Exploring the Influence of Online Education on the Professional Landscape: An In-Depth Examination of Employers' Perspectives

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KEYWORDS

Online education, Employment market, Employer perceptions, Online degrees, Online certificates, Learning platforms, Skill shortages, Industry requirements, educational efficacy, Credentials evaluation, Job readiness, Policy implications, Workforce development, Employability skills, Digital learning credentials.

ABSTRACT

This research paper investigates the viewpoints of companies on the impact that online education has on the contemporary employment market. Because of the explosive rise of online learning platforms, it is absolutely necessary to have a solid understanding of how potential employers evaluate the credentials earned through online education and the value that they hold.

This study studies employers' attitudes towards online degrees, certificates, and other types of online learning, and examines the elements that influence their impressions. The study also looks at the factors that influence employers' perceptions of online learning.

In addition, it investigates the efficacy of online education in preparing individuals for employment, determining where skills shortages exist, and adjusting to the changing requirements of various industries. The findings provide educators, policymakers, and job seekers with valuable insights that can help them better understand the attitudes that employers have towards online education.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the main cornerstones of our economy is education. The education industry changed along with the epidemic as digital use skyrocketed, just like it did for everyone else. Physical classrooms were thus neglected in favor of remote learning platforms and virtual tutoring, which helped close the curriculum's learning gaps. During this period, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) improved due to the widespread use of online learning. Higher education's (GER) increased from 26.3% in 2018–19 to 27.1% in FY2021 as a result of online courses improving accessibility.

In today's times, online learning is rapidly becoming the standard practice. Online degree programs have made it possible for education to spread to even the most inaccessible areas, and they have also made it possible for students to study whenever and wherever they want.

The Indian government outlawed online degree courses before. Recently, the Indian government has created norms and a framework for select institutions and universities to provide online degree courses. Latest government rules allow the top 15% of Indian institutions and universities to provide online degrees. However, multiple clauses exist. These schools must be NAAC-accredited and graded A+.

When choosing an online degree, one of the most common worries expressed by students is "Can I get a job with an online degree"?

According to a LinkedIn poll, the second wave of COVID-19 negatively impacted the professional lives

of 72% of students and 65% of recent graduates in India by resulting in the rejection of their job applications. Other obstacles that students have while seeking employment options include inadequate supervision for skill development and heightened family obligations as a result of COVID-19.

Employers these days are increasingly receptive to candidates with online degrees, especially for jobs that call for prior work experience. They recognize that individuals who obtained their degrees online were employed and gaining useful job experience in addition to studying a variety of disciplines to broaden their knowledge and skill set.

The goal of recruiters is to quickly hire the most talented candidates. The conventional method of doing a drive-by at a college is costly and time-consuming. Employers, on the other hand, may virtually interview a greater number of individuals (with online degrees) and choose the best ones.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Naresh B., & Rajalakshmi M. (2020, July), The attitudes towards online education are gradually becoming more positive. It is recommended that educational institutions collaborate with industries to foster innovation, technology advancement, and strategic planning for long-term viability. Additionally, working closely with HR professionals can provide valuable insights into industry needs, enabling the design of courses that align with these requirements. Furthermore, it is essential to educate stakeholders on the importance of online learning methods. [1]

(Kogen, 2021), Futurelearn surveyed 1006 hiring managers and workers in U.S. who earned their degrees online to find out their opinion. Employers rated online learning as a 6.8 on a scale of 10. 62.6% of employers felt they need to rethink the hiring process of applicant with online education. 44% of hiring managers perceived online education as very to extremely valuable after pandemic. Most employers (89%) still envision online learning becoming more and more common. Employing managers quickly saw that online learners were capable of working independently. The capacity of the online student to use technology and online platforms to complete tasks was also valued by 18% of managers. [14]

Linardopoulos, N. (2012, June 22), When it comes to career opportunities, a candidate who has completed their degree through an online platform has a significantly higher risk of being evaluated less favorably than a candidate who has completed their degree through traditional classroom instruction. [2]

Friedman, J., & Claybourn, C. (2022, August 11), More people are willing to accept online degrees. Overall, employers still have different ideas. It's very important to get accredited. Some companies would rather have non-profit online programs than for-profit ones. [15]

Bast, F. (2021, August 18), Urban students (57.4%) were more open to online learning than rural students (49.7%). This study found no correlation between “digital skepticism” and online learning receptibility. In India, most online learning content is for PCs. A larger screen may provide a more immersive experience and make computer text reading more pleasant. With online education as excellent as the conventional classroom model and an overwhelming majority agreeing on its benefits, a blended strategy combining traditional classroom and online learning may be the future of education. [3]

Salas-Amaro, A., Fitzgerald, J., & Djokic, B. (2015, March 1), Researchers emailed 1846 to invite them to take an online degree survey. The findings supported the literature review's worries. Institution accreditation, reputation, online experiences, and interactivity is important. Technical, engineering, accounting, financial, and clinical jobs should be in class or hybrid, according to recipients. Employers still consider the three factors. [5]

Adams, J. (2008, January 1), Online degree programs allow millions of individuals to attend college, but accumulating data shows that businesses and university officials prefer traditional degrees. Much study has compared online and traditional course work, but less has been done on what happens to online graduates when they try to use their credentials. These findings affect online distance education students, instructional creators, and university administrators who supervise continuing education programs. [6]

Adams, J., & Defleur, M. H. (2006, January), In a poll of 269 managers, discovered that, when given the option, 96% (258) of the managers preferred traditional degrees over online degrees in order to be employed in their companies. According to the results of one of the earlier studies, which entailed surveying 108 school administrators and principals in Wisconsin and Illinois, the expressed opinions were that traditional courses were better than online ones. [7]

Mandelbaum, R. M. (2014, April 1), Employers continue to exhibit a significant inclination towards applicants who possess conventional degrees. Nevertheless, the data also revealed certain apparent variations in attitudes and views depending on an employer's position and sector. [9]

3. OBJECTIVES / AIMS

Objective:

- To understand employer's viewpoint on authenticity and quality of online education in comparison to traditional education.
- To understand the elements that influence employers' willingness or reluctance to hire applicants with a history of online learning.

4. RESEARCH METHOD / METHODOLOGY

This study used a survey and, mathematical model to gauge understanding of employer's perspective towards online & traditional education methods which may influence hiring.

The HR managers of different industries from IT & ITES, Design, Banking, Insurance & Finance, Healthcare, EdTech participated in survey.

The research design is descriptive research method. The structured Questionnaire was framed to collect the data for this study. Sample size is 25 respondents and the data collection method was random sampling method.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 Perspective of Employer - Online education in comparison to traditional education.

- An employer's viewpoint on traditional vs online education may differ depending on a number of variables.
- An employer's personal experiences and prejudices, the sector, and the particular job requirements all influence how much importance they place on conventional vs online education. Given the advantages that each form of education offers, many companies could value a mix of the two.
    - H0: There is no significant difference between authenticity and quality of online education in comparison to traditional education in viewpoint of employers.
    - H1: There is significant difference between authenticity and quality of online education in comparison to traditional education in viewpoint of employers.

Summary statistics (Quantitative data):

Table – 5.1 (ANOVA)

(Analysis of variance (Y)

Variable	Observations	Obs. with missing data	Obs. without missing data	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Y	225	0	225	1.000	5.000	3.320	1.075

Table – 5.2 (ANOVA)

(Mean Value & p Value)

Source	DF	Sum of squares	Mean squares	F	Pr > F	p-values signification codes
Model	8.000	26.960	3.370	3.138	**0.002**	**
Error	216.000	232.000	1.074			
Corrected Total	224.000	258.960				

From the above table the fact revealed that there is difference between authenticity and quality of online education in comparison to traditional education in viewpoint of employers (Pr > F -.002) (p-values signification codes - **) therefore null hypothesis is rejected.

Computed against model Y=Mean(Y)

Signification codes: 0 < *** < 0.001 < ** < 0.01 < * < 0.05 <. < 0.1 < ° < 1

Standardized coefficients (Y):

Table – 5.3 (ANOVA) (Summary of Survey Responses; Perspective of Employer)

Source	Value	Standard error	t	Pr > |t|	Lower bound (95%)	Upper bound (95%)	p-values signification codes
what are your thoughts on the quality of education provided by online programs? - Online programs provide a high-quality education that is comparable to traditional programs.	0.047	0.086	0.546	0.586	-0.122	0.216	°
what are your thoughts on the quality of education provided by online programs? – Online education degree / certificate candidates are more likely to be adaptable and flexible.	0.152	0.086	1.774	0.077	-0.017	0.322	.
what are your thoughts on the quality of education provided by online programs? – Online education degree / certificate candidates are often more motivated and self-directed than traditional students.	0.070	0.086	0.819	0.414	-0.099	0.240	°
what are your thoughts on the quality of education provided by online programs? – Online education degree / certificate candidates have a wider range of life experiences than traditional students.	-0.047	0.086	-0.546	0.586	-0.216	0.122	°
what are your thoughts on the quality of education provided by online programs? – Online education degree / certificate candidates may not have the same level of access to resources as traditional students.	0.105	0.086	1.228	0.221	-0.064	0.275	°
what are your thoughts on the quality of education provided by online programs? – Online education degree / certificate candidates may not have the same level of face-to-face interaction with faculty and peers as traditional students.	0.316	0.086	3.684	0.000	0.147	0.486	***
what are your thoughts on the quality of education provided by online programs? – Do you believe that online education degree / Certificate candidates are as qualified as their traditional counterparts?	0.117	0.086	1.365	0.174	-0.052	0.286	°
what are your thoughts on the quality of education provided by online programs? – Online education degree / certificate candidates may not have the same level of networking opportunities as traditional students.	0.187	0.086	2.183	0.030	0.018	0.357	*

Data Interpretation:

- **Significant Perceptions (p-value < 0.05):**
  - Lack of Face-to-Face Interaction:

    With a mean response of 0.3160, a significant t=3.684, and p=0.000, respondents strongly agree that online education candidates may not experience the same level of face-to-face interaction with faculty and peers as traditional students. This indicates a critical concern about interaction quality.
  - Networking Opportunities:

    A mean response of 0.187, p=0.030 suggests agreement that online education candidates may lack networking opportunities compared to traditional students.
- **Marginally Significant Perceptions (p-value between 0.05 and 0.10):**
  - Adaptability and Flexibility:

    Respondents somewhat agree (t=1.774, p=0.077) that online education degree candidates are more adaptable and flexible, though the evidence is not conclusive.
- **Non-Significant Perceptions (p-value > 0.10):**
  - High-Quality Education:

    Respondents are neutral (t=0.546, p=0.586) about whether online education provides comparable quality to traditional programs.
  - Motivation and Self-Direction:

    The perception that online education candidates are more motivated and self-directed (t=0.819, p=0.414) lacks strong support.
  - Life Experiences:

    Responses indicate no significant agreement or disagreement (t=−0.546, p=0.586) that online education candidates have a wider range of life experiences.
  - Access to Resources:

    There is no significant evidence (t=1.228, p=0.221) that online candidates face access challenges to the same degree as traditional students.
  - Qualification of Online Candidates:

    Respondents are neutral (t=1.365, p=0.174) about whether online candidates are as qualified as their traditional counterparts.

5.2 Elements that influence employers' willingness or reluctance to hire

There are a number of variables that influence the desire or unwillingness of businesses to accept online education. These factors include the perceived quality of education, alignment with industry demands, as well as the employers' personal experiences and biases against online education. It is possible that addressing these problems may lead to increased acceptance in the eyes of employers as online education continues to develop.

- H2: There is no significant difference in consideration for hiring online learners in comparison to traditional education.
- H3: There is significant difference in consideration for hiring online learners in comparison to traditional education

Summary statistics (Quantitative data):

Table – 5.4 (ANOVA) (Analysis of variance (Y):

Variable	Observations	Obs. with missing data	Obs. without missing data	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Y	250	0	250	1.000	5.000	3.880	1.023

Table – 5.5 (ANOVA) (Mean Value & p Value)

Source	DF	Sum of squares	Mean squares	F	Pr > F	p-values signification codes
Model	9.000	6.960	0.773	0.732	0.679	°
Error	240.000	253.440	1.056			
Corrected Total	249.000	260.400				

From the above table the fact revealed that there is no significant difference in consideration for hiring online learners in comparison to traditional education (Pr > F - .679) (p-values signification codes - °). Therefore, Null hypothesis is not rejected.

Computed against model Y=Mean(Y)

Signification codes: 0 < *** < 0.001 < ** < 0.01 < * < 0.05 <. < 0.1 < ° < 1

Standardized coefficients (Y):

Table - 5.6 (ANOVA) (Elements that influence hiring)

Source	Value	Standard error	t	Pr > |t|	Lower bound (95%)	Upper bound (95%)	p-values signification codes
How much do you consider the following factors when evaluating an online education degree / certificate candidate? The quality of the online education program:	0.035	0.085	0.413	0.680	-0.133	0.204	°
How much do you consider the following factors when evaluating an online education degree / certificate candidate? - I contact the program's faculty and staff to ask about their experience with the program:	-0.094	0.085	-1.101	0.272	-0.262	0.074	°
How much do you consider the following factors when evaluating an online education degree / certificate candidate? - I look at the program's accreditation status:	0.035	0.085	0.413	0.680	-0.133	0.204	°
How much do you consider the following factors when evaluating an online education degree / certificate candidate? - I read reviews of the program from current and former students:	0.047	0.085	0.550	0.583	-0.121	0.215	°

How much do you consider the following factors when evaluating an online education degree / certificate candidate? - I take a look at the program's job placement rate:	0.012	0.085	0.138	0.891	-0.157	0.180	°
How much do you consider the following factors when evaluating an online education degree / certificate candidate? - The candidate's academic achievements:	0.012	0.085	0.138	0.891	-0.157	0.180	°
How much do you consider the following factors when evaluating an online education degree / certificate candidate? -I review the program's curriculum and learning outcomes:	-0.047	0.085	-0.550	0.583	-0.215	0.121	°
How much do you consider the following factors when evaluating an online education degree / certificate candidate? -The candidate's communication skills:	0.094	0.085	1.101	0.272	-0.074	0.262	°
How much do you consider the following factors when evaluating an online education degree / certificate candidate? -The candidate's technical skills:	0.024	0.085	0.275	0.783	-0.145	0.192	°

Data Interpretation:

This table captures perceptions on the importance of various factors when evaluating online education degree/certificate candidates, based on responses collected on a Likert scale. The analysis of mean values, standard errors, and p-values provides insight into the significance of these factors.

1. Neutral Responses Across Most Factors

Most of the listed factors show no significant importance, with small mean values, wide confidence intervals, and high p-values ($p>0.05$). Respondents appear neutral regarding their importance when evaluating candidates.

- **Program Quality:** Mean = 0.035, t=0.413, p=0.680
- **Accreditation Status:** Mean = 0.035, t=0.413, p=0.680
- **Reviews from Current/Former Students:** Mean = 0.047, t=0.550, p=0.583
- **Job Placement Rate:** Mean = 0.012, t=0.138, p=0.891
- **Candidate's Academic Achievements:** Mean = 0.012, t=0.138, p=0.891
- **Candidate's Technical Skills:** Mean = 0.024, t=0.275, p=0.783

2. Marginally Considered Factors

While not statistically significant ($p>0.05$), some factors show slightly higher mean values and may be of marginal importance:

- Candidate's Communication Skills: Mean = 0.094, t=1.101, p=0.272
- Contacting Program Faculty/Staff: Mean = −0.094, t=−1.101, p=0.272

3. Negative or Neutral Responses to Curriculum Review

Reviewing the program's curriculum and learning outcomes shows a slightly negative mean (−0.047),

t=−0.550, p=0.583. This suggests respondents do not prioritize this factor when evaluating candidates.

6. RESULT / FINDINGS:

Findings Based on Analysis of Perspective of Employer:

- **Online Education and Comparable Quality**

Respondents are largely neutral about whether online programs provide education of comparable quality to traditional programs (t=0.546, p=0.586). The small value (0.0470) and wide confidence interval (-0.122, 0.216) indicate limited consensus.

- **Adaptability and Flexibility**

There is a marginal agreement that online education degree or certificate candidates are more adaptable and flexible (t=1.774, p=0.077). The confidence interval (-0.017, 0.322) includes zero, but the effect size (0.152) suggests potential support for this claim.

- **Motivation and Self-Direction**

Respondents do not strongly agree that online education candidates are more motivated or self-directed than their traditional counterparts (t=0.819, p=0.414). The low effect size (0.070) suggests neutrality.

- **Life Experiences of Online Education Candidates**

There is no significant difference in agreement on whether online candidates have a wider range of life experiences than traditional students (t=−0.546, p=0.586). The negative mean response (-0.047) and wide confidence interval (-0.216, 0.122) highlight disagreement or neutrality.

- **Access to Resources**

Respondents are neutral about whether online education candidates lack access to resources (t=1.228, p=0.221). The effect size (0.105) and confidence interval (-0.064, 0.275) do not show strong evidence of a concern.

- **Face-to-Face Interaction**

A significant finding is that respondents strongly agree that online candidates lack face-to-face interaction with faculty and peers (t=3.684, p=0.000). The mean response (0.316) and a confidence interval (0.147, 0.486) confirm this as a critical issue.

- **Qualifications of Online Candidates**

Respondents remain neutral about whether online candidates are as qualified as their traditional peers (t=1.365, p=0.174). The effect size (0.117) is small, and the confidence interval (-0.052, 0.286) reflects uncertainty.

- **Networking Opportunities**

Respondents agree that online education candidates may lack networking opportunities compared to traditional students (t=2.183, p=0.030). The effect size (0.187) and confidence interval (0.018, 0.357) reinforce this view.

Findings Based on Analysis of Evaluation Factors for Online Education Candidates:

- **Neutral Perceptions Dominate:**

Respondents generally show neutrality toward most evaluation factors, such as program quality, accreditation, reviews, job placement rates, and technical skills. This suggests these factors are not strongly prioritized when assessing online education candidates.

- **Lack of Significance Across Factors:**

None of the factors demonstrate statistical significance (p>0.05), indicating that no single aspect stands out as particularly important in the evaluation process.

- **Communication Skills as a Marginally Important Factor:**

The candidate's communication skills show the highest mean (0.094) among the factors, although still not statistically significant. This suggests that interpersonal abilities may be slightly more valued than other attributes.

- **Low Priority for Curriculum and Learning Outcomes:**

Reviewing the program's curriculum and learning outcomes has a slightly negative mean (−0.047),

indicating it may be deprioritized by evaluators when compared to other factors.

- **Uncertainty About Contacting Faculty and Staff:**

The negative mean (−0.094) for contacting program faculty or staff reflects hesitancy or lack of emphasis on gathering direct feedback from institutions about program quality.

- **Technical and Academic Achievements Deemed Neutral:**

Both technical skills (0.024) and academic achievements (0.012) are perceived neutrally, which may indicate that evaluators rely on other unexamined criteria or have no strong opinions about these attributes.

7. DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS :

Strengths of Online Education: Adaptability and flexibility are seen as potential strengths but lack strong statistical support.

Weaknesses of Online Education: Concerns about interaction quality and networking opportunities are statistically significant and align with common criticisms of online education.

Respondents do not decisively view online programs as providing a comparable quality of education or fostering significantly different candidate attributes compared to traditional programs.

There is marginal evidence that online candidates may exhibit adaptability and flexibility.

The general neutrality suggests that evaluators may lack clear benchmarks for assessing online education candidates or do not view the listed factors as definitive indicators of candidate potential.

While not statistically significant, the slight emphasis on communication skills could indicate an underlying preference for interpersonal or soft skills in online education candidates.

The neutral responses toward program-specific metrics (e.g., quality, accreditation, reviews, and outcomes) may reflect a lack of familiarity or confidence in using these criteria to evaluate candidates.

8. CONCLUSION / SUMMARY:

The analysis of factors influencing the evaluation of online education degree or certificate candidates for job reveals a predominance of neutral perceptions across key evaluation criteria, such as program quality, accreditation, reviews, job placement rates, and technical skills. No single factor emerged as statistically significant, indicating a lack of strong prioritization or clear consensus among evaluators.

However, communication skills appear to hold marginal importance, hinting at a potential preference for interpersonal abilities in online candidates. Conversely, factors such as curriculum quality, learning outcomes, and direct feedback from faculty or staff are deprioritized, suggesting evaluators may not heavily weigh program-specific details when assessing online education credentials for employment.

These findings highlight a potential gap in evaluators' understanding or confidence in using specific metrics to assess online candidates effectively. It also suggests an opportunity for online education programs to better position their graduates by emphasizing transparency, building soft skills, and showcasing measurable outcomes such as job placement rates and accreditation.

Neutral Perceptions: Evaluators are generally undecided about the importance of various factors, possibly reflecting uncertainty or limited experience with online education evaluations for job.

Soft Skills as a Differentiator: Communication skills may be a differentiating factor for online candidates, offering a potential area of focus for program enhancements.

Need for Awareness and Education: Raising awareness about program quality metrics and their relevance could help evaluators make more informed assessments of online education credentials for employment.

By addressing these areas, online education programs can improve their perceived value and equip their candidates to better meet the expectations of evaluators who are reviewing them for jobs.

9. LIMITATIONS:

- **Sample Size and Representation:**

The dataset appears limited in size, with responses potentially concentrated within specific industries (e.g., IT, service, animation). This reduces the generalizability of findings to other sectors or geographic regions.

- **Potential Response Bias:**

As some respondents hold managerial or HR positions, their responses might be influenced by personal biases or experiences, rather than objective evaluations of online education candidates.

- **Focus on Employers Only:**

The study exclusively targets employers and does not include perspectives from candidates, educators, or program administrators, which could offer a more balanced view.

- **Lack of Longitudinal Data:**

Responses capture perceptions at a single point in time, missing how attitudes might evolve as online education becomes more common or as programs improve.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS:

Institutions should prioritize the enhancement of face-to-face interaction opportunities, including hybrid models, and improve networking possibilities for online students to address key concerns.

Emphasizing adaptability and flexibility as fundamental strengths positions online education as a contemporary and dynamic alternative.

Employers and evaluators should prioritize clear, measurable attributes such as job placement rates, accreditation, and candidate technical skills to achieve a balanced assessment.

Highlighting program quality, learning outcomes, and student reviews can enhance the understanding of the value of online programs.

Future research should examine the neutrality noted in respondents' perceptions, which may be associated with a lack of familiarity in evaluating online education credentials, and assess attitudes toward candidates with traditional education backgrounds.

Finally, online programs ought to incorporate communication skills training to align with evaluator preferences and enhance graduates' competitiveness in the job market.

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