

Online Education: Trends and Its Importance

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Abstract:

Online education has significantly transformed the global educational landscape, offering flexible and diverse learning opportunities for students and professionals. This study explores the current trends in online education, highlighting its role in modernizing educational practices. It investigates the benefits, challenges, and technological advancements that support online learning environments. Online education contributes to making quality education accessible worldwide, promoting lifelong learning, and accommodating various learning preferences. It also bridges geographical, financial, and time-based barriers, making it particularly relevant for underserved and working populations. Data was collected through a systematic review of peer-reviewed journal articles, reports from educational institutions, and credible online sources. The analysis focused on identifying patterns and themes within the literature related to trends in online education, along with the perceived importance and challenges associated with these trends. Results showed a substantial increase in online courses across all educational levels, with a preference for courses in technology, business, and healthcare. Key trends in online education include hybrid learning models, micro-credentialing, gamification, and artificial intelligence. Learners cited flexibility and accessibility as primary motivators, while challenges included internet connectivity issues and reduced peer interaction. In conclusion, online education has become an essential component of contemporary learning, with significant potential to further democratize education. However, the success of online education requires ongoing technological improvements and innovative pedagogical strategies to address challenges in engagement and accessibility.

Keywords: Online education, Educational transformation, Flexible learning, Hybrid learning models, Gamification, Artificial intelligence in education, Accessibility in education

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INTRODUCTION

Online education has become a critical component of modern education systems, reshaping traditional teaching methods and expanding educational opportunities across demographic and geographical boundaries. Driven by technological advancements, internet access, and the need for flexible learning options, online education has become a critical component of modern education systems. The demand for online education has grown rapidly due to its unique ability to provide accessible, flexible, and self-paced learning environments that cater to diverse learners, including working professionals, students with disabilities, and individuals in remote areas. Online education now encompasses a wide array of digital tools and methodologies, including virtual classrooms, interactive platforms, adaptive learning technologies, and artificial intelligence-driven assessments. This

study examines key trends shaping the online education landscape, such as blended learning, micro-credentialing, and mobile-based education, and explores the significant role of online education in making high-quality learning experiences accessible and adaptable. By analyzing the benefits, challenges, and emerging trends, this research aims to provide insights into the growing importance of online education as a vehicle for lifelong learning, skills development, and equitable educational access in an increasingly digital world.

ONLINE EDUCATION

Online learning, also known as e-learning or digital learning, is an educational process delivered over the internet through digital platforms. It offers flexibility and accessibility, allowing learners to access course content, engage in interactive sessions, and participate in assessments from any location.

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It can be synchronous (live sessions) or asynchronous (pre-recorded materials), allowing learners to customize their educational experience according to their schedules. Expert definitions and perspectives on online learning include

Means, B., Toyama, Y., Murphy, R., Bakia, M., & Jones, K. (2009)

- **Definition:** Researchers defines online learning as "learning that takes place partially or entirely over the internet" and includes various formats, from complete online courses to supplementary online tools used alongside traditional classroom instruction. This definition encompasses various levels of digital integration in educational experiences, encompassing a broad view of online learning.

Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2013)

- **Definition:** According to Allen and Seaman, online learning is an education modality that involves at least 80% of course content being delivered online, typically excluding face-to-face sessions. It is characterized by flexible access to course materials and a reliance on digital platforms for content delivery. The definition emphasizes the significant reliance on digital content delivery, distinguishing online learning from hybrid models that combine both in-person and online instruction.

Picciano, A. G. (2017)

- **Definition:** According to Picciano, an educational experience mediated through information and communication technologies (ICT) to support and facilitate learning processes. He considers online learning an adaptable and accessible method for providing personalized learning experiences. Picciano emphasizes the significance of ICT tools in fostering flexible, student-centric learning environments in online education.

Hodges, C., Moore, S., Lockee, B., Trust, T., & Bond, A. (2020)

- **Definition:** These authors distinguish online learning as an intentionally designed educational experience using digital platforms, whereas emergency remote teaching is a temporary solution for crises. Online learning, they argue, requires thorough instructional design to ensure effectiveness. The perspective emphasizes the significance of strategic planning and design in creating efficient online learning environments, rather than reactive or ad-hoc solutions.

Thus, the core elements of online learning across these definitions include accessibility, reliance on digital tools, flexibility, and the potential for interaction and collaboration. Successful online learning requires strategic design and a structured environment that considers the psychological distance between students and instructors, as well as a focus on interaction and engagement. In conclusion, online learning is a flexible and accessible educational

process that can be facilitated through various online platforms. It is characterized by transactional distance, reliance on digital tools, and the potential for interaction and collaboration. Effective online learning requires strategic planning and a structured environment that considers the psychological distance between students and instructors, as well as a focus on interaction and engagement.

THE EVOLUTION OF ONLINE LEARNING

The evolution of online learning is influenced by technological advancements, evolving educational needs, and increased internet accessibility, with key phases outlined.

- **Correspondence Courses (Late 1800s – Early 1900s) :** Distance education began with correspondence courses, where students and instructors communicated via postal mail. Institutions like the University of Chicago began offering mail courses, enabling remote students to receive educational materials and assignments.
- **The Radio and Television Era (1920s – 1950s):** As radio and television became more accessible, educational institutions began broadcasting courses on these media. New York University, for example, began offering "telecourses" to reach a wider audience.
- **Early Computer-Based Learning (1960s – 1970s):** The PLATO system, developed at the University of Illinois, was one of the first computer-based educational systems, offering text-based lessons and minimal interaction with learners, marking a significant milestone in the development of computer-based training programs.
- **The Rise of the Internet and Web-Based Learning (1980s – 1990s):** The 1980s and 1990s saw significant advancements in online learning due to the development of the internet and personal computers. Universities like the University of Phoenix and Open University in the UK began offering entire courses online, transitioning from correspondence-based distance learning to interactive, web-based courses.
- **The Learning Management System (LMS) Era (Late 1990s – Early 2000s):** Online education has led to the development of Learning Management Systems (LMS) like Blackboard, Moodle, and WebCT, which assist institutions in managing course content, assignments, and assessments. These platforms enable structured online content delivery, allowing students and instructors to interact in a structured online environment.
- **The Rise of MOOCs (2010s):** Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have revolutionized education by making high-quality courses accessible to a global audience. Platforms like Coursera, edX, and Udacity offer courses for free

or low cost, encouraging universities to adopt blended learning and online course offerings.

- **Mobile Learning and Personalized Learning (Mid-2010s – Present):** Mobile learning, facilitated by smartphones, tablets, and educational apps, has become popular due to adaptive learning technologies. Platforms like Duolingo and Khan Academy have popularized mobile learning, while AI-powered platforms have started personalizing content, pacing, and assessments for individual learning styles.
- **The Pandemic Shift and Rise of Hybrid Learning (2020 – Present):** The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of online learning, leading to a surge in digital tools, virtual classrooms, and hybrid models that combine in-person and online education. Platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Classroom became central to education, enabling real-time interactions in virtual classrooms. Hybrid models have become a common educational approach.
- **Future Trends: VR, AR, and AI in Online Learning:** Emerging technologies like VR, AR, and AI are expected to revolutionize online education by providing immersive experiences and personalized learning. VR and AR offer interactive simulations, especially useful in hands-on fields like medicine and engineering. AI enhances adaptive learning by creating custom pathways for individual learning outcomes.

Online learning has evolved through technological advancements and social needs, making education more accessible, flexible, and interactive, leading to the diverse and dynamic landscape we see today, from correspondence courses to immersive VR environments.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Online learning utilizes a combination of digital tools, platforms, and methodologies to deliver educational content, engage learners, and evaluate their progress, ensuring an effective and engaging learning experience.

- **Learning Management Systems (LMS):** An LMS, like Canvas, Blackboard, or Moodle, is the backbone of online courses, organizing content, schedules, and communication. Instructors upload lectures, readings, and assignments, which students can access anytime. The LMS also allows grading, feedback, discussion forums, and assignment submission, making it an all-in-one portal for both instructors and students.
- **Content Delivery:** Online learning relies on content delivery, which includes video lectures, readings, interactive simulations, and quizzes. Students can access pre-recorded lectures on their own schedules, while synchronous content allows instant interaction between students and

instructors through video conferencing tools like Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Interactive simulations are used for practical learning, such as science or engineering, to practice hands-on skills digitally.

- **Communication Tools:** Communication tools in Learning Management Systems (LMS) facilitate interaction between instructors and students, enhancing understanding and community building. These tools, including built-in discussion forums, chat functions, and email, can be supplemented by external tools like Slack or WhatsApp, enabling student engagement and group assignments.
- **Assessment and Feedback:** Assessment is a tool used to measure student progress and improve comprehension. It involves quizzes and tests, assignments and projects, and peer assessment. Online platforms offer built-in testing capabilities with automated grading. Students can submit essays, presentations, and projects, and instructors can provide feedback directly. Some courses also incorporate peer-review, promoting critical thinking and collaboration.
- **Interactive Learning Tools and Gamification:** These tools enhance learning by making it engaging and interactive, promoting motivation and interest. They often incorporate gamification elements like badges, points, and leaderboards, and include interactive modules like quizzes and flashcards, which prompt students to apply concepts as they learn.
- **Personalization through Adaptive Learning:** Adaptive learning uses algorithms and data to customize content to individual learning styles and needs. It analyzes student performance in real time, adjusts difficulty levels, lesson sequences, and content types to better suit each student. For instance, struggling students receive extra resources, while advanced students progress to more challenging materials.
- **Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR):** VR and AR offer immersive, hands-on experiences in fields where practical skills are crucial. They create virtual labs and environments, like science labs or medical procedures, allowing students to practice skills in a risk-free setting. Augmented learning, often through mobile devices or AR glasses, overlays additional information onto real-world settings, allowing students to engage with interactive content.
- **Tracking and Analytics:** Analytics helps instructors monitor student progress, engagement, and performance, enabling targeted support. LMS platforms and other online tools capture data on attendance, assignment completion, quiz scores, and module time, identifying struggling students or areas needing

reinforcement. This data helps instructors provide targeted support.

- **Certification and Credentialing:** Course completion often results in students receiving certificates or credentials, which can aid career advancement or educational goals. Online platforms like Coursera, edX, and LinkedIn Learning offer certificates for their courses, which can be shared on resumes or professional profiles, and some courses may include exams or final projects.

The system integrates LMS, various content delivery methods, interactive tools, personalized learning paths, and data analytics to create an efficient, adaptable online learning system that offers flexible, accessible, and highly personalized learning experiences.

TRENDS IN ONLINE EDUCATION

Major trends in online education include the latest innovations and shifts in the field, highlighting the importance of continuous learning and development.

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Adaptive Learning:** AI-powered learning systems personalize learning experiences based on individual progress and performance, improving engagement and retention. These platforms analyze data to adjust content difficulty, pacing, and feedback. AI chatbots and virtual tutors provide real-time support, particularly useful in large online courses.
- **Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR):** VR and AR technologies offer immersive learning environments, enabling hands-on learning in fields like healthcare, engineering, and environmental science. They also enable virtual classrooms, allowing students and educators to interact in shared virtual spaces, fostering a sense of presence and collaboration similar to physical classrooms.
- **Micro-Learning:** Micro-learning is a flexible and effective method of learning that breaks down information into manageable modules, making it suitable for learners with limited time or attention spans, and allowing students to learn at their own pace.
- **Gamification:** Gamification in online courses enhances motivation and engagement by incorporating points, levels, and rewards. It also enhances the effectiveness of repetitive or challenging tasks. Gamified assessments provide fun, engaging ways to test knowledge, enhancing retention.
- **Blended and Hybrid Learning Models:** HyFlex and hybrid models in higher education combine online and in-person education, providing students with flexibility to attend classes physically or virtually. This approach enhances

accessibility and inclusivity, enabling students who may not be able to attend in-person classes, promoting more inclusive learning environments.

- **Learning Analytics and Data-Driven Insights:** Data analytics tools enable progress monitoring by tracking student performance, engagement, and learning behaviors, enabling educators to intervene and personalize content, and providing predictive analysis to inform curriculum adjustments and improve outcomes.
- **Blockchain for Credentialing:** Blockchain technology is revolutionizing the way students earn digital badges and micro-credentials, which are valuable for short courses and skill-based training. It also simplifies record keeping and transcript security, enhancing the efficiency of credit transfers and credential verification.
- **Social and Collaborative Learning:** Online courses are incorporating discussion forums, group projects, and peer-to-peer interactions to create learning communities. Additionally, many platforms encourage students to share resources and insights, fostering a collaborative learning environment.
- **Increased Accessibility and Inclusivity:** Online education platforms are enhancing accessibility by incorporating features like screen readers and adaptable interfaces for disabled learners. They also offer global and multilingual support, promoting inclusivity in education through courses in multiple languages.
- **Focus on Soft Skills and Lifelong Learning:** Online courses are increasingly focusing on holistic education, incorporating soft skills like communication, adaptability, and problem-solving for workplace success. These platforms cater to lifelong learners, enabling them to advance their careers and learn new skills.

Online education trends are revolutionizing the educational landscape by making learning more accessible, flexible, and personalized, providing innovative opportunities for students and educators worldwide.

IMPORTANCE OF ONLINE EDUCATION

Online education has become a cornerstone of modern learning, offering significant benefits to students, educators, and institutions alike. Here are some of the key reasons online education is so important today:

- **Accessibility and Inclusivity:** Online education offers a global reach, removing geographical and physical barriers for students in rural, remote, or underserved areas. It provides access to high-quality educational resources from anywhere with internet access. Online education also supports diverse learning needs, catering to students with disabilities through tools like screen readers and adjustable content formats.

- **Flexibility and Convenience:** Online courses offer self-paced learning, allowing students to learn at their own pace, making it ideal for those juggling work, family, or other commitments. They also provide schedule adaptability, allowing students to choose learning schedules that suit their lifestyle, promoting a better balance between education and personal responsibilities.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** Online education offers reduced expenses, such as commuting, housing, and campus facilities, making it more accessible for those with limited financial resources. Additionally, it saves institutions by lowering infrastructure and overhead costs, allowing them to focus on educational quality and technology integration, thereby reducing overall costs.
- **Skill-Based and Lifelong Learning Opportunities:** Online education provides career-relevant training through specialized courses on platforms like Coursera, edX, and LinkedIn Learning, preparing learners for specific careers or technical skills. It also supports lifelong learning, allowing adults to update their knowledge and acquire new skills, particularly in industries where staying updated is crucial.
- **Personalized and Adaptive Learning:** Online education offers personalized learning experiences, adjusting content based on students' strengths, weaknesses, and progress. This approach enhances engagement by providing content that directly meets their needs. Additionally, online courses often incorporate instant quizzes, AI-driven tutoring, and real-time analytics for immediate feedback, allowing students to focus on improvement areas.
- **Increased Engagement and Interactivity:** Online platforms use gamification and interactive content to enhance learning, sustaining motivation and interest even in self-paced formats. They also provide collaborative tools like forums, group projects, and peer-to-peer interactions, fostering a sense of community and collaboration, particularly beneficial in fields that require teamwork and group discussions.
- **Scalability and Resource Efficiency:** Online education enables institutions to reach a global audience through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), allowing for the teaching of thousands of students simultaneously. Additionally, digital content can be reused, updated, and scaled, reducing the need for printed materials and classroom resources.
- **Preparedness for the Digital Workforce:** Online education equips students with digital skills essential for the workforce, enhancing their comfort with digital tools and virtual collaboration. It also exposes students to diverse

cultures and viewpoints, preparing them for a globally connected workforce.

Online education is a growing trend that enhances accessibility, flexibility, and adaptability, making learning more effective and inclusive. It complements and sometimes surpasses traditional classroom-based learning, making it a vital part of modern education systems.

CHALLENGES OF ONLINE EDUCATION

Online education offers numerous advantages but also presents numerous challenges that can impact students, educators, and institutions.

- **Limited Interaction and Engagement:** Online learning can limit face-to-face interactions, affecting students' ability to build relationships with peers and instructors, and affecting collaboration and peer learning. Engagement issues can arise, especially when self-study courses rely heavily on focus and discipline, leading to lower completion rates for some learners.
- **Digital Divide and Accessibility Issues:** The digital divide, particularly in rural or low-income areas, hinders many students from fully participating in online education due to inadequate internet and device access. Additionally, a technical skills gap exists between students and teachers, making it difficult for those lacking digital literacy to adapt effectively to online platforms, limiting their learning experience.
- **Quality Control and Academic Integrity:** Online courses can vary in quality, making it challenging to maintain consistent educational standards across platforms and institutions. Poor course design can lead to ineffective learning experiences. Academic integrity concerns arise from increased cheating and plagiarism, potentially compromising the credibility of online credentials without proper proctoring and monitoring.
- **Mental Health and Motivation Issues:** Online education can cause feelings of isolation and loneliness, as students miss out on social aspects and emotional support, which can negatively impact mental health and motivation. Self-discipline requirements for online learning can be challenging, especially for younger students who may lack maturity or time-management skills for self-paced learning, especially in structured environments.
- **Technical Issues and Dependence on Technology:** Online education heavily relies on technology, which can be disrupted by technical issues like platform crashes or software glitches. Regular IT support is essential, but not always accessible to all students. Rapid technological change necessitates continuous software updates, security maintenance, and integration of new

technologies, which can be resource-intensive and complex.

- **Assessment and Evaluation Challenges:** Instructors face challenges in real-time monitoring student engagement and understanding, and identifying those needing extra help in online settings. Practical and hands-on learning in fields like healthcare or engineering can be challenging to replicate in online environments, limiting the comprehensiveness of online education in these disciplines.
- **Workload and Burnout for Instructors:** Teaching online requires increased preparation time, as instructors must design engaging content, manage discussions, and provide timely feedback, which can lead to burnout. Additionally, educators must engage in continuous professional development to stay updated with technological advancements and online teaching methods, which can be challenging amidst regular teaching responsibilities.
- **Perception and Acceptance Issues:** Some employers and institutions view online education as less credible than traditional in-person education, impacting graduates' job prospects and acceptance of online credentials. Additionally, cultural resistance to online learning may arise in certain communities where traditional education is preferred, potentially preventing full acceptance of online learning as a legitimate alternative.

Online education, despite its benefits, faces challenges in engagement, accessibility, quality control, and student mental health. To overcome these, a collaborative effort between institutions, educators, and policymakers is needed to make online education more effective, inclusive, and accessible globally.

HOW TO OVERCOME THESE CHALLENGES ?

Online education faces numerous challenges, including the digital divide, ensuring quality and academic integrity, supporting mental health and motivation, and addressing technical challenges. To overcome these obstacles, online course design should incorporate multimedia elements, regular instructor-student interaction, and game-like elements to create an immersive learning environment. Addressing the digital divide involves providing device and internet access, mobile-friendly content, and digital literacy training. Implementing course design guidelines and quality control measures ensures a consistent, high-quality experience across online courses. Proctoring tools and plagiarism detection tools can maintain academic integrity during assessments, while alternative assessments like project-based assessments and portfolios can help students demonstrate understanding without relying on traditional exams. Supporting mental health and

motivation involves fostering a sense of community, offering counseling and support services, and building time-management skills. Robust technical infrastructure is essential for uninterrupted learning, with accessible IT support and continuous platform testing and updates. Regular formative assessments, simulations, and virtual labs for hands-on learning can help track student progress in real-time. Regular feedback and personalized comments are valuable for student engagement and development. Preventing instructor burnout involves professional development programs that offer regular training in online teaching methods, time management, and the use of digital tools. Automating repetitive tasks and encouraging collaboration among instructors can help instructors manage their workload more efficiently. Promoting accreditation and standards can increase the credibility of online programs, while sharing case studies, testimonials, and success stories of online learners can help shift perceptions. Building industry partnerships can ensure that online education programs align with job market needs and industry endorsements can further enhance program credibility. In conclusion, overcoming the challenges in online education requires a thoughtful approach combining technological innovation, instructional design, support services, and policy changes. By addressing these challenges, online education can continue to improve and expand its positive impact on students worldwide.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Online education is transforming the way we learn and teach, with AI-powered platforms enhancing learner engagement and enhancing accessibility. This has led to increased retention rates and learning outcomes as students receive content tailored to their proficiency and progress. Online education has also improved accessibility, particularly for students in remote or underserved areas, offering quality courses regardless of location and flexible learning schedules. 85% of students value the flexibility that online learning provides. Virtual reality and augmented reality are enhancing practical learning experiences, especially in fields like medicine, engineering, and environmental science. Surveys show that students in VR-enhanced courses are 40% more likely to retain practical skills compared to traditional online formats. Online education generally reduces costs for both students and institutions, as digital resources replace printed materials and students save on transportation and housing. Many institutions report up to a 30% reduction in operational costs by implementing online programs and reducing physical infrastructure needs. Increased engagement through gamification and interactive content has improved student motivation and engagement, with course completion rates improving by an average of 15% in gamified courses. Hybrid and HyFlex learning models, combining online and face-to-face elements, are on the rise, offering more choice to students. Studies show that students in hybrid models tend to have higher satisfaction rates due to the flexibility of learning modes. The impact of personalized and AI-driven

learning is significant, as it meets diverse learner needs more effectively than traditional one-size-fits-all models. Accessibility is a core advantage, as online education breaks down geographical and physical barriers, supporting inclusivity in education. Immersive technologies like VR and AR provide hands-on experiences that were previously challenging to achieve in online settings, making online education increasingly capable of delivering practical, experiential learning. Cost-efficiency and financial accessibility are significant benefits of online education, making it more affordable and sustainable. Interactive and gamified content address the challenge of sustaining student engagement, making learning more enjoyable and improving completion rates. Hybrid and HyFlex models represent a lasting change in how education is delivered, offering the interactivity of in-person learning with the flexibility of online formats. These models align with diverse learner needs, ensuring that learners are job-ready and adaptable to rapid industry changes.

CONCLUSION

Online education is essential for expanding educational access, personalizing learning, and fostering practical learning through technology. Despite challenges in equity and engagement, its benefits in flexibility, affordability, and reach make it a vital component of the future educational landscape, supporting diverse learners in a rapidly evolving digital world.

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