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Challenges of e-Learning in an Era of Social Distancing in Higher Education

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Abstract

The COVID -19 pandemic has transformed our life and the age-old practices have come to a standstill and while the whole world is in chaos, the virtual world has answered the call. Educational practices have turned topsy turvy from traditional practices to virtual one. Technological organizations have been striving to support by sprucing up their existing online platforms, apps and providing training to educators. Besides, efforts have been made by Government [MHRD] and Non-governmental organisations to tackle the hiccup in the education system and bring about a smooth transition to the virtual world. Measures have been taken to update educators and stakeholders and adapt them to the changing scenario. Many educational institutions have shifted to virtual classrooms, using tools such as Zoom, Google Hangouts and Microsoft Teams, online resources and virtual platforms like Google Suite and You Tube videos. Teachers are forced to evolve new strategies to involve students in classes by changing the teaching pedagogy, feedbacks and constant monitoring. Still there are many pitfalls and drawbacks in assessment and grading. E-Learning using technology has not been accepted wholeheartedly by all, because it had been assumed that this method lacked the human element required in learning. Left with no other choice and after proper training virtual and flipped classrooms has been accepted by the masses. Results have shown that E-learning platforms are bringing a measurable difference in students' engagement and performance. It is providing a new dimension to the education space causing a shift in the education sector.

Keywords: Zoom, e-Learning, Higher education, Online resources

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has disturbed the regular lifestyle of humans across the world, the virtual world has come to the rescue. Educational institutions have changed their base to virtual platforms to conduct classes online. Therefore, in order to meet the requirements of completely all stages of education from Kinder garden to college level, online education has emerged as an alternate to ordinary face to face classes. Government and personal organizations have been trying best to help one another by sprucing up their existing online platforms, apps and providing training to teachers to use the online resources at optimum level. Besides, efforts are being made by government [MHRD] and non-government organizations and Ed tech companies to support the higher education system to make a smooth transition to the virtual world. Updating and encouraging teachers, organizing counseling sessions for stakeholders like teachers, parents and students are a number of the important measures taken by the administration within the recent past.

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With boundless determination to supply customized teaching-learning materials suitable for online classes and facilitate the schooling of youngsters, the Indian government has launched the PM e-VIDYA platform, with new DTH channels, one for every class to meet the requirements of the all strata of society.

Many educational institutions have moved to virtual classrooms, with the tools such as Zoom, Google Hangouts and Microsoft Teams. But there are some still stressed to get online. Both the teachers and schools are tapping additional effort to involve students in classes by changing the teaching pedagogy, taking feedback from parents and monitoring students constantly. There are some teachers who are using WhatsApp to stay connected with students. Some institutions are trying out online resources and virtual platforms like Google Suite and YouTube videos to make online classes as engaging as offline ones. But still there are many pitfalls and drawbacks such as making students write notes, assignments, monitor and grade them.

2. E-Learning

A learning system maintained formalized teaching but with the assistance of electronic resources is understood as E-learning. While teaching is often based in or out of the school rooms, the utilization of computers and therefore the Internet forms the main component of E-learning. E-learning also can be named as an internet enabled transmission of skills and knowledge, and therefore the delivery of education is formed to an outsized number of recipients at the same or different times. Earlier, it was not accepted wholeheartedly because it had been assumed that this system lacked the human element required in learning. However, with the rapid progress in technology and therefore the advancement in learning systems, it is now embraced by the masses. The use of computers served as a starter

of this revolution and with the passage of time, smartphones, tablets have occupied a vital place within the classrooms for learning. Books are slowly getting swapped by soft copies and pendrives. Knowledge also can be shared via the web, which is accessible 24/7, anywhere, anytime. E-Learning within the times of COVID-19 means all learning through E-Learning. Educational institutions are temporarily closed and students are at their residence.



Figure 1: E-Learning. Education

Source: <https://images.yourstory.com>

3. E-Learning in Higher Education

The concept of traditional learning has changed radically while classroom training is the sole option for learners. With the increased adoption of the web and new technologies, access to quality education is made possible. Online using a computer and web connection. It is the technological era when e-Learning in education is a common and revolutionary concept. In such a period, where students are compulsory to contend with an enormous treasure of knowledge from day to day, it becomes extremely important to understand why e-learning in education is presently being preferred over the strained and verified, more conservative methodologies.

1. Greater Access
2. Resource Scalability
3. Better Results
4. Improved Pace
5. Cost-Effectiveness
6. Quick Lesson Delivery
7. Personalization
8. Instant Upskilling
9. Environmentally Sound
10. Traceable Outcomes
11. Project-based learning
12. Blended learning

e-Learning in education fetches determinate differences in student engagement and performance. It reduces the gap in delivery of education and provides a substitute to classroom education.

4. E-Learning is Extensive in India

The Indian e-learning market size was \$247 mn, comprising 1.6 million users in 2016. It is likely witnessing an 8X growth to succeed in \$1.96 bn and therefore the present user base will raise at 44% CAGR to 9.6 million users by 2021. India is that the second largest after the US which has grown in e-learning market by 15.64% and exceeded \$48 bn by 2020.

5. Digital-Friendly Government Policies

The central government has launched several programs under the initiatives like 'Digital India' and 'Skill India' to spread digital literacy, create a knowledge-based society in India, and implement three principles 'access, equity and quality' of the Education Policy. Digital initiative taken by government of India such as,

- SWAYAM
- SWAYAMPRAKASH
- National Academic Depository [NAD]
- National Digital Library of India [NDL]
- E-Shodh Sindhu [eSS]
- Virtual Labs
- e-yantra
- Talk to Teacher Program
- E-acharya
- E-Kalpa
- FOSSEE [Free/Libre and open source software in Education]
- Vidwan
- Spoken tutorial
- BAADAL
- Global Initiative of Academic Networks [GIAN]
- e-PG Pathshala
- National Institutional Ranking Framework [NIRF]
- IMPRINT [Impacting Research Innovation and Technology]
- SAKSHAT–A one stop educational Portal
- Atal Ranking of Institutions and on Innovation Achievements [ARIIA]

- know your college
- Digilocker
- The National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning [NPTEL]
- OSCAR [open source courseware animations repository]
- Shodhgangotri
- Virtual Learning Environment
- Text Transcription of Video Content
- SOS Tools

6. E-Learning Challenges of the Teachers

As education goes on online, many educators are being asked to show their students from home. It is known that some of the teachers aren't conscious of online learning and the process as most of them are into traditional classroom teaching. It sometimes makes it difficult for them to change their way of teaching. Proper online training should be tended to teachers before teaching students. With all the advantages of online learning still there are few challenges faced by teachers.

6.1. Engaging Students

As students are moving towards online learning from traditional classrooms, it becomes difficult for teachers to regulate to a replacement learning platform. Teaching online might not influence and have interaction students for extended periods of time. Students can simply get distracted and miss concentration during live sittings. So the teacher needs to understand that online learning has a lot of advantages with respect to tools and interesting platforms to engage students in learning. Inclusion of those tools and multiple sorts of learning approaches like podcasts, videos (teaching channel, own videos and live classes), discussions, various sorts of text through learning resources and web log, different assessment methods (tests, quizzes, assignments and projects) learning activities and collaboration result in better learning outcomes.

6.2. Time Commitment

If the course content is assumed face then the time commitment has to be considered. It is quiet hard to adapt those learning into real online format. Teachers should tend a while for correct planning of the content and methods to deliver to the scholars. Teachers aren't ready to deliver the effective content in time. It is said that teachers take longer in teaching online than face to face. If students exceed their deadline in submitting assignments or projects cause more work a friendly tone can be used for communicating together with your students to determine rapport. Teachers can set reminders/alarm/due date for assignments and projects in your learning management system. Send it to your students one week before the submission deadline.

6.3. Communication

The more detailed the syllabus, the better to speak to the scholars. Sometimes teachers aren't given enough time for the preparation of content for his or her students. There are some students who evade communication with teachers during virtual learning. Online teaching is like communicating without visual communication, so students might misunderstand and may end in their poor performance. Sometimes students might invite an extension for his or her work or give any excuse for the delay. Flexibility has to be given to for the scholars in making up to their deadlines. Teachers must recognize the need of keeping in contact with the students and understand what kind of activities can accomplish the goal. Conduct discussions for specific content for the scholars with the chance to unravel the matter and learning effectively. Also providing discussion on practical questions by the scholars which will reduce frustration, problem-solving skills and handling technical issues. Teachers should provide a platform for the scholars so as to speak and collaborate with other fellow classmates.

6.4. Assessment

Assessment is that the most vital a part of online learning for college kids also as teachers. And it causes stress to students at times. So whenever there are assignments or projects, teachers might face tons of questions from the scholars. As there's less communication between students and teachers, expectation from the students' performances

also differs. Students are likely to experience less homework, less assignments or lack of examination sometimes. This can cause difficulties for teachers in assessments. Teachers must understand the type of questions students might ask and prepare FAQs for the common questions. Make sure that you simply give proper assignments and conduct tests at regular intervals. This can assist you to assess them supported their performance.

6.5. Feedback

Every student needs feedback for his or her performance for improvement. Teachers find it difficult to offer feedback to all or some students individually. Sometimes few students get benefited from it while others don't. As students aren't given proper feedback resulting in poor performance. Teachers don't find proper methods of providing feedback to all or any the scholars. Teachers should understand how important it is to give feedback for the students for their growth and improvement. It must be made personalized guidance is provided to all or any the scholars in order that they will work on their learning abilities.

6.6. Learning Management Systems

Teachers experience a tough time in expressing their content to students, especially assignments and assessments. There are problems with understanding the extent of difficulty in terms in fact content among students. According to teachers, the event opportunities that occur face to face communication fail in online learning. Teachers should have an understanding of the strong learning management system and web technologies that can help pedagogy. They have to think and cash in the training and workshops attended during teacher training, apply the methods/resources that is relevant to the subject specialization for effective teaching and management systems has to be applied. Teachers can also approach other teachers who realize the management system in online learning.

6.7. Teaching Methods

The majority of the teachers follow typical classroom-style teaching methods, as they are familiar with blackboard and books. It becomes hard for them to implement new teaching methods that are totally computer-generated and technology-driven. Most important thing is to urge comfortable during a virtual classroom. Find out different sorts of tools that make teaching and assessment simple and straightforward have to be used. Teachers can develop many teaching methods which will improve their learning like conducting different activities, model making, debates, group activities, virtual tours, group discussions, role play, etc.

6.8. Fear of Cheating

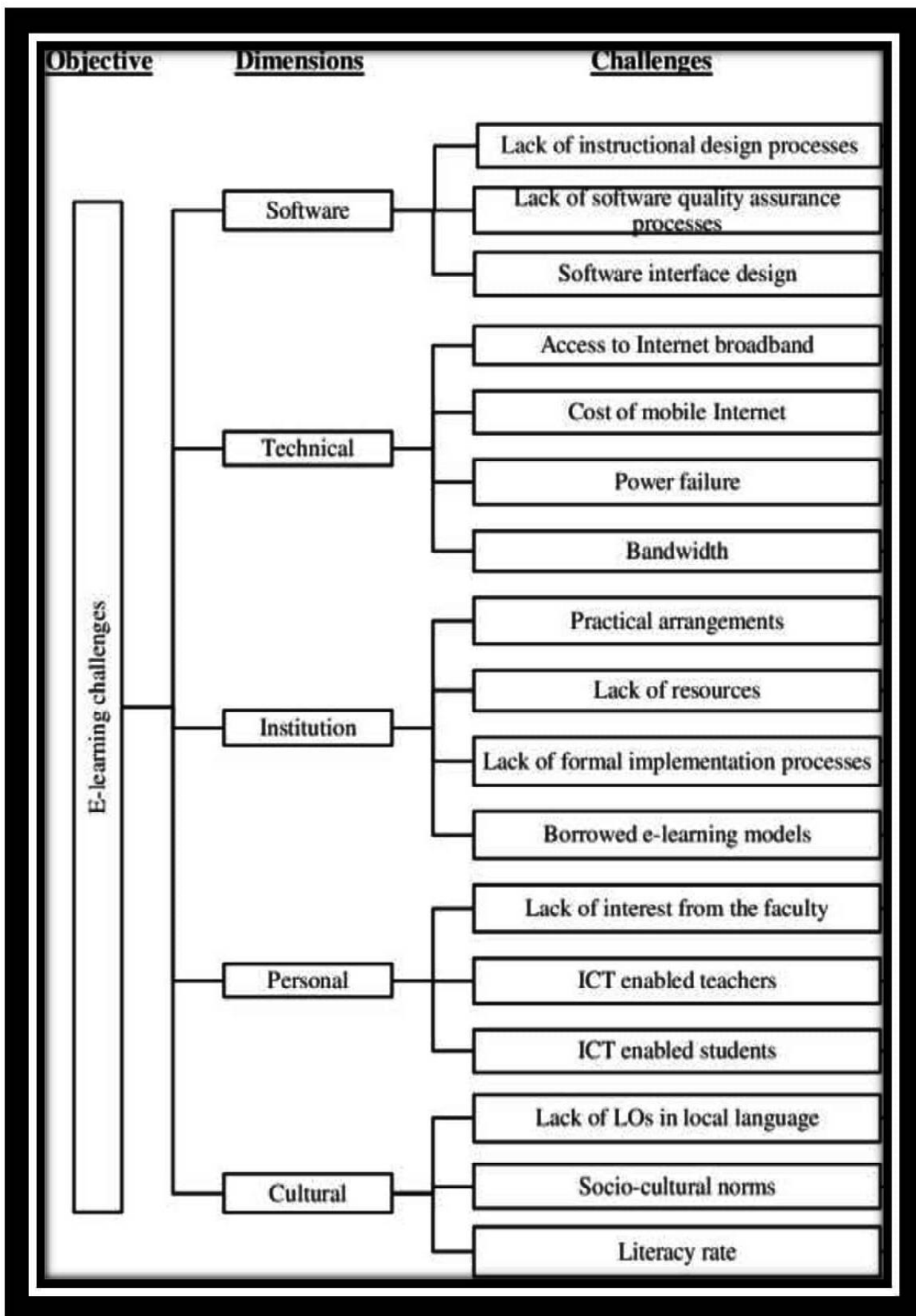
Sometimes teachers might feel concerned about the danger of cheating in online learning. They feel that students can cheat to urge better leads to the tests and assignments. There are many reliable ways to reinforce the integrity of online learning. Teachers should allow students to require exams consistent with their convenience. Do not force for assignments or any tests unless they're ready.

6.9. Technical Issues

Several teachers struggle with practical problems that are inevitable and cause anxiety. They become helpless if something technical errors arise during live session or communicating with students. Teacher should contact technical support for solving problems that can cause hindrance in the learning process. Upgrading your computer with apps and software which will help in an efficient learning process with a high-speed internet connection is required.

6.10. Course Content

The course content was designed earlier with reference to traditional classrooms. But with the shift to online learning, it requires redesigning in fact which may take a substantial amount of your time and energy. It would be successful if better learning outcomes are planned before hands. Most of the cases (problem oriented subjects), these courses work well in traditional classrooms but go flat in online learning. It happens when there are not any content-related activities, assignments or projects which will be done online. Teacher must understand the course content and how to fit it into online course. Some changes in terms of activities and assignments could be made for a far better understanding of the concepts.



7. Online Learning Challenges Faced By Students

7.1. Adaptability

Students find it hard to adapt to a web learning environment immediately after traditional classroom learning. Due to the sudden change, they're unable to adapt to the computer-based learning. Students who are always studying within the traditional classroom mindset aren't ready to specialize in online platforms. It is important for them to simply accept the new learning environment with an open mind. Nowadays adaptive learning is using AI to regulate the content consistent with individual needs. It supports in as long as personalized developments to spot their weaknesses and strengths for better learning outcomes.

7.2. Technical Issues

Many students aren't well equipped with a high internet connection that's required for online learning. Sometimes students may face technical issues as they're not much aware of technology and computer applications. A slow and high internet connection can play a crucial role in how quickly you'll attend the category and don't miss any live sessions. There is an opportunity of poor connectivity which results in difficulty in downloading some information associated with the topic, blurred videos, etc. students just need to find a high-speed internet connection at your home, and don't know where to get technical support for the connection and other practical issues related to software and tools for effective learning.

7.3. Computer Knowledge

Lack of computer education could also be a serious concern in today's world. Students who are still unable to operate basic computers with MS word and PowerPoint. And whenever some technical issues emerge, they find it difficult to unravel the matter in such a scenario. Students face many difficulties with online classes, MS office, communication-related apps and websites, browsing study materials, etc. Some do not possess proficiency to like login, live classes, creating and submitting work, communicating with teachers and friends. Students should be provided access to support devices which can help them solve technical problems via call, email or live chat. You ought to concentrate to your instructor during the tactic of solving the issues.

7.4. Time Management

Many students struggle in managing their time in online learning. E-learning is totally new for them and requires concentrated work. They have a scheduled planner to manage their time in an efficient manner. Online learning provides flexible time unlike traditional classrooms. But some students face difficulties in adjusting to the time required for online learning. Time management is vital for believe online learning. Students needs time and energy for better learning outcomes. Students should know the factors which can affect your timings during the training process like,

Avoid Distractions – plan to avoid distractions which can affect your learning. There are many platforms which can engage to entertainment and communication. But confirm that time is set for breaks and specialize in learning as scheduled to avoid missing live classes or sessions.

Create To-Do List –prepare a listing of activities on an everyday basis. Use this list to tackle each task. Confirm that the list is adhered and is established which the routine which can make time management practices easy.

Seek Help – To manage time during e-learning get assistance from your parents, friends and families. In order to not miss out on learning and at an equivalent time work are becoming to be done.

Avoid Multitasking – don't plan to take up multiple tasks at the same time. Have single task at a time because it can make the work less effective and productive.

7.5. Self Motivation

Students are losing hope once they find difficulty in online learning. It requires motivation to finish tasks and interact students with their learning. Lack of motivation could even be a typical challenge for all students.

Involve Yourself – you need to show up for all the activities and learning during the sessions is required. Confirm that logging in a day, checking for the status and appearing altogether the sessions and discussions is compulsory. Join in conjunction with your friends and teachers for asking and sharing information.

Schedule Time for Learning – Students have to prepare a study plan for effective learning. Take a chance and restart back to learning with an equivalent interest and enthusiasm.

Stay Positive – Confirm that positivity is maintained towards online learning. Make use of the time within the only way and gain knowledge for better learning outcomes.

7.6. Distraction

Learning from house is a tremendous experience. It is possibly expected that things around are kind of a faculty campus. But reception things are different as an example, you'd possibly need a huge classroom, parks, playgrounds, canteens, friends, teachers around you to guide and learn. But with online learning, everything has to be managed in one room with parents around you. Students are often easily distracted by small things reception. Students should inform their parents and friends about the time of online learning in order that there'll be no distractions from their side. Restrict the study area for others to return during live sessions and video calls. Confirm to relax within the breaks set within the schedule. During this way, is balanced learning and quality time alongside your friends and family is balanced.

7.7. Learning Styles

Most of the students have learned within the physical classroom. Online learning can cause to adapt to different types of learning. There are some students who can adapt to those styles quickly but some of the students who need more time will lack in attention, inability to understand the online class, struggle in making projects and assignments using technology. To get better learning outcomes, it's important to know the training styles. Students will learn through interaction, visual presentations, audio classes or written notes.

7.8. Communication

Students lack effective communication skills during online learning. Teachers give assignments for improving reading and writing skills but there's a chance that they might not be able to write so convincingly that educators understand the concept behind their assignments. There are some students who feel shy to talk with their teachers and friends because of the new model of learning. It'd happen thanks to lack of interest, poor technological skills with apps and video calls or unable to precise themselves via live chats, emails or text messages. Students should become aware of the importance of communication for better learning. Online learning enhances your learning experience and it offers a platform for announcement and interface with others. In issues in communication, help from teachers and friends can be sought. Tools which can assist in improving your communication skills can be learnt from them. Reading writing and interacting is needed for better communication.

7.9. Virtual Engagement

Online classes aid teachers in understanding, coursework, communication via email, live chats or messages and delivering content by live sessions, presentations, recorded videos or lectures for the students. In spite of those activities, still some students don't find engaging compared to a typical one. Students find it difficult to speak face to face who struggles with understanding concepts. Many times these students don't even approach teachers to clear their doubts. Students can communicate with teachers in private to clear doubts either through virtual learning platforms or calls. Teachers could be ready to assist you out more clearly. And they can assist you with a number of the straightforward reading materials that are simple to know. Overtime together with your teachers and friends after the web classes can yield for a far better understanding of the topic.

7.10. Feedback

Every student needs feedback for his or her performance during the training process in order that they will improve their learning abilities. They are not only observed during the tests or exams but also for every assignment and project. Research reveals that the scholars hardly visit their assignments to see their suggestions and comments. The feedback model with reference to online is going to be difficult for them to know and implement. Students can approach teachers for feedback related to performance. Students can improve your learning pattern supported the feedback.

8. Challenges are Still Many

Online education definitely gives a bright future in India, but the journey is fraught with several challenges.

- Insufficient digital infrastructure
- Poor learning engagement
- Lack of standardization, credibility and quality

- Language of the courses
- Low completion rates

9. Conclusion

E-learning platforms are bringing a measurable difference in students' engagement and performance. Pearson India Managing Director Vikas Singh says that it reduces gaps in the delivery of education and gives a new dimension to the education space. In the current scenario, professionals will be required to re-skill themselves every 3-4 years to remain relevant in their evolving job roles, says Zairus Master, CEO, Shine Learning.com, which provides access to certification courses from top global educational service providers. At this scale, e-learning platforms are the sole way forward. Professionals will get to equip themselves with relevant skills before their current skills become obsolete. Moreover, the government is adopting a series of measures to bring an industrial revolution to intensify e-learning which can ultimately cause a serious shift within the Indian education sector.

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