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MOOCs-SWAYAM: Bridging the gap in higher education access in India

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Abstract

Education is a weapon for the conquest of knowledge. Without the help of education, we cannot overcome the darkness of ignorance. For the better improvement of education, we need a better platform and better-experienced resource persons. In the era of technology, we can access information and knowledge from all over the world within a second, which makes our learning process easier and faster. The Indian Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)-SWAYAM brings a remarkable change in the Indian higher education system. It provides the opportunity to job holder learners to enroll in their willing courses without any physical classroom restriction, and it also provides a self-paced learning environment to all groups of learners in their day-to-day hectic working schedules. This paper aims to discuss, the role of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)-SWAYAM in bridging the gap and distance in access to higher education. MOOCs-SWAYAM is an open online platform that offers a worldwide course from various disciplines with various subject experts and experienced skillful resource persons. This platform aims to provide free, flexible, and quality education to all. It plays a significant role in democratizing education by providing access to quality and skillful learning resources to learners worldwide. Furthermore, the paper discusses the journey of MOOCs- SWAYAM and how SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) helps bridge the gap and distance in higher education access in India.

Keywords: MOOC, SWAYAM, higher education, access

Introduction

Education is the key to success, which helps to unlock our minds from the darkness of ignorance. It helps develop our cognitive, affective, and psychophysical areas of learning. In simple words, it helps in the all-round development of the individual and creates better citizenship. In the twentieth century, education increased productivity and fruitfulness with the help of technology.

Integration of technology in education brings a remarkable change in the field of modern education that creates employability, opportunities, and valuable human resources for society. The Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)-SWAYAM is an Indian government initiative to offer flexible, accessible, and cost-effective education to nine class to PG students. The main aim of this platform is to establish democratized education that will reduce the gap in higher education and create a bridge that connects learners with higher education. The SWAYAM is an initiative by the government of India that mainly aims to provide free and flexible online courses for students as well as teachers across India. It was launched by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (presently known as the Ministry of Education) on 9th July 2017. This platform offers different courses across various disciplines by different teachers from various institutions like IITs, IIMs, central universities, other reputed universities, and other educational institutions. The basic principles of SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) are acquiring access, quality, and equity among learners.

The SWAYAM offered different courses by coordinating with nine different coordinators such as the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Consortium for Educational Communication (CEC), Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIMB), National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), National Institute of Technical Teachers Training and Research (NITTR), National Programme on Technology Enhanced

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Learning (NPTL), and last one is University Grants Commission (UGC). The University Grants Commission launched the Credit Transfer Regulation in 2016. These Regulations allow learners to transfer their earned credit to their respective academic programs easily. The courses offered through SWAYAM are free of cost for any learners, but there are few exam and certification fees for those learners wanting a certificate. At the end of each course offered through SWAYAM. There will be an evaluation of learners through a proctored examination, and after the examination earned credit transfer into our respective course.

Review of Related Literature

Ahmed and Baishya (2019) ^[1], conducted a study on “MOOCs with special reference to SWAYAM: a study based on recent development” and found that the launch of SWAYAM as a MOOCs platform by the government of India has brought a remarkable revolution in the education scenario of India. Through the help of the SWAYAM, the challenges identified from the study can be easily overcome. Bordoloi, *et al.* (2020) ^[3], conducted a study on “Lifelong learning opportunities through MOOCs in India” and found that MOOCs are the future ODL in the present era. They have not only offered free and flexible education but have also provided a bright direction to avail the quality educational opportunities provided by different public and private institutes.

Reddy (2020) ^[11], conducted a study on “MOOC in higher education in India: benefits and challenges” and found that various MOOC platforms are being used in India to offer different courses such as mooKIT, NPTEL, and SWAYAM. SWAYAM has been very recently by the government of India. This initiative of the government aims to provide free, flexible, and quality education to all.

Vijayashekaranyaka J R (2020), conducted a study on “SWAYAM: The Way to Success MOOCs in India” and found that the success rate of SWAYAM is based on the content quality and relevant courses offered to the public. Every educational institution should have arranged separate courses for the students who want to learn.

Paul (2020) ^[10], conducted a study on “SWAYAM: the new era of e-learning platform in India through MOOC” and found that with proper planning, management, and implementation, SWAYAM can play an important role in Digital India and Skill India missions of the government of India. It helps to access the universal education.

Mohile (2021) ^[9], conducted a study on “e-learning using SWAYAM (MOOCs) - awareness among undergraduate and postgraduate students” and found that there needs to be strong motivation and awareness from educational institutions and government bodies to learners about the importance of SWAYAM.

Soy and Bauri (2023) ^[13], June conducted a study on “MOOCs as a tool for higher education: an empirical study” and found that MOOCs are a golden opportunity for students to access quality, free, and flexible education easily. This paper attempts to explore the important role of MOOCs in higher education.

Bhesera and Bika (2024) ^[2], conducted a study on “Access, equity, and quality in higher education: Envisioning India through SWAYAM” and found that in the higher education sector SWAYAM as a MOOC platform has been attempting

to make education quality-oriented. It plays a vital role in enhancing the knowledge system of India.

The objective of the Study

1. To know the history of MOOCs and SWAYAM.
2. To know the basic features of the SWAYAM.
3. To discuss the aim of the SWAYAM.
4. To know the National coordinators of the SWAYAM.
5. To discuss the role of the SWAYAM in higher education.

Methodology of the Study

The methodology of this study involves a comprehensive literature review and qualitative analysis of secondary data to understand the present scenario of MOOCs-SWAYAM in India. It also includes an analysis of government policy and initiatives.

History of MOOCs and SWAYAM

The concept of MOOCs was first used by George Siemens and Stephen Down in 2008 at the University of Prince Edward, Island, for connective knowledge. In 2011, Stanford University, California, US, offered free online courses through MOOCs. In 2011, Sebastian Thrun founded a company called 'Udacity' with Mike Sokolski to offer MOOCs. In April 2012, Andrew Ng and Dafe Koller, two other Stanford professors, started the company 'Coursera' which collaborates with several universities to offer MOOCs.

Move forward towards the history of MOOCs- SWAYAM in India.

The Government of India has decided to provide free and flexible education to all students. In February 2009, the Indian government launched the National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (NMEICT). On July 9, 2017, MHRD launched a national platform called SWAYAM (Study Web of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) for MOOCs to offer online courses from 9th to post-graduation class. It has nine national coordinator appointments by MHRD, namely AICTE, CEC, NPTEL, UGC, NCERT, NIOS, IGNOU, IIMB, and NITTR.

Types of MOOCs

Mainly MOOCs can be divided into two types in their approach to course delivery

1. **xMOOCs (extended MOOCs):** It stands on extended MOOCs. This MOOCs are associated with a fixed schedule and focuses on delivering the content at a predetermined time. xMOOCs focus more on a behaviorist approach and open source for course management.
2. **cMOOCs (Connective MOOCs):** Stand on connective MOOCs. cMOOCs are based on the connectivism and decentralized principle of education. It is based on networking learning. Examples of these MOOC platforms are Future Learn and Canvas.

Basic Features of the SWAYAM

1. **Free Courses:** SWAYAM offered free courses in different subjects and levels, including school education, undergraduate, postgraduate, and even technical and professional courses.

2. **Quality Content:** Courses offered by SWAYAM are developed by reputed universities and institutions professors, such as IIMs, IIT, NIT, and central universities, with quality content.
3. **Interactive Learning:** All courses offered by SWAYAM include interactive learning strategies through integrating technology and elements such as quizzes, assignments, and discussion forums to enhance learning style.
4. **Certification:** SWAYAM provides certification features to learners after the successful completion of the course and the exam conducted by the exam proctorial board. It helps learners, which can be beneficial for their academic and professional growth.
5. **Accessibility:** SWAYAM courses are freely accessible via the internet and smartphone. It provides an opportunity for all levels of learners to access free and flexible education all over India without any physical restrictions.
6. **Flexible Learning:** Learners can access their courses according to their own pace and time. It provides a self-paced learning opportunity for all learners.
7. **Credit Transfer:** SWAYAM learners can transfer their earned credit to their respective courses according to their performance for academic and professional growth.

The Aim of the SWAYAM: To provide access to free and flexible high-quality educational courses to all levels of learners according to their respective areas and interests.

1. To bridge the gap and minimize the distance of higher education access, especially for those who live in remote and backward areas.
2. To create a diverse learning society by the help of providing different courses to cater to diverse interests and needs.
3. To facilitate life-long learning with life skills education through different valued courses.
4. To inculcate employability skills among learners that help to enhance employment and reduce unemployment in society.
5. To foster innovation and creativity in teaching and learning methods through the integration of technology in education.
6. To provide opportunities for all teachers to teach a wider audience and interact with learners in new ways.
7. To promote a multidisciplinary learning approach among students by offering different courses and content.
8. To enhance collaboration and knowledge-sharing skills among all learners and teachers across the county.
9. To support the National Education Policy goals to increase the gross enrolment ratio and minimize the dropout rate in higher education. And demonetization of education in India.

Table 1: The National Coordinators of the SWAYAM

Sl. No.	National Coordinators Name	Sector
1.	All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)	Technical Education
2.	Consortium for Educational Communication (CEC)	Digital Education
3.	Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)	Distance Education
4.	Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIMB)	Management
5.	National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)	Teacher Education
6.	National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS)	Open Schooling
7.	National Institute of Technical Teachers Training and Research (NITTR)	Technical Teachers Training and Research
8.	National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL)	Engineering, Physical Sciences and Management
9.	University Grants Commission (UGC)	Higher Education

The Role of the SWAYAM Bridging the Gap in Higher Education Access in India

1. **Supports Government Initiatives:** It supports government policy and initiatives like Digital India and Skill India by providing free, flexible digital and skillful educational resources.
2. **Universal Access to Quality Education:** SWAYAM provides universal access to quality education without any free and physical restrictions, a person can access courses at anytime and anywhere with good internet connectivity.
3. **Enhanced Learning Opportunities:** SWAYAM offers different courses for different groups of learners according to their interests and needs. It offers many more advanced courses, which may not be available in the traditional formal education system.
4. **Flexible Learning:** It allows learners to learn at their location and as per their convenience. SWAYAM provides an opportunity to learn to those who have busy schedules or are facing problems in traditional education due to time, cost, and communication barriers.

5. **Cost-effective:** It offers free courses, this feature makes education more flexible, and affordable, minimizing the financial burden on learners and maximizing access to higher education.
6. **Skill Development:** It focuses on offering courses that develop practical skills, making learners more skillful and employable. SWAYAM bridging the gap between higher education and backward learners.
7. **Promotes Life Long Learning:** By providing courses for all groups of learners at every point of their career, SWAYAM encourages lifelong learning and supports them advance their knowledge, skills, and abilities.
8. **Bridge for Backward and Remote Area Learners:** It serves as a link for disadvantaged learners who might not otherwise have access to higher education because of financial or geographical limits.
9. **Professional Development:** It provides professional skill-building courses that help learners grow in their professions and remain relevant in their fields.
10. **Promotes Innovation:** Through the open platform, it gives educators to try out and experiment with new teaching techniques and technological innovations.

Through this feature, it promotes innovation in education.

11. **Capacity Building:** By offering tools and resources to improve curriculum and teaching strategies, it supports learners and educators in developing their capacity.
12. **Reduces Brain Drain:** SWAYAM lessens brain drain and advances national development by offering high-quality education locally, hence minimizing travel elsewhere for their education.
13. **Global Exposure:** Students can access courses from foreign universities through SWAYAM, which enhances their perspective and makes them more marketable in the global market.

Conclusion

We conclude that SWAYAM plays an important role in closing the access gap to higher education in India. It makes education more flexible and accessible by providing a large selection of excellent courses in wide subjects. SWAYAM helps learners especially those from underprivileged backgrounds by offering free and flexible courses. It promotes lifelong learning by offering different courses to different learners according to their interests and needs. It also promotes inclusivity in learning by offering content and courses in multiple languages, creating diverse learners across the country. Moreover, it fosters skill development and offers digital resources in support of government initiatives like Digital India and Skill India. The government should prioritize improving the caliber and applicability of the curriculum as well as raising awareness among students to maximize the impact of SWAYAM in closing the access gap to higher education in India.

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