

TEACHING PERFORMING ARTS ONLINE: A STUDY OF CERTIFICATE COURSE IN HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL MUSIC OF IGNOU

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Abstract

At present e-Learning, is considered as the most effective mode of learning in higher education. With its easy reach among the learners, this expanding alternative mode calls for ensuring and imparting a sound and qualitative education. It has surpassed the limitation of earlier distance learning modes and has successfully taken along the subjects with practical components too. IGNOU has become the first University in India to venture into teaching music through online mode. The present study is an attempt to look at the issues related to the quality dimensions of e-learning in the subject of Indian Music.

Keywords: e-Learning, Qualitative education, Covid 19, Music

Introduction

The advent of communication through Web based technology has transformed every field, including the area of higher education sector, which has undergone a sea change in the recent past while braving the COVID 19. Internationally, a majority of the institutions offering higher education are making strenuous efforts to revise their academic orientations and the course delivery strategies to suit the present need of the student community. It was also observed by several researchers that integration of the Information technology tools into higher education stream has made the process of teaching and learning more interesting and engaging. In this context, online learning mode has emerged as a major higher education option before the global student community in general and students of Indian Classical Music in particular. Music institutions, though operating privately in countries like America, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Germany and various other developed countries have made efforts to re-adjust their strategies of imparting education in the light of the contemporary challenges. While advanced countries responded to these pressures of globalization rather more successfully with their vast resources, country like India is still in the process of designing strategies to re-adjust to the dynamic phase of global reforms in the formal education in the subject like music. In this context, it has been found that the student options are no longer constrained by boundaries, rather many keen western learners are finding an easier and affordable means of learning Indian Classical Music and, therefore, it is paving the way for the emergence of new internet-based borderless virtual education.

The Concept of e-Learning in the Context of Indian Classical Music

Music education involves active practical training apart from the study of theory which makes the learner understand how these two aspects interact to enhance the practice of music

as a discipline. Although the theoretical aspect comprises a lesser proportion of the discipline, the successful interaction between theory and practice is vital to the understanding of music, and, arguably, results in better performance of the art of music. Both theoretical and practical components are therefore important and complementary to music education. It is pertinent to mention here that Music departments at all levels of education worldwide are considerably small in general, for a number of reasons which are enlisted in the following-

1. Much of vocal and instrumental training is skill-based, geared towards developing proficiency in performance. Since pace for acquiring skills to sing or play instruments vary student to student, there is always a need for personal attention in teaching resulting in discouragement in admission of large number of student in one class. On the contrary, less quantity of students means less financial contribution from the students and more financial burden on the institution. So which is why even the colleges and institutions funded by the government have very small music departments in their institutions.
2. On one hand equipping the music rooms in an institute is quite expensive, while on the other hand the requirement of having personal instruments for the students, compel the students to purchase their own instruments which also further reduces the number of potential students.
3. Thirdly and most importantly, there are very few structured avenues of employment opening for the music students. Except for the teaching jobs in schools and colleges there are not many jobs for the average students of music. Talented extra ordinaries however become individual performers or join in media and film music industry.

So, in India, as in many other countries, access to music education is limited, with a considerable number of students interested in furthering their education for a lucrative salaried employment. However, effect of music in one's life cannot be ignored. One of the great things about music in general, is that music opens up a whole new world of experience that further enhances the mental and physical coordination. Music can provide an escape from everyday life or even it can serve as an alternative means of expressing one's own capabilities. Though most of academicians are of the opinion that all fine arts including music should be extracurricular activities, it is increasingly evident that there is a need for extension of music training to the many interested people who do not have opportunities to study the discipline at university level. So, for many, online learning comes as easy solution to this challenge. The above situation compels service providers to explore possibilities of conducting music instruction through the internet as a way of reaching more people.

The potential of e-Learning in music education

The key components of the e-Learning industry are content, technologies and services.

E-lessons are generally designed to guide students through information or help them perform specific tasks. Two distinct types of e-content have been identified, namely information-based and performance-based content. The former communicates information to the student, while the latter involves the building of a procedural skill in which the student is expected to increase proficiency. Both types of content are applicable to music education.

The theory of music is information-based, and includes such aspects as history of music, theory of music, technicalities of ragas and forms, ethnomusicology, the psychology and sociology of music, among many others. The application of e-Learning to information-based content greatly enhance the process of teaching and learning in this area, and provide a forum for students to interact widely with their peers and teachers through web based various discussion forums now available even on mobile phones.

The practical aspect of music forms the core aspect of the discipline, since music is essentially a performing art. The application of e-Learning to this aspect of music is hence very important, yet is also the more challenging of the two types of content. It is for this reason that, Universities do not wish to provide music education through e-learning. However, this constraint has been successfully overcome by traditional and famed Music practitioners. All the named and famed Indian music personalities today impart practical music training through internet-based environments. There are many private organizations too who are using LMS, you-tube, video – conferencing and virtual platforms to teach Indian Classical Music to the learners on one-to-one basis.

Developments in internet and multimedia technologies are the two key enablers of e-Learning. According to Rosenberg (2000), successful e-Learning depends on building a strategy that optimises the technology within an organisational culture that is ready and willing to use it. Various technologies, which are constantly improving, have been developed to facilitate e-Learning. The increasingly popular trend in e-Learning, particularly in higher education, is the creation of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), sometimes in combination with a Management Information System (MIS) to create a Managed Learning Environment in which all aspects of a course are handled through a consistent user interface standard throughout the institution. Virtual education refers to instruction in a learning environment where teacher and student are separated by time or space, or both, and the teacher provides course content through course management applications, the internet, multimedia resources and videoconferencing among other technologies. A virtual classroom is therefore a learning environment created in the virtual space. It improves access to advanced educational experiences by allowing learners and lecturers to participate in remote learning communities using personal computers. The quality and effectiveness of education is the process improved through the support of a collaborative learning process. The teachers

demonstrate the possibilities of expanding access to music education by the use of pre-recorded lessons in practical, which can be imported to remote areas for use by learners.

Being said so, the above technology will not be able to totally replace the great teachers or Gurus in the first generation of e-learners of Music. However, e-Learning in music is an important development in education today. A combination of traditional, face-to face instruction with e-learning has resulted in a concept known as blended learning, which is widely being used in learning music on line.

Challenges of Teaching-Learning Music through E-Learning

While many opportunities for expansion exist, the adaptation and implementation of e-learning courses creates certain challenges that may have remarkable impact on its processes. With regard to implementation of e-learning courses in music education, the following are some of the challenges that have been noted:

1. Reluctance to move away from fixed traditional approaches used over the years. Resistance to change causes people to shy away from e-Learning since it differs fundamentally from such approaches;
2. Experience in the use of computers, computer ownership and efficient time management also determine the rate of adaptation and implementation of e-Learning approaches;
3. Technological shyness is another problem to be addressed. The need for requisite technical skills among instructors or lecturers is necessary for the realization of effective results following the dissemination of e-content. Staff working with students online must be able to understand the content as well as be at least reasonably or highly trained in the use of computer and the internet.
4. Proper implementation of e-Learning presupposes availability of individual computers and the necessary software for the students. This is because e-Learning frequently requires hands-on activities, whether one is participating in asynchronous or synchronous activities. Insurance of music as a practical subject requires some special software for use in notation and transcription. There is therefore a need for a wide spectrum of relevant computer or internet-based resources;
5. Time is also an essential factor in developing e-content. In contrast to traditional lesson preparation, the amount of time required to develop and implement e-content may at times be prohibitive to its utilisation. Since e-content is expected to be handled within the same time frame as conventional face to face instruction, there is need for careful time management if one is to cover the required level of course content;
6. The lack of proper or constant internet connectivity and the speed of the internet, brought about by inadequate facilities and slow dial-up speed respectively, also

poses a challenge to proper implementation in India, more so in some rural areas. This may hamper the relay of distance learning courses;

7. Despite all the merits of e-Learning, there is a danger that students may rarely attend face-to-face, on-campus classes, resorting to purely online study satisfied with their online classes as they are with traditional ones.
8. Despite all, evaluating each student individually on on-line mode is a problem. The institute has to collaborate with the programme study centres regarding the on-line practical examination of each individual student. Till the number of students does not cross 30, evaluation can be done in the form of Webinar inviting external examiners to evaluate performance papers live on line. Viva can also be conducted live on-line by allocating distinct time to individuals.

Objectives of the Study:

The study was aimed at evaluating the quality of teaching-learning transactions of Indian Classical Music in the online mode. Since this is a performing art, and the learners, though commendable performers with keen interest in the field of music are mostly of a traditional bent of mind. Are the learners of today equally well-versed with the technological aspects so as to be able to learn the course components online? This was the specific objective of the study.

Methodology:

In India, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), which is primarily an open and distance university started a programme on Indian Classical Music (ICM). Other Open universities have also started programmes in ICM, however, to cover the practical component they hold regular classes of music as in conventional systems.

As discussed in the above section (challenges of teaching-learning music through E-learning), the number of students enrolling in the subject of music is very low and scattered all over the country. So, to provide practical guidance in cost-effective way, IGNOU started providing 'Web Enabled Academic Support' to the learners and turned the programme online.

In view of the above, a study was conducted with a focus on evaluating the quality of learning music through online mode. Methodology of the study was based on the observation of the performance of the students in their practical examination and interviewing the passed-out students of the programme. The study was conducted on the students of last three semesters (Jan 2021, July-2021 and Jan 2022).

The programme particulars are -

- The programme is a 6 months course consisting of and three practical courses.

- Objective of the practical courses are to teach basics of Indian Classical Music to the non-initiated but willing learners.
- Practical components are provided through the recorded lessons.
- Weekly mentoring is provided through Google Meet platform.

The study is conducted with the help of a simple questionnaire to the students of last three semesters (Jan 2021, July-2021 and Jan 2022). There were a total of 63 respondents and in-depth interview was taken from 11 of them. Data was also collected from the results of Term End Practical Examination conducted by External Examiner.

Results

After the interviews, the data collected was collated and analysed. Post analysis, the results that emerged are presented in the following postulates:

- Practical Curriculum – It was found that Practical curriculum was designed aptly with keeping in mind the do-ability within the time frame of a semester.
- The performance of the students proved instructional system was successful as the students with no prior training could recognize their personal suitable pitches for singing, could practice according to the video instructions and execute proper voice production for singing Indian Music.
- Students could render the songs with moderate tunefulness and confidence.
- At the end of the programme the students had the feeling of satisfaction.
- The students themselves acknowledged the enhanced confidence level while performing Indian Music.
- The students were more open to pursue long duration programme in Indian Music through ODL mode.
- However, some students demanded more frequent mentoring classes than once in a week and some others felt at least one week of workshop will bring more better results.
- From the point of view of the external examiners, the programme was quite successful in terms of quality music education to the un-initiated learners.
- From the teacher's point of view it was felt that training in ICT is needed for the teachers and the students as well for better results.

Conclusion

Those conventional musicians who opposed distance learning in Music are privately imparting training to the distant learners in exchange of big fees. But private tuitions or institutes are never student centric. They are more interested in business. Most private tutors and institutes provide only practical training; component of theory is almost neglected in these institutes. Also, there are only one or two institutes who follow proper syllabus.

Evaluation methodology is questionable too in these institutes. At the end of the courses the diplomas they receive do not hold much recognition. However, distance universities can provide quality education in music if they wish. Universities such as IGNOU that have pedagogic guides, all technological facilities and EMPC to produce quality modules has become pioneer in this field. Future belongs to technology and especially in education, its use has proved to be fruitful. Indian classical music is no exception.

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