

Education

Your window to the world of learning

Modes of learning in the digital age

ONLINE EDUCATION E-learning cuts across the barriers of time and distance, and provides a seamless opportunity for professionals and students to enhance their knowledge base, writes **V Pradeep Kumar**

In today's constantly changing competitive world, it has become increasingly important for people to skill themselves and be aware of the latest developments. In such cases, online learning or e-learning can come to one's help. E-learning enables one to acquire knowledge and skills through mediums that deliver text, audio, images, animation and video. For professionals, e-learning helps to update without taking a long break from work and for students, it complements conventional learning. As a result, it has become quite popular among professionals and students. The increased popularity of online courses can be attributed to:

- Focused learning and training options on diverse subjects.
- Access to information 24x7, from any place.
- Comprehensive learning with the integration of offline and online education.

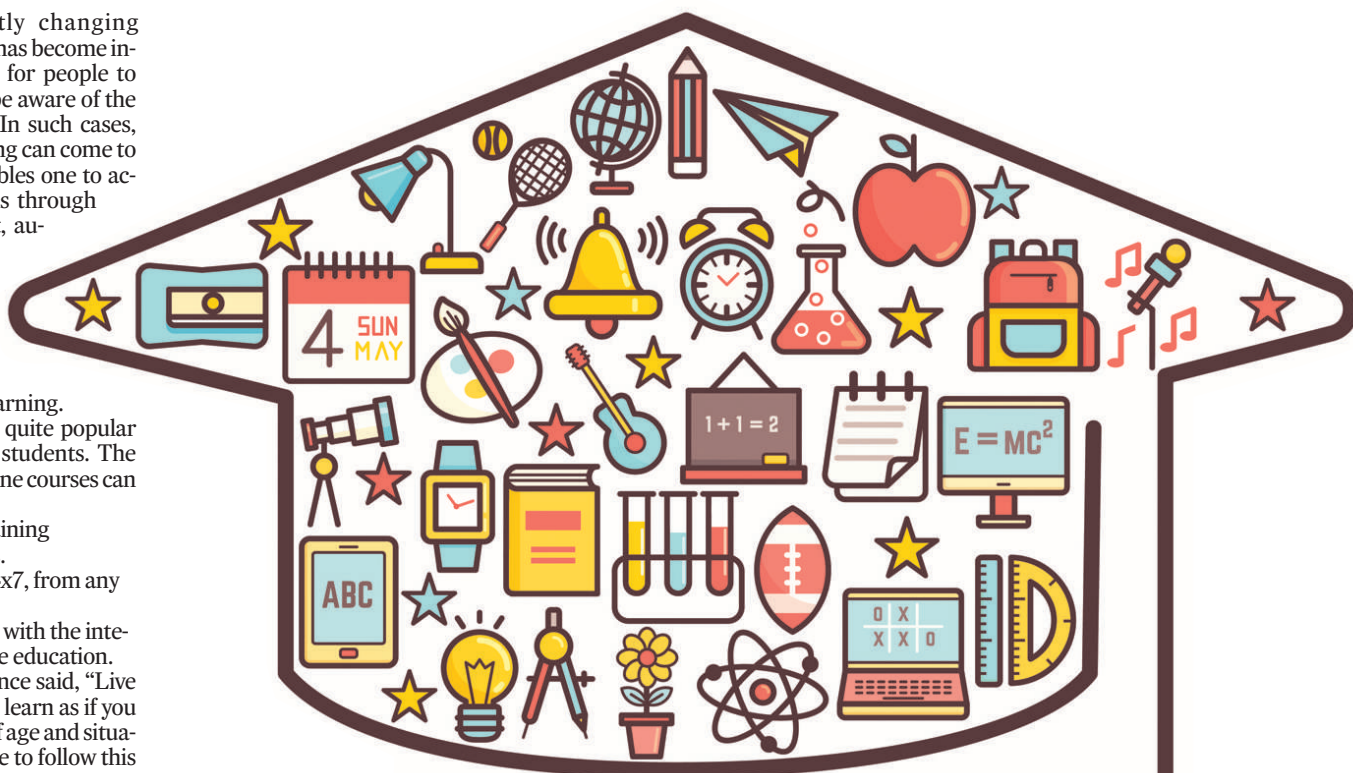
Mahatma Gandhi had once said, "Live as if you die tomorrow and learn as if you live forever." Irrespective of age and situation, e-learning enables one to follow this universal truth, as a path to success. E-learning improves the knowledge base of professionals and students and equips them with skills. This can be particularly seen in cases where individuals are looking to change their careers.

Diverse courses

India has more than 700 universities including private and deemed ones, and a large number of them have options for e-learning. They offer courses in a variety of disciplines. In addition, there are established institutes, who run various technology-related courses. Some of the popular courses that are being undertaken are related to foreign languages, Business Management, Digital Marketing, Project Management, AutoCAD, Data Analytics, Cloud Computing, IT Services and Quality Management.

It doesn't just stop at academic-related courses. If you are still passionate about activities such as dance or music, which you may have given up when you started college or work, e-learning provides ample opportunities for you to pursue them in a serious manner. It could also, perhaps, even lead you to develop an alternate career. Many children residing outside India learn music through Skype with an established musician based in India. There are also well-known academies catering to such needs of people residing within and outside the country. Thus, e-learning cuts across barriers of distance and borders, providing a seamless option of learning with the established professionals, who are otherwise not available through conventional learning or face-to-face learning.

However, before taking up an e-learning course, one needs to understand the opportunities and challenges that come with



Here are some dos and don'ts that you need to keep in mind before enrolling to an e-learning course

DOS

- Be careful and informed while choosing a course.
- Understand its syllabus and pedagogy.
- Be committed, disciplined and organised.
- Voice your opinions and issues about lessons.
- Plan and finish assignments on time.
- Be honest while writing exams.

DON'TS

- Don't join a course just to add a qualification.
- Don't join the courses that need a lot of personal interaction such as team building, leadership, public speaking etc.
- Don't misuse the flexibility of e-learning.
- Don't be silent when you find the a particular topic tough.
- Don't procrastinate.

it and if the course is relevant to your specific need. So, before you decide, take the following tips into consideration:

- **Establish clear goals:** Be clear about your academic/professional goals. This is because the course must facilitate you to achieve them. The expectations about the course will differ from person to person.
- **Choose a recognised institute:** The biggest challenge is to overcome the apprehensions about the usefulness of online courses after completing it. While

knowledge gained is always useful, the extent to which such courses are recognised in academic and industry circles remains debatable. Hence, minimise the impact of such apprehensions by doing thorough research about the course offered and choose only those that are offered by recognised universities and institutes.

■ **Understand course content:** Evaluate the course content and teaching pedagogy and its appropriateness to your specific need. There are numerous teaching methodologies like video classrooms, virtual classrooms, online discussions, interactive e-lessons, instructor-led or self-paced lessons, mobile learnings, electronic simulations etc.

Carefully selecting the course can ensure that you complete the course and not leave it midway due to disappointments. Also, choose a well-defined course of a university or institute which has a specified number of students.

■ **Active participation:** E-learning is an impersonal way of learning with practically no face-to-face interaction. The comfort levels of learners will depend on their familiarity with the medium, grasping powers and the ability adapt. A very high degree of participation in online discussions and forums, with active engagement with instructors and virtual classmates, will help you derive maximum benefit.

■ **Self-discipline is a must:** The flexibility provided by e-learning is indeed the biggest advantage for all those who are otherwise engaged in a full-time career. As a result, finding a balance between professional and personal life is a challenge. While flexibility of an online

course attracts enthusiastic learners initially, a strong self-motivation is critical to sustain a sense of self-discipline to complete the course.

Although, the demand remains high for conventional education, the growth is hampered due to a severe shortage of quality institutions and faculty. Further, changes in curriculum and pedagogy have been slow in the conventional learning, and not related to industry requirements.

For example, the industry feels that only 25% of engineering graduates are job-ready and the rest can't be employed directly, without imparting job-related skills. In this context, online education system can complement conventional learning, and can improve the quality of overall education and job-ready skills. Thus, e-learning provides a wonderful opportunity to fill the gap in knowledge and skill sets of professionals and students. With e-learning, you can achieve your goals quite easily in both the academic and professional world.

