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AN APPRAISAL OF ONLINE MBA PROGRAMS IN INDIA: MIXED METHODS STUDY ON STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

India's online MBA program's ease and quality are attracting students. With a 71.16% employment rate, MBA programs are popular. India's online education business is growing rapidly due to internet access, digital literacy, and technology tools. Tier 2 and 3 cities saw 32% rise in online education demand in 2023. Online MBA programs provide working professionals a cost-effective way to advance their professions. Their accessibility and convenience help students balance personal and professional life with academics. Online master's degrees in business administration can help students acquire the creative thinking and managerial skills needed for the gig economy. Lifelong learning is another benefit of online MBA programs. Since organizations and business operations change, knowledge must be improved to ensure efficiency and success. Online MBA programs foster lifelong learning by using instructional videos and technology to personalize learning. Online MBA courses reduce traditional learning costs, making MBA degrees more affordable. Due to lower infrastructure and operating costs, their tuition fees are lower than on-campus programs. Students from all backgrounds and incomes will have equal access to online MBA courses. Online MBA programs provide unprecedented access to top-tier business education. These schools' world-class instructors and course materials allow students to receive a great education anywhere. They can accommodate students with different learning methods and preferences due to their versatility and multimedia utilization. Flexible scheduling and financial aid make online master's degree programs beneficial to under-represented groups. This applies especially to women and other underprivileged groups. Technology like learning management systems makes it easier for students to access course materials, participate in discussions, and submit assignments. These programs emphasize workplace-relevant skills to support professional ambitions. Partnerships with corporations and real-world case studies teach students marketable skills. Online MBA students can network with academics and business moguls from across the world, creating a collaborative learning environment. Online seminars, workshops, and networking events help build professional ties. Online program graduates can connect into a global alumni network for job prospects. This study used qualitative and quantitative data to address research questions using a mixed-methods case study approach. Methods included qualitative content analysis, paper surveys, and semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Results showed that online MBA programs improve education, empower women and other under-

represented groups, and promote teamwork. Faculty in online MBA programs have pros and cons. Advantages include adaptability, accessibility, fresh teaching methods, and student-centeredness. Tech issues, sluggish response times, and engagement issues are hurdles. Faculty must adapt traditional teaching approaches to online contexts and find ways to engage students without seeing or talking to them. Online MBA programs face campus unfamiliarity, engagement fatigue, infrastructure and technology issues, time management issues, and communication issues. Customized learning experiences, augmented and virtual reality integration, enhanced networking, gamification, AI chatbots, collaborative platforms like Slack and Microsoft Teams, and hybrid learning models are emerging trends in online MBA student engagement. Online MBA student counsellors should provide advice, encouragement, and tools to assist students achieve. Student councilors advise and provide input to keep students on track academically and professionally. They also motivate students by checking in, assessing their progress, and helping them reach their academic goals. School counsellors' prompt input helps students stay engaged and grasp expectations. Student counsellors help students manage stress and focus (29%). Online MBA programs have pros and cons for students and faculty. A qualitative study on university strategies to increase student-faculty relations in online MBA programs recommends teachers actively participate in online forums, group chats, and discussions. Joint projects, interactive technology like virtual group chats and live webinars, constructive criticism, faculty hours for student interaction, and mentorship programs are essential recommendations. MBA professors use Canvas, Moodle, and Blackboard to distribute course materials, track student progress, and provide real-time feedback. Teachers use video lectures, podcasts, webinars, and message boards to make classrooms engaging. Virtual team projects that promote cooperation and leadership are another MBA peer-participation innovation. Real-world applications like internships, consultancies, and local firm collaborations let students apply theory to practice. Online education workshops for faculty are growing and cover topics including online teaching methods, virtual collaboration technologies, and creating compelling learning environments. Through a community where instructors share their experiences, thoughts, and best practices for education, faculty members learn from one other and improve online MBA programs. Virtual and augmented reality are being tested in certain online MBA programs, creating unlimited possibilities. AI can personalize learning, helping teachers meet students' needs. However, a good online MBA program includes student-teacher contact, real-world projects, and flexible course material. Finally, colleges should adopt online MBA program trends to engage professors and students. Modernizing technology and improving faculty assistance can help institutions overcome technological difficulties.

Keywords: Online MBA Course, Perspectives, E-Learning, Student Engagement, Faculty Support

INTRODUCTION

In this continuously changing world of education, the online MBA Program is becoming popular as a solution for students and professionals who want to study flexibility without compromising on the quality of education. Students might have to face multiple challenges while pursuing an online MBA degree. 2025 MBA trends focus on reducing challenges through customized learning, using technology, and enhancing student-faculty interaction (1). The demand for MBA Programs has increased rapidly in the recent past. Among all degree holders in India, those with an MBA are the most employable (71.16%), according to the India Skills Report 2024 (2). The online education industry in India is growing tremendously. This growth is driven by expanding internet services, more digital literacy, and accessibility to technological devices (3). Specifically in Tier 2 and 3 cities, online education demand increased by 32 % in 2023 (4). Many popular universities, like Amity University Online, offer online degree Programs, which have increased the confidence in students to enroll in different certifications and Programs (5). Online education in India is also considered an affordable and flexible alternative to on-campus courses. As the trend of online education continues, it will allow students to learn and advance their careers' without making a hole in their pockets (6). There has been a significant rise in online MBA Programs in the last ten years (7). They allow working adults to get graduate degrees without giving up their careers or moving (8). Attending in-person classes and interacting with faculties face-to-face has long been considered essential for an MBA. However, due to the introduction of virtual learning platforms, students can learn flexibly and engage in meaningful conversations with their peers from diverse backgrounds (9). As an alternative to more conventional methods of instruction, online MBA Programs have grown in importance. They make it possible for students to learn regardless of their location (10). However, what is the faculty's opinion on this change? This paper takes a look at how online MBA Program is making management education accessible for all. The author also reflects on how faculties feel about recent developments in the education system.

AN OVERVIEW OF HOW ONLINE MBA COURSES IN INDIA ARE MAKING MANAGEMENT EDUCATION ACCESSIBLE TO ALL:

MBA programs have undergone significant changes and revisions ever since they were first introduced in the business academic space. With the digital transformation of the world, MBAs have also been digitalized to make education accessible to a larger student population (11). The introduction of online MBA courses has brought a highly flexible and personalized approach to acquiring an MBA degree even for working professionals. The online MBA programs have developed over the years and today, they offer great value for money while enabling career

growth (12). Online MBA courses come with many benefits that make education accessible for everyone. How Does Online MBA Make Education Accessible?

1. Flexible and Convenient: Although there are many business schools that have created an excellent learning environment for their students by offering full-time, offline, and even residential MBA programs, not all students can join these programs due to a host of reasons (1). Only a small number of students can occupy seats in the MBA programs. What's more, these programs are not flexible as their full-time and residential nature creates entry barriers for students who cannot travel or leave their ongoing personal and professional commitments (2). For a working professional who is seeking career growth, the only resort is to take a two-year sabbatical or balance the job with evening and weekend classes which can also be challenging. Offering a perfect solution to these problems, online MBA programs are highly flexible and convenient in their nature (3). Students can pursue online MBA courses from wherever they want without having to leave their personal and professional commitments. It is possible for working professionals to pursue their full-time along with a part-time online MBA option (4).

2. Becoming Managerially Competent: An increasing number of individuals are now restarting their careers in the gig economy and equipping themselves with the skills needed for success in the future workplace (5). They aim to enhance their managerial skills with capabilities geared towards the future. Aspiring leaders need to be competent in forward-thinking skills to maintain a competitive edge. Simultaneously, the methods by which contemporary learners absorb information and acquire knowledge have progressed. To address this problem, online MBA courses offer anytime anywhere learning (6).

3. Lifelong Learning: As organizations and their business functions are constantly evolving, knowledge must be consistently enhanced to ensure effective operation and success (7). In this setting, the online MBA programs promote and support the idea of continuous education and lifelong learning. Students get used to learning about new courses and formats that enable learners to remain professionally current (8). In addition to instructional videos, online education includes numerous tailored technologies aimed at delivering distinct online learning experiences for every student. Digital learning engages the learner and replicates the classroom environment (9).

4. Affordability and Financial Accessibility: Enrolling for and completing an online MBA requires a substantial financial commitment (10). Online MBA courses are making the completion of an MBA degree a less expensive experience by lowering different costs related to conventional learning (11). Online MBA courses also typically charge lower tuition fees than on-campus programs because of no physical

infrastructure and operational expenses. Students benefit from savings on housing, travel, and other expenses linked to moving to a university (12).

5. High-Quality Business Education: In the past, enrolling in an MBA program at a renowned institution was typically restricted to individuals who could cover the expenses or fulfil strict admission criteria (13). Online MBA programs are transforming this story. Online MBA programs allow students to engage with top-notch faculty and course materials no matter where they are located. The program is accredited and upholds the same strict academic criteria as conventional programs, guaranteeing that students obtain a top-notch education (14).

6. Inclusive Learning: Online MBA courses are designed to be inclusive while catering to diverse learning needs and learning preferences. The courses incorporate features such as transcripts, subtitles, and screen-reader compatibility for supporting students with disabilities (15). Online learning also leverages multimedia including video, interactive simulations, podcasts, and audio for accommodating different learning styles. With many collaterals, students can gain the best of business knowledge (1).

7. Empowering Women and Marginalized Sections of Society: Traditionally, women and those from marginalized groups have encountered many barriers in obtaining higher education (2). Online MBAs are assisting in closing this gap. Adjustable learning hours enable women, particularly those managing family duties, to seek higher education. Numerous institutions provide specific scholarships and funding to assist underrepresented populations in pursuing online MBAs (3). Virtual environments offer a secure space for students of various backgrounds to connect, cooperate, and establish professional relationships (4).

8. Technological Advancements Enhancing Accessibility: Technology plays an important role in making online MBAs more accessible and effective (5). They are designed on an advanced learning management system providing an easy user experience that helps students access course materials, participate in discussions, and submit assignments (6). There are tools such as video conferencing and virtual whiteboards that facilitate live interactions between students and faculty members mimicking the traditional classroom experience (7). With a couple of clicks, students can gain access to extremely useful business management lessons.

9. Bridging the Skill Gap: Online MBA programs emphasize practical skills that can be directly applied in the workplace, rather than solely theoretical knowledge (8). Many programs provide students the opportunity to focus on specific fields such as finance, marketing, or entrepreneurship, aligning their education with professional aspirations (9). Collaborations with the industry and the availability of real-world case studies guarantee that students gain skills aligned with current market needs. Online MBA

programs promote ongoing education, providing students with the resources needed to adjust to changing business environments (10).

10. Fostering Collaboration: Online MBA programs connect students with the faculty members, and industry leaders from across the world creating a vibrant and collaborative learning environment (11). Students can participate in online workshops, seminars, and networking events to build meaningful professional relationships (12). Students must be exposed to diverse perspectives for enhancing their cultural intelligence which is a crucial skill in the present interconnected business world (13). Graduates of the online programs also gain access to an extensive alumni network by opening doors to career opportunities across the world.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A case study approach was used in the present study. A case is instrumental (2) in providing an understanding of the issues of how to facilitate learning online. In addition to the case study approach, a mixed-methods research design (1) was employed to investigate issues of interest from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. Data collected in this study included semi-structured one-on-one interviews of students, faculty members, counselors and in-person focus group interviews of the head of institutions providing online MBA program. The sample was purposefully selected from top ranked MBA college in western Maharashtra. A total sample of 80 respondents included, 20 second-year online MBA Students, 20 Teachers, 20 Student Counselors and 20 Directors participated in one-on-one in-person interviews. The interview participants were selected using a purposive sampling method to select respondents from diverse backgrounds in the sample. The investigators used an interview protocol, which included information that needed to be provided to the participant (e.g., the purpose of the interview, confidentiality of their responses) as well as 15 leading questions with spaces to take notes during the interview. Every interview was tape recorded and was later transcribed for analysis. A qualitative content analysis method (3) was used to identify emerging themes from the interview data. Multiple researchers were involved in the analysis to test the coding reliability. Member checking (4) was also used to ensure the trustworthiness of this qualitative inquiry. The purpose of collecting quantitative data in addition to the qualitative data collected from the interview study was to enable the investigators to generalize findings from the qualitative inquiry. This survey instrument consisted of 67 questions and was divided into five sections. The first section of this survey instrument asked the participants' background information. The second section of the questionnaire consisted of 5-point Likert questions that pertain to the participants' overall perceptions and attitudes toward the online MBA program. The last section included four open-ended questions soliciting the participants' general comments about their experiences with the online MBA program and their suggestions for improving the program.

The paper-based questionnaires were handed out to respondents. 78 respondents returned the survey, which accounted for nearly a 100% return rate. Respondents who participated in this study had various backgrounds in terms of their age, gender, location, professional experiences, and online learning experiences. Some of the respondents surveyed also participated in the interview study, which was described earlier, prior to or after the survey was conducted. For data analysis, the survey data was entered into SPSS. Various statistical analyses, including descriptive statistics and correlation analyses, were employed for the data analysis. A qualitative content analysis also was conducted of qualitative data which was gathered from the student responses to open-ended questions in the questionnaire.

RESULTS & FINDINGS

ONLINE MBA FACULTY INSIGHTS QUALITATIVE SURVEY RESULTS: MBA FACULTY VIEW

From the standpoint of the faculty, there are advantages and disadvantages to teaching an online MBA Program. Important online MBA faculty insights are given below:

BENEFITS:

1. Flexibility: Respondent 51 states *"One major perk of online classes is their adaptability to faculty schedules. Their lectures are recorded, which students can watch at their convenience. Instead of stressing out about classroom management, teachers can concentrate on creating lesson plans and content"*.

2. Wider Reach: Respondent 11 states, *"Faculties can interact with students from around the globe when they teach online. They can form meaningful relationships with students from many walks of life, which enriches classroom discussions and provides students with global business perspectives"*.

3. Innovative Teaching Methods: Respondent 19 states, *"Modern technology has given faculties new resources to improve student learning. They can be more innovative with their lessons because of tools that facilitate video conferencing, file sharing, and feedback systems"*.

4. Student-Centered Learning: Respondent 88 states *"Online MBA courses like the ones offered by Amity University Online inspire students to participate actively in their evolving MBA education so they may explore topics that appeal to them more closely. Faculties can simplify this process by offering customized guidance and frequent feedback"*.

CHALLENGES:

1. Engagement: Respondent 78 states, *"One of the common.challenges of online teaching is keeping the students interested and involved without direct human contact. Discussion boards, live Q&A sessions, and group projects are some activities to ensure student engagement"*.

2. Technology Issues: Respondent 71 states, *"Both students and faculties may encounter problems with technology from time to time. These include sluggish internet connections, trouble accessing digital platforms, or software compatibility concerns. These problems can impede instruction and learning for teachers and students"*.

3. Lack of Immediate Feedback: Respondent 61 states, *"In traditional classrooms, faculty can easily assess students' performance and provide instant feedback. However, in online settings, where communication relies heavily on written interactions, it becomes harder for instructors to evaluate their students' performance in real time"*.

ONLINE MBA STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND FACULTY SUPPORT CHALLENGES: QUANTITATIVE SURVEY RESULTS MBA STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

When it comes to online MBA Programs, faculty members are crucial to their success. They are in charge of class discussions, grading assignments, and giving lectures. But it is not always easy to adapt traditional teaching approaches to an online setting. Faculties must think of ways to engage their students even when they can't see or talk to them in person. This can be done through organizing group discussions, debates, quizzes, etc. Online MBA Programs are flexible for students worldwide, but they also have some challenges that can impact student experiences, engagement, and faculty support. Some of these challenges include:

1. Limited campus experience (19%): Missing face-to-face connections, discussions, and social interactions can reduce your sense of belonging and community and an absence of an on-campus atmosphere.

2. Engagement fatigue in students (21%): Looking at screens for longer can lead to disengagement and reduced interactions and participation.

3. Technical and infrastructure challenges (13%): Technical challenges like internet connections or insufficient knowledge of online tools can disturb your engagement.

4. Time management challenges (26%): Balancing the MBA Program with personal or professional commitments can be a struggle for you, leading to potential burnout.

5. Communication gaps in online learning (21%): The online environment lacks face-to-face communication, making you hesitant to ask questions actively and engage in the classes.

QUALITY SURVEY ON EMERGING TRENDS FOR ONLINE MBA STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: TECHNOLOGY PARTNER PERSPECTIVE

Online MBA Programs are changing constantly to improve students' engagement. Here are some of the key trends which are helping to reshape online MBA students' engagement:

1. Customized learning experiences: Respondent 34 states, *"Adaptive and personalized learning platforms are gaining popularity in online MBA Programs. These platforms tailor content to match individual progress and interests, creating a more engaging and effective learning journey"*.

2. Learning through AR and VR: Respondent 47 states, *"Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) are integrated into online MBA Programs to simulate real-world scenarios. These technologies provide hands-on experience, enabling you to actively participate in case studies, projects, and practical exercises for a more immersive learning experience"*.

3. Better networking opportunities: Respondent 63 states, *"Virtual peer networking platforms can help build connections and encourage peer-to-peer learning"*.

4. Gamification: Respondent 57 states, *"Gaming elements like rewards, leaderboards, and challenges motivate the students to continue learning and improve their performances"*.

5. Integration of chatbots and AI: Respondent 83 states, *"AI-based chatbots can quickly answer your queries about anything"*.

6. Collaborative platforms and tools: Respondent 91 states, *"Slack and Microsoft Teams can be used for group projects and discussions. This is because these platforms provide seamless communication, enhancing student-faculty interaction"*.

7. Hybrid learning models: Respondent 53 states, *"Many colleges also include hybrid learning models through networking events and workshops. These opportunities can help to bridge the gap in online learning"*.

RESULTS OF A QUANTITATIVE SURVEY ON STUDENT COUNSELLOR SUPPORT FOR ONLINE MBA PROGRAMS: A COUNSELLOR PERSPECTIVE

In online MBA Programs, student counselor support is important to provide students with guidance, motivation, and connections for success. The opinion of student councilors in online MBA support systems is as below:

1. Student Counselors provides important academic support and mentorship to help student stay on track with regular feedback and guidance for career growth (22%).

2. Student Counselors can help student stay motivated while checking in on you occasionally, tracking your progress, and guiding you to reach your academic goals (18%).

3. Quick and efficient Student Counselors feedback helps student stay engaged and clear of expectations (31%).

4. Student Counselors support also helps students with mental health challenges as they offer counselling to help students manage stress and stay focused (29%).

QUALITATIVE SURVEY ON UNIVERSITY STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN STUDENT-FACULTY INTERACTIONS IN ONLINE MBA: MBA HEAD OF THE INSTITUTE PERSPECTIVE

Meaningful communication to build strong faculty and student interactions is important in online MBA Programs. Here are some of the effective strategies that are popularly adopted by Head of the Institutions to build stronger student-faculty relations:

1. Respondent 82 states, *"Dedicating some hours to faculty regularly for interacting with students, clearing doubts, and offering guidance"*.

2. Respondent 72 states, *"Active participation of teachers in group chats, discussions, online forums, etc., to offer real-time assistance to students and promote interactive learning environment"*.

3. Respondent 25 states, *"Encouraging the faculty to provide constructive and timely feedback to students, helping them improve. Teachers should keep in mind that the feedback should be encouraging and corrective to keep them motivated"*.

4. Respondent 56 states, *"Top universities nowadays are also including mentorship Programs which allows students to learn from faculty expertise while building strong relationships"*.

5. Respondent 63 states, *"Including collaborative projects for teachers and students to work on together can help them build deep connections and opportunities to develop skills and knowledge under expert faculty"*.

6. Respondent 77 states, *"Using interactive technological tools like virtual group chats and live webinars can help students and faculties to engage in meaningful discussions"*.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ONLINE MBA TEACHING INNOVATIONS: Faculties are beginning to see how new online and blended learning forms can complement one another. Learning management systems (LMS) like Canvas, Moodle, or Blackboard have been a huge step forward. Faculties can use these sites to distribute course materials, monitor student performance, and offer immediate comments.

   - Interactive Content: Interactive content such as video lectures, podcasts, webinars, and message boards are commonly used by faculty to foster an engaging learning environment. Recorded video lectures offer added convenience for students, while interactive elements like exercises, quizzes, and live discussions further enhance participation and involvement.

   - Peer Collaboration: Another innovation in MBA Programs is the rise of virtual team projects that promote peer-to-peer connection. Group projects and case study evaluations are common assignments that faculties can share to ensure students collaborate on projects, developing teamwork and leadership skills.

- Real-World Applications: Reputed institutes like Amity University Online offer internships, consulting assignments, real-life case studies, and partnerships with local businesses. All this enables students to bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and practical application.

2. ENHANCING FACULTY TRAINING FOR ONLINE EDUCATION: The need for digital training among MBA faculty members is growing in tandem with the popularity of online MBA Programs. Online learning can be challenging for instructors who rely on tried-and-true methods of instruction. Here are some tips that can help faculties cope with the challenges of online training:

   - Professional Development: Workshops for faculty members' professional development are available at many schools; these sessions often cover topics including how to effectively use virtual collaboration tools, design engaging learning environments, and online teaching practices.

   - Best Practices for Online Teaching: Faculties are also picking up new tricks from each other. Faculty members enhance the quality of online MBA Programs by fostering a community that shares instructional ideas, best practices, and experiences. They learn how to design exams that measure student progress, foster engaging online conversations, and make educational resources that work for students in the digital learning era.

3. THE FUTURE OF ONLINE MBA PROGRAMS: The potential for learning online MBA teaching innovations is limitless, given the rate at which technology is evolving. VR (Virtual Reality) and AR (Augmented Reality) are already in the testing phase for some online MBA Programs. By allowing students to participate in virtual business simulations and case studies online, these technologies can potentially revolutionize how students learn. Learning could also be personalized using artificial intelligence (AI). Faculties can better cater their lessons to their students' needs using AI-driven analytics that reveal each student's areas of strength and improvement. The development of more advanced adaptive learning technology provides students with the necessary assistance for academic success. But for now, faculties think the secret to a good online MBA is a mix of student-teacher engagement, practical experiences, and flexible learning. Students may expect an ever-improving online education as institutions keep pushing the boundaries of what is possible in higher education.

CONCLUSION

As online MBA Programs are popular, colleges should embrace·MBA trends to elevate online MBA student engagement and faculty support. Universities can overcome challenges like technical difficulties by using updated technologies and strengthening faculty support systems. These experiences and solutions not only help students to have great learning experiences but also maintain strong student-teacher relationships. Online MBA Programs

are transforming business education, including the teaching methods. The new online teaching methods bring various advantages and disadvantages for the faculties. Flexibility and worldwide connections are two large benefits, whereas involvement and technological challenges are two big drawbacks. With proper training and tools, online teaching can be refined and made easier for students and teachers.

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