

## **Youth and Covid19: An Estimation of Employability in the Rise of Online Learning**

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### **Abstract**

Today youth employment is the biggest concern of the nation. According to the Centre for the Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) the unemployment rate in India has been increased by 6.9% in February'2021, as compared to January'2021 i.e., 6.53%. Now again due to the second wave of Covid, the unemployment rate is reaching at its worst and the local lockdown scenario in many states have witnessed a huge impact over the jobs, almost 70 lakhs jobs have been suffered. This also indicates that situation may get even more worse if the lockdown will continue to happen and things don't get under control soon. As per the article published in "The India Express" May 11' 2021, the employability of engineering graduates is registered 47.38% only, which is highest among all other domains, on the one hand where country is facing a continuous increasing challenge of employment, at the same time there is a new wave of online courses have arrived apart from the regular degree/diploma programs. This paper tries to analyse the market potential for these online courses and tries to investigate whether the candidate gets the real benefit after completing these online courses which claims to be specialised in certain area or domain in terms of providing employment.

**Keywords:** Youth, employment, online courses, covid, economy.

### **Introduction**

Almost 12 million people are added to India's working population every year which comprises age bracket of 15-24 years, as per the data published by University Grant Commission on March' 21. India has total number of 979 universities which comprises (State, Dean, Central and Private Universities). In spite of existing large number of universities, India has witnessed a huge expansion, in particular to higher education where large number of courses are now offered by both public and private universities. Not just the government colleges but the private universities have also made their mark in the top university listing in India, which are taken care by mostly corporate groups, various societies and other private bodies.

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The University Grant Commission declares every year the list of fake universities in view of growing number of technical universities in India. As per the UGC fake university list in India 2020-2021 report, the unrecognised list of state university, technical institute and colleges, which are not AICTE approved, includes 24 (twenty four) such self-styled universities. The Centre for Monitory Indian Economy reported that country's current unemployment rate stands at 7.5%,

where the graduate rate stands at 18.5%, as per the data of 2019 published by CMIE; the report also states the unemployment rate for females contribute 17.5% as compared to 6.2% for male candidates. The report precisely indicates that one in every fourth graduate is searching for a job. Also to be noted is that apart from established traditional higher education institutions comprising of Universities, Associated Colleges, Private Institutions, deemed Universities, another fast emerging sector is online education – Swayam, NPTEL Courses and other online courses which are approaching students to register themselves under these courses and also offer better employability to enrolled candidates on successful completion, the value of online courses is gaining momentum fast during this pandemic situation, where movement is restricted and doing everything through online mode is being preferred. Therefore, it is high time to evaluate the mushrooming number of online courses in terms of their authenticity, market reediness and future scope for the better employability of youth in India.

### **Objectives**

1. To study the current state of youth employment in the country.
2. To analyse the effectiveness of various modes of education.
3. To study the employability potential of increasing online courses.
4. To study the causes of increasing unemployment in the country.
5. To study the potential disciplines in increasing the employment in the country.

### **Literature Review**

Jindal Aman and Chahal B.P.S. (2018) in their paper underlined the importance of online education in present time and admitted that as a result of rapid technological changes taking place all around the education sector is also undergoing changes in terms of imparting education. The paper also focussed on the challenges that come across while implementing online education as against face-to-face education. The paper identified internet penetration, low cost of imparting education through online mode, easiness in approaching the course, government's initiatives, employer's recognition and promoting employability of students as key factors that can help in promoting online education in India. On the other hand, paper also brought into light the parameters that are posing challenge to the smooth growth of online teaching and promotion of online courses such as insufficiency of digital infrastructure and lack of proper use of key methods and computer knowledge on the part of students to communicate with the instructor available online. Nitonde Rohidas (2018) in his research paper recognised Technology Enhanced Learning as the core of higher education in the 21st century and NPTEL (National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning) a joint venture of IITs and IISc has take a lead in this direction. MHRD has taken enough measures to promote online education and programs. The objective of promoting online learning is admired as an great pushing factor in terms of enhancing employability and skilfulness of learners as the learners can go through the lectures and knowledge gain at their own pace and convenience without pressure of timelines and strict class schedules. Thus, online education can be a tool of promoting employability and confidence among students. Patel Atul, Parekh Yogesh (2019) in their research came with some interesting points that University Grant Commission is determined to bring sweeping changes in the present setup of higher education system in India and to make Indian students equally capable while competing at international levels and hence improve their employability and skills. With this background UGC promoted NPTEL and SWYAM platforms which can be utilised for promotion of online certification programs and courses offered by various higher education universities and institutions. The research came up with the conclusion

that E-learning system is gaining popularity and the same is being preferred as an effective tool both by trainers and trainees in terms of imparting education and improving the personality development, improving knowledge base, enhancing employability of students and overall growth of youth population. Lone Zahoor Ahmad (2017) recognised the significance of online education and accepted it as a future of promoting education in India. The paper also brings into light the fact that already many courses are being offered online and thousand of students have been enrolled under them. With the Digital India programme's vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy, the education sector in India is poised to witness major growth in the years to come. Technology-led reach and easy access will bring about a socio-economic difference in the lives of Indian learners.

### **RESEARCH GAP**

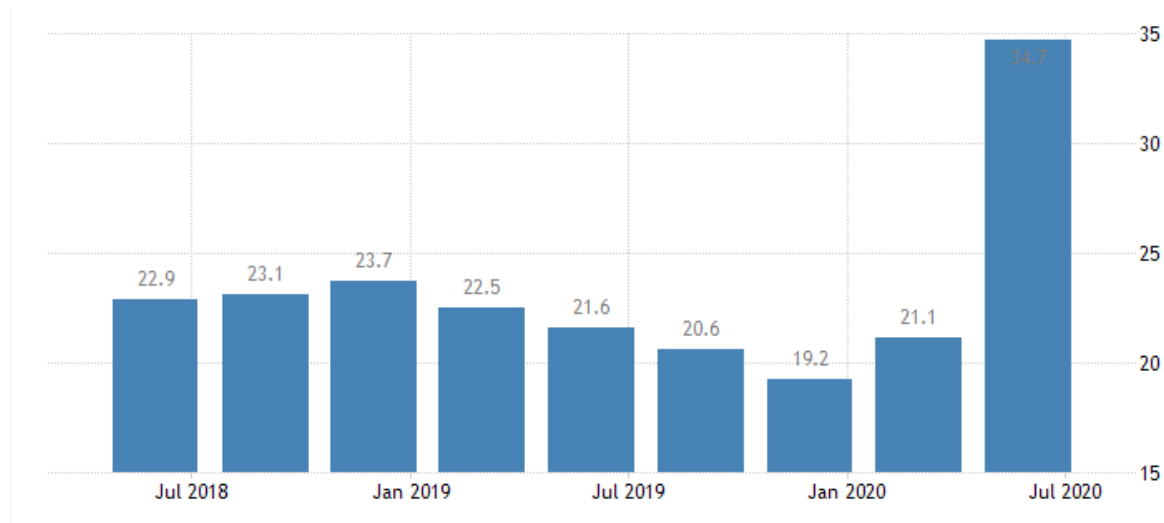
The review of literature of papers gone through and a few of them mentioned above brought into light the following Research Gap which made us to think and analyse further on the said paper to find out the impact of online education programs and courses on employability.

- All the paper were of the view that online education system and promotion of courses through NPTEL and SWYAM platforms enhances the employability, skill updating, and confidence level of learners and they are better equipped to prove themselves in terms of achieving employment or becoming skilful entrepreneurs.
- No paper or study could be found to actually analyse the employment generation after going through online courses and how many learners were enrolled in a given time period under these online courses and hoe many could seek job or have enhancement in terms of skill that is capable of helping them to manage their needs independently.
- To bridge this gap and quench the curiosity of do these online courses are really helping in generation of meaningful employment or all this is also an eyewash, this paper has come into light.

### **Youth, Unemployment and Online Courses**

**Figure 1.** Youth Unemployment Rate in India increased to 34.70 percent in the second quarter of 2020 from 21.10 percent in the first quarter of 2020.

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**Source:** Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI)

The above graph clearly states that the unemployment rate in India is continuously on the rise an increase of almost 13% within a year is a matter of concern regarding the employability of Indian youth. At the same time, another wave of COVID-19 pandemic has shaken almost every facet of life. Though industries have witnessed a lot of disruption, the maximum impact has been in the teaching sector. As per the UNESCO, almost 1.5 billion or even larger number of learners across the world have shifted from the traditional to online medium of learning. The increasing demand for online medium and its influence on physical learning medium is a major concern in this changing scenario. One of the initiatives launched in India is the National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) which has again broadened the scope of online learning. The number of online courses for students are increasing every day. With that, their perceptions of learning environments and academic outcomes are also changing. Earlier, students did not perceive online courses to be equivalent to face-to-face courses but, with time, they have adapted and the number of students now opting for online courses has grown. Online courses offer education at a much more reasonable cost compared to an in-class course. They can save on items such as housing and transportation. With the platforms like SWAYAM-NPTEL now the interested students can enjoy high-quality online instructors from the institutions like IITs, IIMs and other premium institutions. Seeing the current scenario when all the academic institutions have adopted for online learning and it is expected that when classes resume, most teachers will probably adopt a hybrid model such as flipped classrooms, having seen the benefits of online learning, as it also offers the advantage of taking courses outside one's domain of specialisation and gaining a certain degree of expertise. On the other end there are wide range of students who are looking just to obtain qualifying marks rather than focusing upon actual learning. It is evident on the platforms such as NPTEL uninterested students do not get high marks by insincere means whereas an average student will be somewhere in between, which also makes the dropout rate higher in such programs where the enrolled number of students are much higher as compare to actual number of students who successfully complete their certification. There is certainly a need for faculty members or teachers to learn online pedagogical methods and tune their content and teaching style to benefit students. If the online instruction is well-designed and of high quality, it particularly benefits an average student. Online education not only caters to students' differentiated needs by enabling them to pick and learn courses they are interested in, but also helps them control their learning

environment, learn at their own pace, and build a balance between their studies and other commitments.

### **Increasing unemployment in the country**

Youth unemployment in India is among the major concerns and is one of the most widely discussed issues, yet it has hardly seen any resolution. Education for us Indians is finishing schools and colleges. But we fail to understand that that's not it.

**Population:** population and youth unemployment in India, according to a source, every year, India sees 8-9% increase in enrolment at the higher education level. India is among the top 5 countries to have highest number of students going to the universities. The problem here is that there is no equivalent rise in the number of opportunities.

**Low Institution/University Standards:** Outdated curriculum, inferior teaching resources, lack of basic infrastructure, to name a few, are at the root of youth unemployment. The students are not trained to meet the needs of the economy, or understand the subject to the core, but rather to cram up the syllabus and get the right grades.

**Lack of right skills:** Absence of relevant skills is one of the major reasons for youth unemployment in India. To be fit for working in any industry, it is quite important to equip oneself with the necessary skill set and focus on competency. However, most youth today lack the appropriate skills that a job specification requires them to have.

**Job opportunity & qualification mismatch:** Lack in decent remuneration and qualification mismatch is again a big hurdle to the employment. However with online learning mechanism the integration have become possible where 360 perspective is now much talked about in the curriculum.

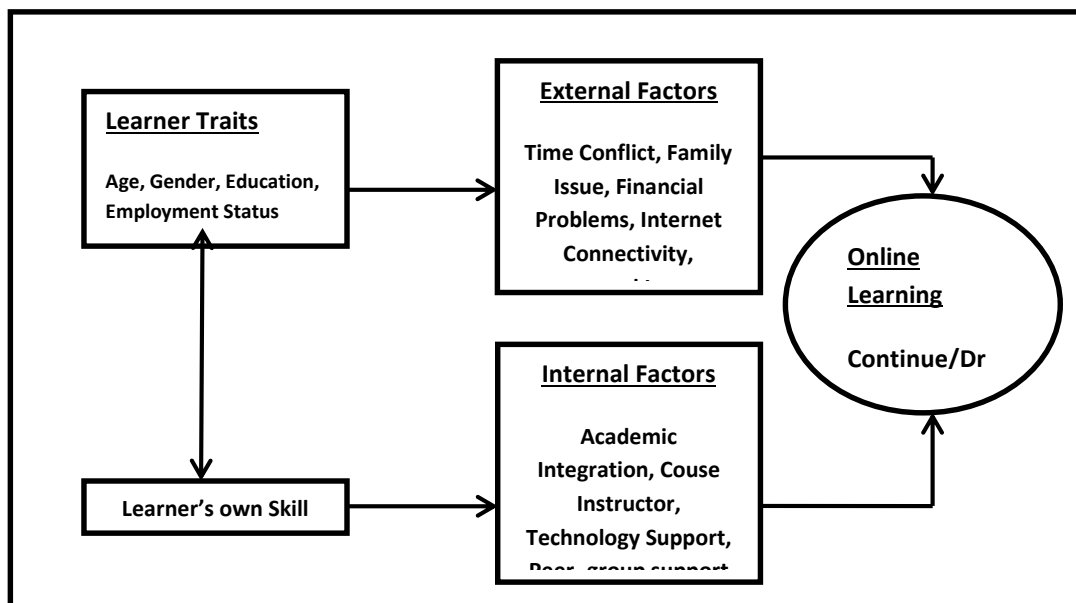
**Meeting Societal responsibilities:** The idea of a working female is still not very widely accepted in India. While most women do aspire to build their careers, time constraints and family pressure have always been a reason to shun them away from taking up good opportunities.

### **Increasing dropout rates in online courses**

Welcome to the problem a lot of people in the e-learning industry do not like to talk about the high dropout rates for online courses. Though there are no national statistics, but a recent report in the Chronicle for Higher Education 2021 clearly states that institutions report dropout rates ranging from 20 to 50 percent for distance learners. And officials of online courses go along with dropout rates of 10 to 20 percentage which is higher in distance offerings than in their face-to-face counterparts. The learning outcomes and effectiveness of an online programme, however, is yet to be proven. As per a study by Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the completion rates for Learning Management Systems (LMS) based courses is not more than 4 per cent and the success of the graduates is even lower. During the pandemic duration, a lot of people are learning through online medium ranging from tech, design, hardware and much more via informal courses, either YouTube or other platforms, rather than through formal institutional set-ups. It clearly indicates the emergence of new learning habits that are driven by the desire to pick up practical skills. As

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more start-ups are now focusing upon finding relevant talent, the focus has slowly but surely shifted from immaterial to more tangible skills. With the internet becoming a big giant school, where the students decide what to learn, where and when, the learning process has become more democratic than ever. The learning outcomes and effectiveness of an online programme is still under review. The low success rates of online courses are credited mainly to the lonely experience that these online platforms offer. Adding to that is the quality of curriculum and programmes; it is challenging for students to move ahead once they are stuck on a concept or trying to take time out to come back to the course, losing motivation or due to changing priorities. Hence, they end up dropping out. It is also observed that the only times when students completed these self-paced learning programmes is when they needed a course completion certificate to submit in a college or office for a pending promotion, appraisal or grades to qualify.



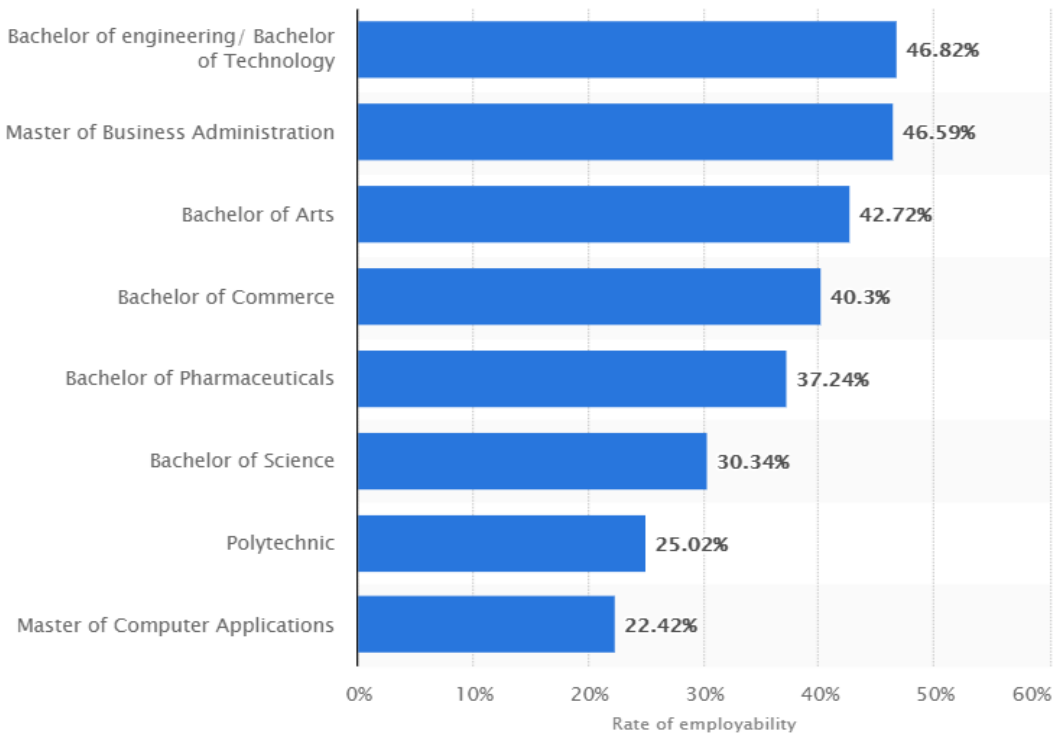
**Picture 1.** Showing the factors responsible for Continue/ drop in an online learning environment.

To curb the challenges emerging in the successful implementation of online learning following issues needs to address:

- **Students do not have enough time:** Students are overburdened with the increasing expectation of faculties and guardians where they get stuck in meeting the deadlines of already assigned tasks.
- **Lack of management oversight:** There are various operational issues which are related to the management of online learning mechanism which are not taken care by the management timely which leads to long term problem in the adjustment of the students with this new teaching pedagogy.
- **Lack of motivation:** Once the session is over the student is completely out of the learning environment and there is no interaction and peer pressure to complete the task timely thereby lack of motivation is also a challenge.

- **Problems with technology:** Problem with the technology infrastructure is again a big challenge, In India still the network and accessibility is not consistent which also acts as an hurdle in the successful implementation of these online learning courses.
- **Lack of student support:** The online teaching is also suffering with the lack of student support where the active participation by the student is missing. Despite of being connected the active response rate of student is relatively low.
- **Individual learning preferences:** The fact that people have different preferences when it comes to online learning in terms of course curriculum, topics and even the teaching pedagogy which sometimes does not match with others thereby increasing the challenge to match the preference of every student.
- **Poorly designed course:** The curriculum designed for the online courses needs to be reviewed as stated earlier in the paper these courses are of no use unless it is skill based and job oriented.
- **Substandard/inexperienced instructors:** The online teaching industry is also facing a tremendous challenge in terms of providing specialised teachers. At times the faculty teaching does not know how to differentiate online learning from the convention teaching pedagogy which doesn't get fit in this online learning environment there by resulting in higher dropouts.

**Figure 2:** Employability among graduates across India in 2021, by degree



**Source:** Statista Research Department, Mar 12, 2021.

In 2021, undergraduates in engineering and technology domains had the highest employability rating at 47 percent. In comparison to that graduates with a computer application degree had an employability scope of just over 22 percent. Also, the MBA degree has picked up its position which was declined during the years 2016-2018. Therefore, the online courses should be designed focusing upon the market potential of these emerging disciplines under these top course's category.

### Conclusion

We all know that information technology has played a vital role in changing the rules of the game and no sector is left unaffected by the sweeping waves of information technology including education sector which gradually was adapting incorporation of technology in imparting education. In this direction we were moving slowly but with conformity from pure black board teaching to use of Over Head Projector (OHP) to Power Point Presentation to use of LCD and also few courses were being introduced online of late, though things were moving ahead smoothly, all of the sudden with the introduction of new education policy, enough argument in favour of rapid shift from traditional teaching to online education in the name of making students more employable and skilful has been sought for. The pandemic boosted further the online education as movement was limited to the four walls of houses, a rapid shift to online methods of imparting education took place and so also many reputed world class universities started offering degree and professional programs online, which are economic and are boasted as providing better employment to students. An analysis of the scenario brought into light the other side of the story that no doubt enrolment in online courses has increased but the dropout rate is also very high, further even after so much of expansion of online programs in addition to existing physical educational network the number of students seeking admission and getting passed out have increased but they are not able to be absorbed in effective numbers rising further the unemployment rate, thus to argue that online programs, courses and degrees are helpful in enhancing the employability of students does not hold good. However, better would be to in the ratio or increasing workforce expansion of industries, promotion of infrastructural projects and limiting unplanned unproductive expenditure by the State should be restricted and finances diverted towards employment generation projects, so the youth is absorbed adequately.

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