



Digital University

This editorial is based on [“How A Digital University Can Transform India’s Education System”](#) which was published in Hindustan Times on 10/02/2022. It talks about the arguments in favour and against the establishment of a digital university.

For Prelims: National Education Policy 2020, PM e-Vidya Scheme, SWAYAM, SWAYAM-Prabha, National Digital Library.

For Mains: Challenges and Opportunities of Digital Learning, Ensuring Universal Access to Digital Learning.

The [Covid-19 pandemic](#) has greatly affected the education sector. But even before the pandemic, the lack of an adequate number of universities led to limited options for aspiring students. This created a need to reform the way in which we impart higher education.

The surge of digital technologies provided a whole new view to imagine teaching-learning methods, university governance systems, higher education goals, and how future universities are perceived by employers.

The **Budget 2022-23** announced the [establishment of a digital university](#). This is a decision of great significance as a digital university will provide better access to high-quality higher education in multiple languages and also aligns with the vision laid out in the [National Education Policy, 2020](#).

The Prospect of Digital University in India

What has been Proposed regarding Digital Universities?

- The central government will set up a **digital university to impart “world-class quality education”** and promote online learning in different Indian languages.
- To address **“learning loss”** due to school closures, the government will also expand the **‘One Class One TV Channel’ initiative** under the [PM e-Vidya scheme](#).
- The proposed digital university and the expanded TV education programme will lead to a modern, pioneering and practical blueprint for steering India in the [Amrit Kaal](#).

What are the Arguments in Favour?

- **Inefficiency of the Current Model of Learning:** There is an increasing recognition that **the current university model is rigid** and that traditional universities have **failed to customise education** to take care of needs, interests, financial capabilities, and diverse cognitive abilities of students.

- Thus, the educators and policymakers feel the need to create flexible educational systems to provide customised high-quality “anytime/anywhere” education.
- **Economic Advantage:** Such pre-packaged education by academics would help in achieving the economies of scale required in India.
- **Being Updated with Technology:** With emerging technologies driving information economies, it also becomes **necessary for those employed to acquire new skills relevant to their changing roles.** The current model is of little help in this context.
- **Contributing in Scientific Advancements:** Since the digital university will be built on a networked hub-spoke model, it can **develop cutting-edge information and communications technology** platforms and digital content, using emerging technologies such as **AI, machine learning, virtual reality, augmented reality, and blockchain.**

What are the Arguments Against Digital Universities?

- Online learning via digital universities raises questions about **how far will online education help support greater access to and success in higher education** among those who are on the margins.
- Online teaching should **not be confused with meaningful education.** It may provide some engagement when schools are closed, but is **pedagogically inferior to in-person learning within the learning** community of the classroom and the school.
- The **first-generation aspirants** have no cultural capital to bank on while struggling their way through college.
 - These students are also from the other side of the digital divide which makes them **vulnerable to a double disadvantage** if digital modes become the mainstay of education.
- Digital learning is further associated with a plethora of socio-economic problems ranging from **intermittent Internet connectivity** and **frequent power cuts** to financial constraints in **procuring a high-speed Internet connection** and **limited access to digital literacy** and devices among college goers in the country.

What is the Way Forward?

- **Online and Offline Learning to Complement Each Other:** If universities have to remain relevant for students, they need to recalibrate their functioning to **resonate with the priorities of their non-working and working students.**
 - While digital forms of learning have the potential to enable students to pursue independent learning, **conventional and digital forms of education should not be considered mutually exclusive.**
 - Online learning needs to be understood as **one strand in a complex tapestry of curricular communication** that may still assign an important central role to direct human engagement and social learning.
- **Opportunities Presented by Digital Universities:** The digital university can **integrate all the components of the learning value chain**, from the admission process to providing learning material in the digital format, online interactions, continuous evaluations, and awarding of degrees.
- **Digital Hub for Education:** The digital university can integrate the existing capabilities such as **SWAYAM, SWAYAM-Prabha, ePG-Pathshala, eGyanKosh, National Digital Library,** and **Virtual Labs into one organic entity.**
 - This hub can then **collaborate with the best public higher educational institutes,** such as the IITs, IIMs and central universities to provide an affordable world-class teaching-learning ecosystem.
- **Supporting the First-Generation Aspirants:** The first generation aspirants need to be provided **consistent hand-holding and backstopping from teachers and peers,** otherwise they will tend to remain on the margins and eventually drop out or fail.
 - It is therefore necessary to think deeply and introduce effective measures by which digital education, even if it becomes a mainstay, **does more benefit to these students rather than isolating them** from rest of the tech-savvy generation students.

Discuss the opportunities offered by the establishment of a digital university, especially when the covid-19 pandemic has disturbed the functioning of the whole education system.

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