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THE ROLE OF MOOCS AND SWAYAM IN DIGITAL EDUCATION: FOSTERING LIFE-LONG LEARNING

Bharti Sharma[1], Dr. Ritika Sharma[2]

1 JRF, Research Scholar, Department of Education, Himachal Pradesh University, Summer Hill, Shimla
2 Associate Professor, CDOE (ICDEOL), Department of Education, Himachal Pradesh University, Summer Hill, Shimla

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every area, including education. The use of technology and e-learning platforms had gained access during the time of pandemic. During this critical time, MOOCs and SWAYAM have emerged as mind-blowing transformative platforms of education, providing the learners access to a large number of skill-based and academic courses. MOOCs and SWAYAM are the online platforms responsible for self-learning by the students. During the lockdown, SWAYAM had introduced a new function in its online platform i.e. "Let COVID 19 not halt your learning continues with SWAYAM." MOOCs and SWAYAM had revolutionized the whole educational system by providing free access to education and by offering lifelong learning. SWAYAM is a national platform of MOOC started by Government of India. In India, SWAYAM aims to provide free access to education and life- long learning opportunities to all irrespective of age and background. SWAYAM aims to offer about 2000 courses. SWAYAM programs aim at achieving the goals of access, equity and quality which are also known as the three cardinal principles of SWAYAM. This paper aims to examine the role of MOOCs and SWAYAM in imparting digital education and life - long learning opportunities. This paper will also highlight the challenges faced by students in accessing digital education through the platforms like MOOCs and SWAYAM. Students face numerous challenges in accessing education through these online platforms that in turn impacts their engagement as well as their learning outcomes. These digital platforms like MOOCs and SWAYAM should try to overcome these challenges and obstacles in order to attain the goal of effective and inclusive education for all.

Keywords: *Covid-19, life-long learning, online platforms, Swayam, digital education, self-learning, inclusive education, challenges.*

Introduction

Education is the powerful instrument for the progress of any nation. It is essential that everybody should have access to educational opportunities in the 21st century. Various universities located in developed countries such as China, Korea, United States have attained top ranks due to their higher educational attainments and higher educational standards. On the other hand, countries like India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan, which are developing countries have not attained much in terms of educational achievements, because such developing countries are facing a lot of problems such as disparities on the basis of gender, disparities in attaining education, disparities in urban and rural students in terms of education, digital divide between people and so on. But digital revolution is playing an essential role in the development and progress of such countries. Digital revolution is bringing changes in various sectors such as education, health, banking, agriculture, financial inclusion, rural development etc. The main area of improvement by digital innovations is higher education, where with the introduction of latest technologies and innovations, the traditional methods of teaching are changing. In the present era, use of technology in every aspect of education is the most promising development. Technological usage in the field of education has made the teaching-learning process much easier, as students can access the study material anytime, anywhere without any geographical constraints. The introduction of MOOCS (Massive Open Online Courses) is the major innovation in the field of technology which provides opportunities to large number of learners to participate in free and open courses of education without any geographical constraints. MOOC platform was created by Ministry of Human Resource Development, which help the users to sign up to the courses free of cost, providing opportunities for self-learning and skill development among the participants. MOOC has become a popular way of offering online courses worldwide. Various platforms like Udemy, Edx, FutureLearn, Coursera, Class2Go are delivering Massive open online courses from a long time. The main aim of introducing this digital initiative is to provide the best teaching and learning to all the students including the disadvantaged ones. In this world. Where MOOCS were incorporated from 2012, India is a new player who stepped in this scenario in 2017 with

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the introduction of Study Webs of Active Learning for Young aspiring Minds (SWAYAM), which is an online platform developed by MHRD on the basis of three principles: access, quality and equality. SSWAYAM aims to deliver education to the most disadvantaged people and people residing in remote areas. Due to digitalization, the world has become smaller virtually and a lot of quality resources are easily and freely accessible to the students. SWAYAM is India-based MOOC. Courses are hosted in 4 quadrants on SWAYAM:

- Video lecture
- Reading material can be printed and downloaded.
- Self-assessment tests
- Online discussion forums for clearing doubts of students.

The emergence of these courses is no less than a revolution in the educational system of India where quality education is delivered freely even to the remotest sectors and these online platforms were devised with the aim to "Touch every student with digital revolution and to develop the habit of online learning among them".

Review of Literature

Sharmistha Pramanik (2018) conducted a study entitled "Attitude of postgraduate students towards SWAYAM: Indian version of MOOCs". The findings of this study revealed that the participants of this study were digitally literate and had knowledge of internet but only 3% of them had access to MOOCs. Around 36% of the participants were not familiar with SWAYAM. A comparison was also made between traditional methods of teaching and MOOCs. About 65% of the participants were in favor of traditional education system. 73% of the participants agreed that MOOCs and SWAYAM serve a good option for retired teaching faculty as they can share their experiences with the new generation regardless of cost, time and place. **Kartik Mondal and Ramendra Kumar Parhi (2024)** conducted a study entitled "Awareness of SWAYAM MOOCs among students of Teacher Education". Descriptive survey method was used in this study. The findings of this study suggested that 39.5% students of teacher education were aware of MOOCs while 39.6% students of teacher education were not aware of MOOCs. 40.2% of the students of teacher education were not aware of the facilities provided by MOOCs while 40.1% students of teacher education were well aware of facilities provided by MOOCs. 34.7% of the teacher education were familiar of online discussion forum of MOOCs whereas 36.6% students of teacher education were unaware while others stayed silent. 49% students were not aware of the video lecture courses provided on the DTH channel i.e. SWAYAM PRABHA while only 27.4% students were aware of this service. Only 27.9% students of teacher education had access to internet connected computers while 51% students of teacher education did not had access to such facility. It was also found that out of 800 participants, only 149 participants from teacher education were enrolled in MOOCs.

Harihara Bhesera and Shankar Lal Bika (2024) conducted a study entitled "Access, Equity and Quality in Higher Education: Envisioning India through SWAYAM". This study indicated that a large majority of children usually get enrolled in SWAYAM courses. As per 2022, the enrollment of students in higher education was 24,670,969 but the rate of completion of courses was very low. Out of these students who got themselves enrolled, only 11.43% got themselves registered for exams and only 6.65% had completed the courses successfully along with certification. This study also mentioned various causes for the poor success rate of SWAYAM such as lack of access to internet, lack of smartphone devices, lack of computers, problem in understanding English, inadequate schooling etc. **Saying Zeng, Mary Beth Rasson, Patriok C. Shih and John M. Carroll (2015)** conducted a study entitled "Understanding

student motivation, behaviors and perceptions in MOOCs." The findings of this study indicated that many students got themselves registered in MOOCs to complement other courses that they were pursuing. Some students go themselves registered to MOOCs in order to fulfill the responsibilities of their jobs by acquiring new skills. The findings also indicated that Masters and Ph.D. students got themselves registered in at least one MOOC, in order to enhance the chances of future employability. Many participants hold the perception that large number of MOOC certificates will impress the employers. Most of the participants had registered themselves due to their personal interest. Many learners enrolled themselves in MOOCs to find people with similar interests because meeting such people make them happy.

Delipiter Lase, et al (2022) conducted a study entitled "Parent's perceptions of distance learning during COVID-19 in rural Indonesia". Semi-structured interviews were conducted from 24 parents of students. The findings indicated that the children of 37.5% respondents studied at home from online learning, while the children of 62.5% respondents studied through offline mode. The results also showed that distance learning sometimes lead to violence among children as children do not study at their own, until they are not instructed to study. About 54.4% of the parents complained about increased expenses of education, 41.9% parents felt stressed, frustrated and depressed due to increased workload and increased thoughts. 48.5% parents had told that the motivation of their children decreases and 29.4% parents admitted that their cognitive abilities had also decreased to some extent. **Jahara Mustafa Sakriwala (2022)** conducted a study entitled "MOOCS- SWAYAM: Awareness and challenges in undergraduate students." This study comprised of 582 participants. Out of 582 participants, 450 participants were aware of SWAYAM while 132 participants were not aware of SWAYAM. Out of the total participants, only 323 students got enrolled in SWAYAM out of which only 35 students had successfully completed the course, 95 students got themselves enrolled but did not finish the course because they had not submitted all the assignments while 193 students had not submitted even a single assignment. The results indicated that the students got enrolled in SWAYAM but had not completed the course successfully. This study also highlighted some limitations of SWAYAM such as: lot of time is required in completing the course, higher costs of the courses, other platforms of e-learning are also easy to access.

Narmatha Padlan and M. Balasubramaniam (2023) conducted a study entitled "Challenges of SWAYAM MOOCS among post graduate students of Bharathiar University." The findings suggested that many post - graduate students do not have the proper knowledge of the online content, online apps, mobile learning etc. There is very low maintenance of technologies in various universities. There are also limited seats in MOOC and SWAYAM courses due to which many students face difficulty in enrolling them in these courses.

Significance of the Study
MOOCs and SWAYAM provide diverse opportunities to learners by promoting their lifelong learning, fostering global collaboration and by facilitating professional development of teachers. Providing educational opportunities to all the students is the main priority of higher education worldwide in the 21st century. Currently, the world is focusing on sustainable education for sustainable living. Sustainable education means to provide inclusive and quality education to all which in turn promotes life-long learning opportunities which is essential for sustainable living. India which is a developing country still faces challenges in providing quality education to the students. Thus, the introduction of SWAYAM which is a platform of MOOCs in India might work in a big way by enhancing the lifelong learning opportunities of Indian learners. India is the 6th largest economy of the world but 23% of the poverty of the world is still dwelling in India which calls for the utmost importance of free MOOCs in the country.

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Objectives

- To examine the role of MOOCs and SWAYAM in imparting digital education and lifelong learning.
- To examine the challenges faced by students in accessing digital education through MOOCs and SWAYAM.

Methodology

This research paper is exploratory in nature. It has utilised the data from various secondary sources like research papers, articles, research reports, journals, educational surveys, website of SWAYAM etc**.**

Lifelong learning is a major aspect of sustainable development goals. Every nation is trying to enhance the knowledge and capacities of their workers. Many countries and their educational institutions are taking the help of ICT to benefit the learners who want to stay connected with the paradigms of growing knowledge economy and with this, the objective of lifelong learning is also accomplished. India had also realized the importance of digital resources due to which various open educational resources are being developed and are offered at all levels of education which in turn leads to the creation of equitable knowledge society. Various educational methods and pedagogical techniques are evolving massively so that every learner can access education at his or her own pace and place. The modern inventions like MOOCs and SWAYAM have availed the platforms which can open up the intellect of those people who are hungry for knowledge. According to 2011 census of India, 27.2% females of the country are working in labour force while 78.8% males of the country are working in labour force. This implies the unavailability of adequate skills among adults especially among females for exploring the opportunities of their livelihood. However, it is felt that everyone should possess digital skills which is the precondition and a basic necessity for securing jobs. Thus, e-learning imparted with the help of MOOCs and SWAYAM is assumed to help the students in possessing digital skills. The National Knowledge Commission has also recommended the integration of ICT based education systems in distance education, free internet - based resources, setting of credit banks etc.

MOOCs are freely available online platforms that consist of large number of courses which can be availed by any student irrespective of time and place. MOOCs aim at building an interactive forum which consist of not only students and scholars but also entrepreneurs, professionals, elite universities etc. It has brought revolution in educational system where quality education is delivered freely to almost every region including remote regions. MOOCs are the greatest option for all those students who are talented and all they want is a chance. MOOCs are the greatest option for such students as they can be enriched with the quality education regardless of the institution to which they belong and also for those students who do not get the opportunity to visit schools or who have dropped their studies in between due to various reasons. Some examples of MOOC platforms are- EdX, Course era, Udemy, Udacity, Miriadax, Iversity, Future Learn etc. SWAYAM is a significant step of India towards free quality education. SWAYAM is a platform of digital MOOCs run by Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. SWAYAM not only provides platform to students for learning but also provides certificates. After completing the evaluation, the scores of students are submitted to the institutes from where the student has completed the score within a time period of four weeks. After receiving the scores of students, the institution then awards diploma or degree to the participant. SWAYAM and MOOCs have revolutionized the whole educational system by making free education accessible to millions of people around the world. They serve as the tools which promote lifelong learning by providing affordable, flexible and different resources of education which are useful mainly to the developing nations. The digital platforms like SWAYAM and MOOCs aims to bridge digital divide by providing

flexible, accessible and skill- based education to all the learners irrespective of their background and age. The emphasis of MOOCs and SWAYAM is on the development of skills which enable the learners to advance their careers. The willing students can enroll in the courses offered by SWAYAM and MOOCs without passing any entrance test. These courses are convenient for those who have left their studies in between, who do not have enough money to attend the schools or higher educational institutions, who are pursuing jobs, parents who are on maternity or paternity leaves etc. The SWAYAM platform aims at organizing 2000 courses and 80,000 hours of learning. SWAYAM covers school, law, engineering, post graduate, under graduate and various other professional courses. SWAYAM, which is an initiative of ICT attracts people belonging to all ages due to various reasons like flexibility, low cost of learning, individualized learning, no barriers in respect to time or distance, social and economic circumstances. SWAYAM and MOOCs have the potential to achieve inclusive education and it aims to benefit huge mass of students who have failed to achieve regular education and who cannot reach regular educational system. SWAYAM and MOOCs improve the skill of students along with knowledge of particular subjects. This will lead to the growth in their career along with promoting self – betterment and self – learning of students. Thus, SWAYAM and MOOCs provide a network of teaching – learning which is user friendly and provides high quality experience to the students.

In comparison to the old "Chalk and talk method", students who are learning through MOOCs and SWAYAM platforms can rewatch lectures as much time as they want. This is beneficial in grasping new concepts because revision helps in retaining the concept for longer time. The duration of SWAYAM courses is usually 15 weeks. The SWAYAM courses are generally divided into various modules. The frequency of a video in a module is 40 minutes which ius sub divided into three videos of small length. The total credits define the total number of modules. Through these platforms, people can utilise their free time by learning something valuable rather than wasting it on social media platforms, because once you stop learning, you start dying.

The digital platforms like SWAYAM and MOOCs have transformed the entire system of education by devising high quality resources to the learners. Regardless of this, most of the children face innumerable difficulties in drawing upon these platforms. Usually, the examination system of India is pen-paper based. In order to spread awareness of online examinations systems among students, the government should take the help of several educational policies. A parliamentary panel had revealed that since 2017 only 4% of students had enrolled in SWAYAM. Various issues were highlighted by them such as inflexible teaching, outdated content, poor structuring etc. Many parts of India did not have proper internet connection which is the main obstacle in the learning through MOOC and SWAYAM platforms. Students have the privilege to freely enrol in the courses provided by SWAYAM and MOOCs, but if they require certificates, it is impossible to transfer credits to other universities which is the major drawback of these platforms. Language barriers also act as an obstacle when it comes to offer education through digital platforms. Many courses are still provided in English language only, which creates challenges for the students. Another challenge faced by learners is the lack of support, motivation and guidance. When learners are deprived of face -to -face interaction, they are most likely to experience isolation and lack of guidance and motivation which is essential for successfully completing the course. SWAYAM courses do not provide real time interactions with fellow beings and with the instructors, which leads to delay in the clarity of doubts of students. In addition, some people may be unsure about the benefits of MOOCs and they hesitate in enrolling in MOOCs and SWAYAM. Due to time constraints, many students do not complete the whole course. Another obstacle faced by the students is lack of technological expertise on their part. Moreover, many students lack conducive and quiet learning home environment which affects

their participation and concentration in the class. Many disciplines require hands on experience, field visits, experiments without which the students cannot understand the content. Such experiences are not provided by these online platforms. Also, students enrolled in regular courses may find it difficult to create a proper balance between SWAYAM courses and their academic workload. In such cases, students usually focus on completing the regular courses which lead to incomplete SWAYAM courses. Students who are differently abled may also face challenges due to absence of some basic features like sign language, interpretation, subtitles, screen-reader friendly material etc. this is the major drawback of such courses because today we talk about inclusive education.

Suggestions

SWAYAM and MOOCS as digital initiatives should try to impart courses in regional languages so that non- English speakers can also attain the benefit of these platforms. These platforms should add features such as badges, leaderboards and rewards for motivating the learners. SWAYAM and MOOC platforms should also add virtual group discussions, question-answer sessions, feedback from instructors etc. These platforms should also work and collaborate with other companies in order to provide job-related courses, internships and industry – related certifications so that learners can reap the maximum benefit out of these courses.

Conclusion

A great revolution has occurred in the Indian educational scenario due to the introduction of SWAYAM and MOOCs. Different regulations provided by UGC from time to time always depicted that online education is the need of the hour which cannot be denied. Prosperity of digitalization has made the world virtually smaller and there is a constant increase in the quality resources. It is the duty of every citizen to share such beneficial initiatives of the government with other people. This endeavor will contribute to the sustainable development.

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