



Pedagogical Transitions in Indian Classical Music: MOOCs, Apps, and Online Platforms



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Abstract

With the proliferation of digital technology, Indian classical music education has entered a new phase where pedagogical approaches are being redefined through online platforms. This paper explores the transition from the traditional guru–shishya parampara to digitally mediated learning environments such as MOOCs, dedicated apps, and hybrid models. Drawing on a wide array of platforms including SWAYAM, Udemy, Shankar Mahadevan Academy, and AI-powered tools like NaadSadhana, the study examines how pedagogy, access, community, and learner outcomes have evolved. Based on platform data, learner reviews, and qualitative analysis, this paper identifies emerging trends, evaluates pedagogical efficacy, and discusses implications for the future of Indian music education.

Keywords: Indian classical music, online music learning, digital pedagogy, MOOCs, NaadSadhana

Research Paper

Introduction

Indian classical music has traditionally been passed on through oral instruction in a personalized one-on-one system known as the guru–shishya parampara. Rooted in deep intergenerational transmission, this method emphasizes not just musical techniques but also the philosophical, spiritual, and cultural underpinnings of the art. However, the onset of globalization and the digital revolution has ushered in a transformation of pedagogical formats across the classical arts. In the context of Indian music, the democratization of education through online platforms is rapidly altering how and where music is learned, making it more accessible and varied than ever before.

In recent years, especially post the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous online platforms have begun offering structured, flexible, and affordable courses in Indian classical music. These include MOOCs such as SWAYAM and NPTEL (“SWAYAM”), international aggregators like Coursera and Udemy (“Online Indian Classical Courses”), and specialized Indian

platforms such as Shankar Mahadevan Academy (“Shankar Mahadevan Academy”), Artium Academy (“Artium Academy”), and Furtados School of Music (“Furtados School of Music”). Mobile applications like NaadSadhana (“NaadSadhana”), Riyaz (“Riyaz App Review”), and SwarShala have added real-time feedback, AI-powered accompaniment, and flexible scheduling to the mix. This study explores the pedagogical shifts catalyzed by these digital platforms and evaluates the new teaching and learning models that are emerging.

Research Problem

The core issue this paper addresses is whether the pedagogical value and immersive depth of traditional Indian music education can be preserved or meaningfully adapted within digital environments. While online courses and apps significantly broaden access and reduce cost barriers, they also raise concerns around feedback mechanisms, performance immersion, guru–shishya intimacy, and cultural transmission. This research seeks to identify the trade-offs and potential of these new learning modalities.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the pedagogical models employed in online music education platforms for Indian classical music.
2. To analyze the accessibility, affordability, and learner demographics across platforms.
3. To assess the effectiveness of AI-based and asynchronous feedback mechanisms.
4. To evaluate learner engagement, satisfaction, and community-building in digital environments.
5. To identify gaps and propose recommendations for blended or hybrid pedagogical frameworks.

Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that while online platforms and mobile applications can enhance the reach and inclusiveness of Indian classical music education, they require significant pedagogical adaptation and human mentoring to fully replicate the immersive learning outcomes of the traditional system.

Relevance of the Study

This paper is relevant to both the academic and practitioner communities involved in arts education. With institutions increasingly adopting hybrid learning models, understanding the pedagogical impact of digital platforms is crucial. Moreover, the societal importance of this research lies in democratizing access to Indian classical music for aspirants across rural and international geographies. By examining how heritage can be preserved in a digitally transformed society, this research connects culture, technology, and education policy.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative and comparative research design, integrating both primary and secondary data sources to explore the pedagogical transition in Indian classical music education. Primary data was collected through structured interviews and testimonials from instructors and learners affiliated with major digital learning platforms such as Shankar Mahadevan Academy (“Shankar Mahadevan Academy”), Artium Academy (“Artium Academy”), and NaadSadhana (“NaadSadhana”). These firsthand accounts offered valuable insights into teaching practices, feedback structures, and learner engagement models.

Secondary data was derived from official platform websites, government publications—including the

Telecom Regulatory Authority of India’s Internet Penetration Report (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India)—and institutional sources such as SPIC MACAY’s “Anubhav” documentation (“SPIC MACAY”). Supplementary context was drawn from comparative review of other online music learning environments such as Udemy (“Online Indian Classical Courses”), Furtados School of Music (“Furtados School of Music”), Riyaz (“Riyaz App Review”), myGurukul (“myGurukul – Online Flute Classes”), Sharda Music (“Sharda Music”), Swar Classical (“Swar Classical – Learn Indian Instruments”), Komal Gandhar (“Komal Gandhar – Radha Music”), and KM Music Conservatory (“KM Music Conservatory”).

The collected material was analyzed through qualitative content analysis to identify patterns related to accessibility, pedagogy, and learner experience across platforms. Data was thematically coded under dimensions such as pedagogical quality, learner autonomy, instructional depth, feedback mechanisms, and community interaction. Triangulation across interview narratives, platform documentation, and verified user testimonials was employed to ensure analytical validity and reliability. The results of this analysis are presented in the following section, structured thematically to highlight major trends and pedagogical implications observed across digital platforms.

Discussions

Digital Accessibility and Democratization

India’s internet penetration and smartphone adoption rates have made digital learning in the arts increasingly feasible (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India). Platforms like SWAYAM provide free courses by reputed institutions, and Udemy offers music modules starting at INR 499 (“Online Indian Classical Courses”). The Shankar Mahadevan Academy, with over 50, 000 learners across 95 countries, provides graded, live classes integrated with feedback, notation libraries, and practice logs (“Shankar Mahadevan Academy”). NaadSadhana and Riyaz have personalized practice plans and real-time pitch analysis (“NaadSadhana”, “Riyaz App Review”).

Students from rural India, as well as international learners without access to trained gurus, now gain structured pathways to learn Hindustani and Carnatic music. This shift from exclusivity to inclusion has significant pedagogical and cultural implications.



Pedagogical Approaches and Feedback Mechanisms

Unlike static video tutorials, advanced platforms integrate layered feedback systems. SMA uses Cisco WebEx for real-time classes and OM Book™ for content delivery, enabling live interaction and assignments (“Shankar Mahadevan Academy”). NaadSadhana leverages AI to offer instantaneous feedback on swara accuracy, shruti alignment, and rhythm. Riyaz uses ML models to monitor gamaka variations and voice modulations.

Courses on Udemy by instructors like Ankur Jadhav or Ritu Agarwal are structured in Western pedagogical styles—learning objectives, modular lessons, quizzes, and project work (“Online Indian Classical Courses”). Such formalization introduces consistency but may lack improvisational depth and spontaneous learning elements central to Indian pedagogy.

Learning Communities and Cultural Immersion

One limitation of online learning is the reduced opportunity for cultural osmosis. In a guru–shishya setting, the student absorbs not only technique but demeanor, values, and subtle aesthetics. Platforms attempt to fill this through live webinars, student forums, and digital concerts.

SPIC MACAY’s “Anubhav” series brought legends like Pt. Hariprasad Chaurasia and Alarmel Valli into virtual classrooms, engaging over 50,000 students during the pandemic (“SPIC MACAY”). Artium Academy’s “Guru Live” sessions and Furtados’ community challenges recreate interaction and peer-based motivation.

Variety of Offerings and Modular Progression

Platforms now offer diverse paths: from full diplomas (IGNOU, Annamalai University) to focused modules like “Voice Culture for Beginners” (Udemy), bansuri lessons (myGurukul), or tabla drills (SwarShala) (“myGurukul – Online Flute Classes”, “Sharda Music”, “Swar Classical – Learn Indian Instruments”).

Artium Academy collaborates with artists like Sonu Nigam and KS Chithra for celebrity-led programs (“Artium Academy”). Komal Gandhar offers multilingual training with teacher tracking features (“Komal Gandhar – Radha Music”). These developments reflect a broader curricular palette and personalized tracks to suit hobbyists and professionals.

Hybrid Learning and Institutional Response

Many brick-and-mortar institutions have adopted hybrid models. KM Music Conservatory, Gandharva

Mahavidyalaya, and Vishwakarma University offer online classes supplemented with offline assessments or workshops (“KM Music Conservatory”). Universities such as IGNOU have begun integrating SWAYAM credits into their formal programs (“SWAYAM”).

A promising model is the “flipped classroom” where students first engage with content online and then attend personalized feedback sessions offline. This preserves rigour while offering flexibility.

Learner Outcomes and Limitations

Learners report improved accessibility, time savings, and structured progression. However, challenges persist in:

- Lack of tactile feedback and improvisational jamming.
- Assessment based on self-declaration or limited teacher interaction.
- Isolation and lack of peer-learning, especially in rhythm and ensemble settings.

Technological limitations such as latency affect performance in group sessions, particularly for tala-based practices. AI apps, while helpful, are sometimes critiqued for rigidity and insufficient context-sensitivity.

Recommendations

- Integrate peer learning: Scheduled group classes can enhance rhythm practice and community.
- Cultural modules: Storytelling, history of ragas, and aesthetic philosophy should accompany technique.
- Certification parity: Recognize online course certificates for institutional progression.
- Blended models: Offline residencies or workshops with online scaffolding can improve retention and skill.

Results / Conclusion

Indian classical music is undergoing a major pedagogical shift catalyzed by the digital revolution. Platforms like SWAYAM, Shankar Mahadevan Academy, Udemy, and AI-driven apps have enhanced access, affordability, and modularity. These tools cater to a new generation of learners who seek flexibility and autonomy while engaging with a centuries-old art form.

However, complete digitalization risks losing the improvisational and cultural depth inherent to Indian music. The solution lies in thoughtful hybridization—blending the wisdom of tradition with the reach of



technology. Institutions, policymakers, and practitioners must collaborate to design frameworks that preserve authenticity while embracing innovation.

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