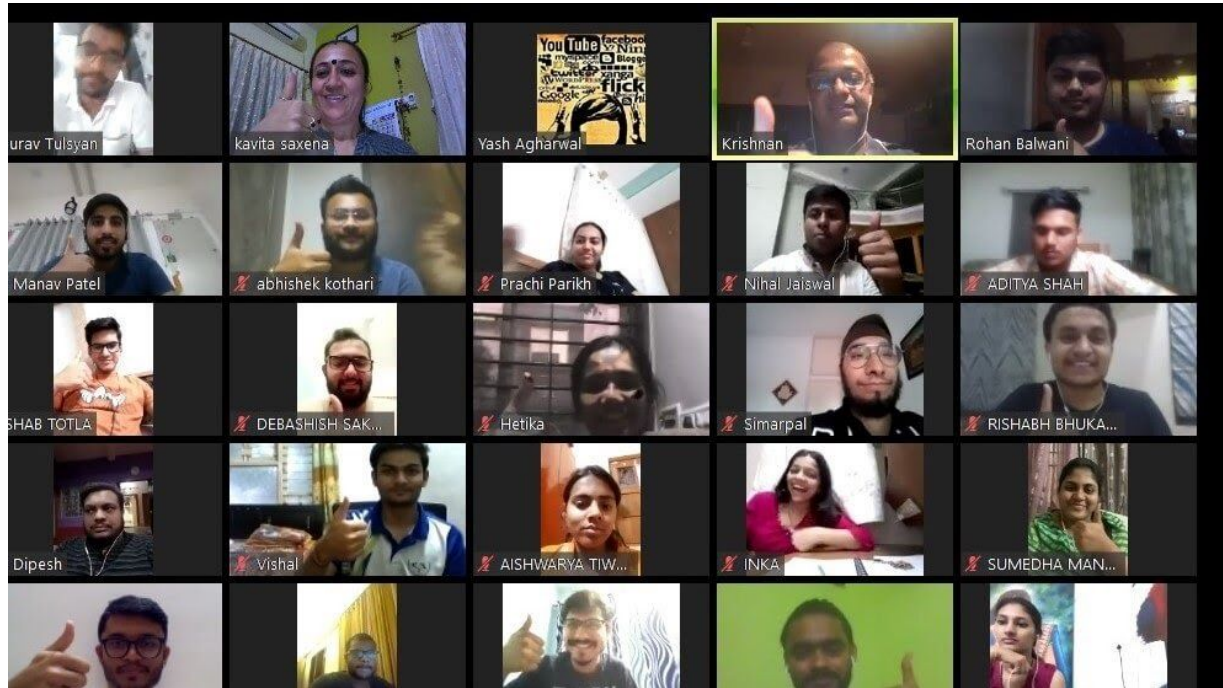


Coronavirus Accelerates Pace of Digital Education in India

EdTech Review - Dr. Kavita Saxena - 17 April, 2020



Online education has started gaining popularity in India in the last few years. The Government of India's efforts to empower youth by offering them quality education free of cost or at the prices they can afford to pay has given rise to Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

This has resulted into educational institutions shifting their teaching pedagogy to e-learning platforms and address a huge mass of students including those in small towns with smart phones being able to access these platforms and pursue online courses. However, there is a mixed response in the teaching fraternity towards MOOCs and other e-learning platforms for various reasons. Conservative leadership at the top level of the academic pyramid, lack of understanding of the various tools and platforms, inadequate regulations and absence of required skills to conduct online course are some of the deterrents for online education in India. Embracing students from diverse academic backgrounds and geographical boundaries makes it difficult to educate them all under the same banner/course. Since it is massive and open, it is difficult to monitor and control and hence, even if the enrolments increase due to ease of access and affordability, completion rates are dismal and students' dropout rates are also very high. Given this background, it will not be wrong to say that MOOCs and online learning is yet to shine brightly in India.

However, the current situation of global pandemic created due to COVID-19 has created a new world of online teaching and learning. The education sector and academicians in India were quick in responding to quarantine by suddenly shifting to online teaching platforms. As universities and educational institutions were forced to close down, instructors have shifted to

remote teaching. Among various online platforms like Google Hangouts, Skype, Adobe Connect and few more, Zoom has emerged as a clear winner in India. Zoom has left behind WhatsApp, TikTok and Instagram and has claimed the top spot on Google Play.

Making the most of Online Teaching – EDII Experience

Neither teachers nor students were prepared for online teaching but to make the best use of the current times, faculty members across various universities and education institutions are responding to the current crisis by trying to maximize the value for their students.

At Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India (EDII), Ahmedabad, faculty members deliberated on the uncertainty over reopening of the institute and welcoming the students back on the campus. There were discussions on various online education tools, available resources and infrastructure to engage the students remotely and keep them connected with effective academic engagement. Even before the crisis, EDII was conducting Open Learning Programme in Entrepreneurship (OLPE) and was also offering textbooks online to students of full time Post Graduate Diploma in Management – Business Entrepreneurship (PGDM-BE). But converting teaching resources and material into digital formats in such a short time was a challenge. It was a difficult task to move the class of more than 50 students to e-learning platform in the middle of the trimester. Creating an online learning environment where students are effectively engaged was one of the major considerations of moving classes to online platform. In one of the courses, the faculty used Zoom App to conduct the course. Small WhatsApp working groups were created with 6-8 students in each group and faculty interacted with them using WhatsApp group chats. Individual Zoom meeting rooms were created for online group activities and faculty moderated the discussions by visiting those meeting rooms. Though the course started with lots of anxiety related to online learning, the overall experience turned out to be very positive for the faculty as well as students.

Following are the important lessons learned from the experience of online teaching:

- Don't use just the PowerPoint presentation in online classes but try to use some of the following features to make the sessions more engaging:
 - 1.Whiteboarding
 - 2.Screen Sharing
 - 3.Virtual Backgrounds
 - 4.Annotations, etc.
- Avoid using too many videos. There may be issues related to sound, clarity and long duration of videos may distract the students
- Create a list of online etiquette and share with students in advance
- Create a session plan/agenda and share with students at the beginning of the class using the Scree Sharing option. This will set the tone for the session and make students aware of what they will be learning in the session
- Create smaller groups for discussion/class room activities by using appropriate features like Zoom's Breakout Room. This will help the faculty to track students' participation in the assigned tasks

- Mute students' micro-phone when they are not speaking to avoid unnecessary noise and disturbance
- Be prepared for issues pertaining to internet connectivity
- Encourage students to give feedback using reactions
- Keep asking frequent questions and engage the students continuously so that they don't lose track of the topic and stay there in attention
- Remember, teaching online is very much different than the regular class room sessions. Faculty members need to think of innovative methods of teaching and use tools that are convenient to use and encourage students to participate well
- Upskilling is the new norm. Be it a teacher or a student, everybody needs to upskill themselves in the new educational technology. Learn newer ways of engaging students online, create curiosity among them by using multiple mediums to interact be it audio/video/presentation/chats/whiteboards, etc.

The Students' Experience

Students' learning experiences are among the most important factors in evaluating the quality of online education. Many students opine that the online classes were not different than offline classes. However, some felt that students need some more time to get the hang of online classes which needs more of a self-disciplined approach to stay connected with the faculty during the session. Some students found online system more interactive as compared to traditional method. Many students felt that online learning is more empowering as they have the opportunity to view the information on their laptops and smart phones rather than receiving the information from the board or screen in the classroom. Sitting in the comfort of the home, not being disturbed by the class mates around them, made the learning more relaxed and increased their concentration in the course. However, many students kept complaining about the internet connectivity and speed that affected their experience of online learning.

Word of Caution

With the increasing popularity of online education platforms, there has also been a rising concern over the security and safety issues related to use of such e-learning platforms. Though most of these Apps are easy to use and convenient for daily sessions/meetings and conversations, careful consideration can play an important role in reducing the risks associated with them. Following are some of the important aspects, if kept in mind, can mitigate the threats associated with breach of privacy or so called zoom-bombing:

- Don't publicize the links of online sessions/meetings on social media or public forums. Doing so can increase the risk of hijacking. Remember, students don't need to create a Zoom account to join the online class. The URL can be shared

with them through email or any other communication medium used by the institute to allow them to join the online class.

- It is advisable to use two-factor authentication feature to strengthen the security of logging into the App/platform
- Disable private chats to have more control over the conduct of the sessions/meetings
- The rights of screen sharing must rest with the host/administrator to avoid others from using this feature unless they are permitted to do so or is required for the benefit of the meeting/session

Concluding Remarks

The current COVID-19 crisis has created a winning moment for online learning. Applications like Zoom and Google Hangouts have found new audiences in faculty and students. Use of technology as a communication platform has created curiosity and interest among them and increased their participation in the education process. With few initial hiccups, many educational institutions have successfully moved from traditional education to online learning. Academicians have shown agility, alertness and adaptability to revolutionize the teaching pedagogy and shift from the class room teaching to use of various online digital tools that can create an interactive and engaging learning environment. Radical changes in the mind-set, policies and perceptions will bring online education in the forefront. However, will this period of Corona quarantine spark a boom in online education is yet to be proved.

About the Author

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Dr. Kavita-Saxena Faculty at Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India (EDII), Gandhinagar, Dr. Kavita Saxena is an educator in the area of marketing and entrepreneurship with over 15 years of experience in academia and industry. She teaches courses related to Entrepreneurial Marketing, Small Business Promotion, Design Thinking and New Product Development. She has co-authored a book on "Emerging Trends in Entrepreneurship Research – Review of The Journal of Entrepreneurship" and has published many research papers and articles in journals and magazines of national and international repute. Her reports on the theme of Entrepreneurship Ecosystem are also published by reputed organizations. She recently participated in the Visiting Program on "Digital Transformation: ICT Centric Innovation" in Germany sponsored by Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) during May 2019. She is also selected for the prestigious AICTE-UKIERI Leadership Development Program for the year 2019-20.

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