

Q Online education has given more opportunities than challenges

### Outline

#### i) Introduction

Thesis statement: There remains no ambivalence that online education has opened a wide window of opportunities while also inducing some challenges. Despite having some serious challenges, the opportunities take precedence due to the broad range of benefits to people.

2) Challenges and opportunities presented by Online education.

3) Opportunities presented by Online education

a) Provides a learning opportunity for students living in remote areas.

b) Classes can be held despite unfavourable weather conditions or civil agitation in the region.

c) Conserves travelling cost and time.

d) Friendly environment for introverts

e) Less resources required compared to in person classes i.e laptop and stable internet connection



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4) Challenges posed by online education

a) Remote areas are bereft of stable internet connection

b) Underprivileged people do not possess electronic devices to take online classes i.e laptops

c) Little to no employment prospects for non-teaching staff

d) Introverts never get the chance to step out of their comfort zone and interact.

e) Many people are digitally illiterate and inept to use laptops.

5) The opportunities outweigh the challenges

a) 4G internet services are proliferating around the globe.

b) Classes can be attended through smart phones.

c) Online education also needs staff to regulate admin related work.

d) Breakout rooms available for enhanced interactive experience.

e) Online education can stimulate digital literacy.

6) Conclusion

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"The future of higher education lies with online learning. It's just that simple". [John Hennessy].

The above quoted statement of a notable American computer scientist, who also happens to be the chairman of Google parent Alphabet Inc., very aptly accentuates the significance of online learning. There remains no ambivalence that online education has opened a wide window of opportunities while also inducing some challenges. Despite having some serious challenges, the opportunities take precedence due to the broad range of benefits to people. Online education has enhanced in several ways such as providing education to people living in remote areas, conserving time and travelling cost, providing a introvert-friendly atmosphere, allowing classes to be held despite unfavourable weather conditions or civil agitations.

The critics, however, point out the negatives of online learning namely how it snatches employment from the non-teaching staff, how many areas lack stable internet connect and how expensive laptops are beyond what many can afford. It should also be noted that much of these negatives are ameliorated with as technology advances, for instance, modern smart phones have the capacity to take

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online classes and 4G internet services proliferating across the globe. And through adopting meticulous policies and making certain adjustments, the remaining challenges, underscored by the critics, can also be surmounted.

Online education is a relatively new concept that witnessed its peak during the covid-19 pandemic. With most of the world shut down, the majority of educational institutions relied on online classes in an attempt to keep the delivery of education going smoothly during these trying times. Despite being the sole means of continuing education during pandemic, it did pose a fair share of challenges for many students had a tough time getting used to this new mode of education, while many others complained unstable internet connection and not having devices equipped for online learning.

The introduction of online education was perceived to be a beacon of hope for many underprivileged students situated in remote areas to receive quality education. For such students, financial constraints often keep them



from moving to a different area in pursuit of better education. Not only does this deprive many students from acquiring education, a fundamental right as enshrined in the constitution of Pakistan, but also stymies the educational advancement of the country. A notable online education provider, LinkedIn, indicates that online education has made it feasible to access education irrespective of the geographical restraints. This reinforces the thought that online learning has made accessibility of education ubiquitous, and can go a long way in enhancing the literacy rate of the country.

Another notable benefit of online learning is that classes can be held despite unfavourable weather conditions or any sort of civil agitation. More often than not, we witness classes being cancelled due to heavy rain or civil unrest. Pakistan, in particular, is no stranger when it comes to suspending entire academic years, let alone a few classes, due to political turmoil. A noteworthy example comes to mind where the chequered history of the country witnessed suspension of subsequent academic years amidst the ouster of Bhutto, a prominent political figure, and later his execution. With



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the adaption of online education, the delivery of education can go smoothly without any disruptions.

A key advantage of online education which cannot be overlooked is that it conserves time and travelling cost. Online education empowers students to attend classes from the comfort of their home, so long as they have a compatible device and a stable internet connection. This not only saves their valuable time but also expunges the travelling cost that many underprivileged students can ~~take~~ benefit from.

Education Data Initiative indicates that online learning is cheaper compared to the traditional in-person teaching as it eliminates travelling cost and also cost for rent, food, internet if the student is living away from parents. This underscores that online education is a cheaper option, and the proliferation of this mode of education, in a country like Pakistan, contradicts the widely held notion that deemed education to be a privilege reserved for the affluent.

Online education furnishes a friendly environment particularly suited for introverts. There remains

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no ambivalence that some students, introvert in nature, find it hard to participate in traditional in person classrooms, and consequently suffer academically when their queries remain unanswered. Online education platforms, on the other hand, provide a friendly platform with an interactive ambiance ensuring that students can freely and easily ask questions. This thought is reinforced by Learning Liftoff, a prominent study guide, which indicates that online learning platforms is a great fit for introvert students. In this way, not only is online education a feasible option but, in certain scenarios, also the preferred one.

Contrary to the traditional in person classes, online learning requires only a modicum of resources, namely a laptop and a stable internet connection. This minimal resource requirement is ideal for both students and the educational provider. Additionally, this mode of education can go a long way in abridging the wide gulf in educational quality between the rich and the poor. This disparity is clearly manifested in the contrasting sights observed in government-funded schools and private institutions, with government schools lacking basic infrastructure

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like labs, boards, and private institutions equipped with the state-of-the-art facilities. So although online education cannot completely expunge social stratification in the field of education, it can reduce it to some extent.

While the introduction of online learning has brought a plethora of opportunities, it does not come without certain challenges. As aforementioned, a stable internet connection is prerequisite for online learning. Regrettably many remote areas throughout the world are bereft of this important staple. The situation in Pakistan is no different as many parts of the country struggle for a decent access to internet services. Data Reportal points out the alarmingly low internet accessibility in Pakistan amounting to only a mere 30.1 percent of total population in January 2023. Such low rates of internet users pose a major encumbrance to the sustainability of online learning.

Another challenge posed by online learning is low availability of electronic devices such as laptops, tablets to the under-

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privileged segments of the community. This scarcity implies that many would be deprived of online learning. Much like a stable internet connection, an electronic device that is compatible with online learning is essential. Unfortunately, financial constraints preclude the less fortunate fraction from buying such devices. The Gallup Data Analytic has conducted a survey to ascertain the number of population that have laptops or tablets. The survey concluded that only 7% of Pakistanis had laptops, while only 2% had tablets. Not only do these shocking stats underscore the poverty in this country, but also reinforces the notion that education remains a privilege reserved for the affluent.

While online education can somewhat increase the accessibility of education and can also prove fruitful for education providers by limiting the resources needed, it is not that kind towards the non-teaching staff. It should be noted that educational institutions need staff members for different purposes. These staff members can range from security guards who manage the security to cleaning staff responsible for maintaining the hygiene standards. A glimpse



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of this was witnessed during the covid-19 pandemic which saw many non-teaching staff members, such as cleaners, getting sacked simply because they were not needed, [Andino Andaregie, Covid-19 impact on jobs...]. The mentioned study implies that progression of online education may pave the way for an unemployment crisis.

An introvert friendly environment for students might seem alluring to many for it alleviates mental health problems among students to some degree, however, there is a significant flaw with such an approach. There is no denying that students introvert in nature, should be catered for, but to provide such students an environment that does not challenge them to come out of their comfort zone will only come back and haunt them later in life. The depart of Psychology of Walden University delineates that if an individual stays in their comfort zone for too long, they are at risk of becoming complacent. The dictum set forth by Walden University serves as an indication that students should be provided a somewhat challenging environment, a type of environment.

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that requires more than just attending the lectures behind a digital screen while tucked up in bed.

One of the most significant, if not the paramount, challenge posed by online learning is the pervasive digital illiteracy among the global populace. Many communities across the globe do not possess ~~the~~ sufficient skills or knowledge to operate laptops or technological devices of such ilk. This problem is also quite prevalent in Pakistan, as also concluded in a survey conducted in 2019, which indicated that only 39% of women in the country were capable of successfully moving and copying a digital file. This survey highlights the dearth of technological knowledge that the country owns.

The challenges pointed out by the critics might have depicted a horrific picture of online learning, but the situation seems to be ameliorating. Internet services, a staple of online learning as aforementioned, seems to be proliferating. Many remote areas that were previously bereft of internet connectivity, now have access to it. This is

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corroborated by Research Gate which concluded, after an extensive survey, that "Proliferation of Telecom and broadband industry has proven as one of the fastest industry over the last 2 decades" - [Research Gate, 2010]. With the swift advancement of internet accessibility, a major hurdle towards the growth of online education, surmounted.

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Another major encumbrance that was stressed upon is the lack of electronic devices such as tablets, laptops. This obstacle is also circumvented with the introduction of modern smart phones.

These phones are compatible with 4G/5G internet services and have the capacity to participate in online classes. Additionally, since they are easier on the pocket, smart phones are quite ubiquitous. According to Wikipedia.org, there are 72.99 million smart phone users in Pakistan. Not only does these stats greatly exceed the percentage of laptop users, a mere 7% as mentioned earlier, but also indicate that a major fraction of the country could potentially reap the benefits of online education.



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Although online learning leads to the unemployment of many non-teaching staff members such as cleaners and security personnel, it is also a source of employment for many. Online education requires a great deal of staff and experts to regulate admin related work or to manage the institution's online portals. This was witnessed during the covid-19 pandemic, which saw a great rise in online course enrollment followed an increase in demand for technical staff. In this way online education does not induce unemployment, rather the technologically conversant supersede digitally illiterate staff.

With the advancement of technology, the standards of online education also elevates. e-learning platforms incorporate the latest softwares and technologies effectively deliver lectures. Online education is not circumscribed to screen-based attendance. Many online platforms, such as zoom, offer a dynamic and engaging learning session experience. They provide features like breakout rooms, real-time Q&A polls, and versatile communication channels, allowing participants to engage verbally or through chat.

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Such features ensure that students not only receive the best delivery of education, but also actively engage during the lectures.

Online learning can go a long way in stimulating digital literacy. There remains no doubt that Pakistan is a country which, despite having huge youth ~~but~~ bulge, suffers from technological ineptness. There are numerous causes for this decay, a prominent being the antediluvian pedagogical methods still ~~prevail~~ prevalent in many parts of the country. Online education, on the other hand, can provide a much needed impetus to stimulate digital literacy. According to Digital Learning College, online learning provides a dynamic and interactive environment for individuals to enhance digital literacy skills. Therefore, online learning not only improves the literacy rate in the country but ~~can~~ can also contribute towards technological proficiency.



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In a nutshell, the introduction of online education has brought numerous opportunities as well as some challenges. The opportunities, as embodied in the essay, outweigh the challenges since it benefits people directly. Online learning remains still a relatively new concept, which surged in popularity during the covid era. Nonetheless, this new mode of education has the potential to transform the educational ecosystem of the world.