be the merger of Eastern knowledge with Western knowledge. It will try to preserve our strong family bonding.
9. Establishing hand-to-hand relations between the Education world and the Corporate world.

Conclusion

Inspired by Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy, the University believes that a strong relationship between the University and Industries always strengthens our policies, such as employment, dynamic and realistic research, and various social development works, which, in turn, helps strengthen the University and Industries. To assure academic modernization, which requires a stress-free work culture and an open-market outlook in place of today's secretariat outlook everywhere. In this University, our vast heritage knowledge is excavated alongside traditional Western knowledge. It can be said to be the merger of Eastern and Western knowledge.

We are gearing up for advancement with the modern net-world at our disposal. Proper utilization of this technology is in our grasp. Minimizing the generation and geographical gaps is our primary objective. India can become a pioneer in this venture. The limit is sky. Digital University is needed to excavate and unmask our vast hidden knowledge base, such as the introduction of "Sriniketan" by Rabindranath Tagore and others. For this purpose, we will encourage our students to learn our classical languages, in which the treasure of knowledge remained locked in ancient books throughout India. We foresee our project as a success, and we are presenting a gift of Neo-Modern Digital India to our nation. As we conclude, we hope policymakers, educators, and industry leaders will form an association dedicated to transforming this vision into reality. Together, we can drive initiatives that strengthen both the traditional and modern educational paradigms, ensuring that Digital University becomes a cornerstone of global educational innovation. This collective approach will not only propel India forward but also serve as a model for nations worldwide.

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