



VIRTUAL LEARNING: A CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

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Abstract:

Few basic rights are given to all citizens by constitution of India, and right to education is one of them. It makes education the fundamental right of each and every individual. But India being a developing nation faces lots of obstacles in this overall process and limited budget and poor infrastructure tops this chart. In this present scenario, virtual learning act as a remedy, that focusses on providing low-cost education to large number of learners. Keeping that groundwork as a base, present study tries to highlight the concept of virtual learning, its kinds, its benefits and drawbacks associated with it. Beginning with the meaning of virtual learning, this paper also differentiates between synchronous, asynchronous and hybrid virtual learning. It also discusses in detail about benefit and drawbacks of virtual learning. The study also wraps the entire situation in the single frame that will provide base to the future researchers. The study also notifies about the limitations of the present research work that evaluates the breadth for future research work on the above discussed theme.

Introduction:

Virtual learning, online learning and e-learning are the most common terms used to describe modern learning mediums. These words are often interchangeable because they fall into the broader concept of technology-upgraded education (Cunff, 2022). However, there is a gigantic disparity between these (Corey, 2020) and it highlights discriminated facet of education. Moreover, virtual learning is the most recent aspect of technology-driven learning adopted during the pandemic. With the closure of schools,

colleges, universities and educational institutions, virtual learning became the only practical and feasible solution (Laura, 2023). However, virtual learning has maintained its viability even after the end of the pandemic, which is the best alternative for rendering low-cost education to numerous learners at the same time.

Objectives:

This research paper has the following objectives. It aims at achieving the following: -

1. To provide theoretical framework for understanding the concept of virtual learning.
2. To highlight the benefits and advantages of virtual learning.
3. To discuss about the disadvantages of virtual learning.

Methodology:

This study is performed using secondary data compiled using journals, websites, publications and newspapers.

Meaning:

Virtual learning is broader than online learning and goes beyond it (online learning is a significant component) (Laura, 2023). It refers to the scenario in the learning environment where instructors or educational facilitators and learners are isolated by distance or time (Dung, 2020). Teaching actions are undertaken using technology (Racheva, 2017). It is defined as the process of rendering education using a digital and modern medium as a remedial solution in case of a physical gap between student and teacher (Stonebraker & Hazeltine, 2004; Seth et al., 2019). Information or content of the courses is transmitted to the students through multimedia sources, the internet, videoconferencing, and information technology applications. Electronic channels include video, voice and data

through television, streaming audio and videos, radio and web-based technology (Stonebraker & Hazeltine, 2004). These technologies marked a new era of learning which is better and cheaper (Lizzio et al., 2010). Virtual learning differs from traditional learning as well as online learning. In virtual learning, the education facilitator and students join the class at a similar time, which helps them establish real-time interactions (Cunff, 2022).

Virtual learning can be bifurcated into three categories: -

1. **Synchronous Virtual Learning-** is a form of learning in which learners are required to join online live- streamed classes. Education facilitators stream their presentations or lecture, providing a platform for learners to raise their queries online through the microphone, live chat, or webcam. There is a high degree of interactivity. It provides the participant with a platform allowing them to establish real-time communication using video or audio connections (Racheva, 2017). Virtual learning environments equip learners with the opportunity of establishing linkages with fellows at the same time.

2. **Asynchronous Virtual Learning-** involves pre-captured and pre-recorded lectures; learners are given preference to attend these according to their own inclination. Faculties and instructors publish lectures, teaching material, and video or audio files on their preferred platforms. This learning procedure is not based on fixed time intervals (Racheva, 2017). Small assessments or quizzes accompany these to examine whether students are on track with the lecture series and class schedule. In case of any qualms, learners can associate with instructors through e-mails or text chat. The communication between the learners is based on asynchronous forms, which leads to passive feedback from learners, and unsatisfactory communication between facilitators and learners. Students also experience solitary as they feel disconnected from each other because of the absence of any live communication.
3. **Hybrid Virtual learning-** is the aggregation of both in-personal and virtual learning. This is the most frequently adopted medium of learning desired for structured

communication and lessons with the instructors. It is the framework that integrates with-in personal instructors with online learning (Robinson, 2020).

Benefits of Virtual Learning:

1. **Flexibility-** Since virtual learning involves the usage of information technology. It is a much more flexible approach in comparison to traditional classrooms. Virtual learning is the perfect opportunity for enthusiastic learners to learn while working, as in traditional classrooms, physical presence is compulsive (The benefits of online education in a virtual classroom, 2023). It offers more privileges to participants in terms of deciding learning hours. The availability of online lectures can be checked based on their schedule. Interested candidates can study at their convenience.
2. **Removes the time and space hurdle-** Developing nations still face physical barriers in rendering education. In this scenario, virtual learning act as a boom. It removes the space, time and distance barriers between instructors, learners and participants. It enables educational facilitators to cater to

numerous participants at the same time that too at a reduced cost.

3. **Cost-effective-** The presence of inflation is witnessed in every sphere of living, including education. However, virtual learning can be cost-effective in analogy with other learning mediums. It provides several cost saving procedures to the learners. The cost of transportation becomes negligible in the virtual learning scenario, as participants are not physically required in the classrooms. Education through a virtual environment is relatively cheaper than the traditional methodology. Virtual learning allows numerous participants to enroll together and reap the benefit of the economics of scale.

4. **Accessibility to online content-** Where traditional classroom leaves learners accountable for maintaining and assembling notes, virtual learning is quite divergent. Virtual learning mediums such as online content, presentations, short video clips, and audio recordings can be revisited and viewed repeatedly, which is more straightforward, easy and effortless.

5. **Enhance Management Skills-** The flexibility of virtual learning enables learners to enrich their management skills. Students need to manage their course themselves within a given time framework. This responsibility helps students in sharpening their management skills.

Despite these benefits, virtual learning is accompanied by certain drawbacks.

Drawbacks of Virtual Learning:

1. **Technical problems-** Virtual learning is entirely based on technology. Although we are part of a technologically collaborated world, this upgradation has limitations. In the 21st century, we also experience inconsistent and unstable internet connections, outdated or contaminated hardware, and software bugs that disrupt the online learning process. These hindrances in online learning hamper the learner's experience and act as an obstacle in the virtual learning procedure.
2. **Lack of face-to-face interaction-** As there are two sides to every coin, collaterally, the distance between instructor and learner has advantages and disadvantages. Alike other online learning

mediums, virtual learning also lack face-to-face communication between instructor and students. This lack of direct communication sometimes leads to social isolation among learners. Students also experience a lack of pressure, which is a drawback because students abandon their studies quickly.

3. **Cultural hurdles-** Prioritizing variations and inclusion is critical in the case of managing virtual learning. In this global learning environment, course content creators and participants do not share a common language, religion, views, experiences, and expectations. Course content created, designed, and delivered from a single perspective can result in disengagement, resentment, interpretation problems, and even a lack of understanding.
4. **Necessitate self-discipline-** Virtual learning is more of a self-dependent medium of learning. Participants need to be self-motivated and self-disciplined in this whole process. Moreover, the requirement of these intrinsic factors is a hurdle for introverted learners.

Conclusion:

The present paper aimed at providing a ground framework that can explain the whole scenario of virtual learning. In particular, the meaning, benefits, and drawbacks of virtual learning are highlighted in this paper. This is one of the few research papers that has consolidated past research work collaboratively. The present work extends the existing literature and provides the groundwork for future research. It is fruitful for educational facilitators, instructors, learners, participants, and institutions. It can help government and non-government organizations that are trying to cater education to a large number of learners. They can plan future steps based on the existing issues.

Limitations:

However, like other research work current study also has certain limitations.

1. This study does not give any weightage to the quantitative data; the study is qualitative.
2. The study is based on secondary data collected from selectively available sources.
3. The study discusses virtual learning in general without considering its variations.

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