Attitude of Higher Education Students towards the Effectiveness of Online Education with Special Reference to Coronavirus Pandemic

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Abstract: *Attitude of higher education students towards the effectiveness of online education with special reference to coronavirus pandemic. The global education landscape has undergone a profound transformation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the sudden closure of schools and colleges worldwide, online education emerged as the primary mode of instruction, affecting millions of students. This article explores the attitudes of higher education students in India, particularly those pursuing MBA, medical, and engineering programs, toward online learning during the pandemic. It delves into the challenges and benefits of online education, highlighting the digital divide and resource limitations. The study aims to uncover the evolving perceptions of students and the adaptability of higher education institutions to this unprecedented shift. Through surveys and data analysis, the article provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of online learning and its implications for the future of education.*

Keywords: online education, COVID-19 pandemic, higher education, student attitudes, digital divide

1. Introduction

"The key to success is getting people to do the right thing at the right time." – Michael W. Allen, CEO, Allen Interactions

So is the right time for the adoption of online education in the world, given the contemporary needs of the society, that we are waking up in a pandemic hit world. The concept of online education and e- learning platforms are not new. It has come a long way, experiencing its own journey. The long history of online teaching in India started with broadcasting space provided by the AllIndia Radio and the Doordarshan for telecasting recorded educational programmes for not only higher education but also for school-going children. In 1994, ISRO provided the teleconferencing facility at IGNOU that was a booster for a large number of online courses like management studies, computer science and especially for teachers training in India. In the year 2000, the teleconferencing got the recognition as an official education channel under the Gyandarshan platform. There was still the need for two-way video communication. In 2005, an effort was made by ISRO in collaboration with MHRD and IGNOU in this regard with the launching of EDUSAT satellite designed by late "APJ Abdul Kalam" during his tenure as President of India. Despite all efforts, EDUSAT could not fulfil the need as expected. It is a fact that even 15 years back from today, it was a big challenge to establish a two-way video communication between one to many. Today in 2020 both the teachers and learners must be fortunate to have so many apps developed for two-way communication even in mobile. Now the challenge is not with technology but with ideas that how to make the online teaching more useful. In the limited time frame of online teaching where a teacher has to address a large number of learners and it may not be possible to respond to the queries of all of them and many of the learners may not get the chance to ask their queries. Hence, to address these issues, came into picture the role of other modes of communication such as Email, WhatsApp, etc. through which learners can send their queries beforehand and at the same time the teacher can get prepared to answer those before going to the online classroom. Corona pandemic, its impact on Education sector and the role of Online education in meeting the exigencies of the pandemic Little did the world know on the eve of new year celebration 2020 about SARS-COV-2, the virus, that was about to bring the whole human race on its knees along with its heap of weapons, army of intelligentsia and brain superior to all the organisms on this globe. COVID-19, though has got the label of health and economic crisis, has left none of the spheres untouched of its impacts. Lockdown, was just the beginning of the story. How long story? We don't know. It all started with the relieving and exciting feeling for students that they got a bonus holiday from schools, for employees to get introduced with the work-from-home culture, for families to spend time with their near and dear ones under one roof. But gradually the pandemic took to unveil its horrible face down the line, when those students realised that learning in brick-and-mortar classrooms, seeing their friends and teachers in person and playing on grounds may no longer be normal. Employees in unorganised or organised sector started to get the heat of salary cut or even the shock of getting no salary at all. Families remained to be locked down with their close ones in their homes with no entertainment places to go for; parks, gyms, restaurants being shut, movie releases being postponed, all sort of exams got postponed, countries-imposed disaster laws on their nations for uncertain periods of time. Uncertainties is all we are left with in our lives. With the economy coming to a screeching halt, sprang up a number of economic issues uncovering numerous loopholes in the national and international infrastructures of different systems. In the education sector, one question is of prime importance currently that, is it the right time to go completely digital? We hardly have any other choice. The pandemic posed a serious challenge on the Education sector worldwide. The immediate response to the threat by the global community was sudden closure of schools and Colleges worldwide. As of 12 January 2021, "approximately 825 million learners got affected. According to UNICEF monitoring, 23 countries are

currently implementing nationwide closures and 40 are implementing local closures, impacting about 47 percent of the world's student population. 112 countries' schools are currently open." Multipronged consequences of online education rose its heads. Online education against formal education is like a 2-D shadow of a 3-D sculpture. Talking about India, according to the MHRD report and National University of planning and administration, 260 million learners have been affected as infrastructure development is on a great fall back. The pandemic has made all the schools and colleges across the country to adapt online teaching through various apps like zoom, google meet, cisco webex meetings, teams app and many more. Classes and examinations are conducted online whereas, the assignments are submitted through email, WhatsApp, and other platforms. The virus outbreak means tremendous losses in learning hours. There are many limitations of online education like lack of technical knowhow and unequal availability of resources and infrastructure like Japan is struggled hard to digitise its education system with poor infrastructure. It is equally important to accept that it is always better to go for something against nothing. So, the importance of online education amidst this crisis cannot be undermined altogether. Moreover, with time, its various positives have also been seen like gradual improvement in the technical knowhow of public in general, increase in digitisation of India, growth in ed-tech start-ups, upsurge in blended learning, improvement in learning material, exposure of students to various international level Institutions and many more. The old parable has been said rightly that," Every cloud has a silver lining". Though it is onerous to see a pandemic with optimism after this magnitude of suffering, yet every failure of ours to win over the pandemic is taking us one step closer to the success. This can be proved form the great involvement of private sector in online education. Tech companies like Google and Microsoft quickly offered their digital platforms and services to support the continuity of virtual education. Google suite for education and Microsoft office 365, which are free for schools and colleges, have been popularized with their adoption across the world. Open platforms like Udemy, edX, Coursera are remarkably doing excellent job to educate the society. The Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD) has launched e-Portal "YUKTI" to tacklethe COVID crisis. In words of Samuel Beckett," Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better." Rationale of the study : One of the direct impacts of the lockdown was on the Education sector that came to a sudden halt. Over 1.5 million schools and all the major colleges across India closed down followed by a quick shift to a large scale digital Education. For higher Education, mid-march was the middle of an academic semester, and, as a result institutions feared loss of academic contact hours. However, the only way to cope with the situation was to shift to the online mode of Education. MHRD, recently renamed as Ministry of Education, which regulates Education through its various agencies like UGC(University Grants Education), rolled out several initiatives to promote online education, few of which includes, Pragyata guidelines on online education, Internet access under Bharat Net scheme etc. With all these tailor made solutions brought about to solve the novel complications, the onus of adaptability to the never before experienced situation lies on the students ultimately. In the previous one year of conduction of Educational programmes through online mode, a mixed response from students have been received that has been continuously conveyed through various articles and journals at different platforms. Some have found Education through online mode challenging and have focussed on its various limitations, while others see it beneficial and needful according to the present needs of the society believing upon the fact that "necessity is the mother of innovation". This study is an attempt in this direction to unveil the attitude of higher education students towards the effectiveness of online education programmes that are being conducted during the lockdown. At the end of the day, it is the students who have to adapt themselves to the new situations, deal with the novel challenges and perform in the new system. So, it is imperative to know the attitude of students towards the effectiveness of online learning in conduction of higher.

Statement of the problem the problem may be stated as- Attitude of higher education students towards the effectiveness of online education with special reference to coronavirus pandemic.

Operational definition of the terms:
- Higher education students: In present study, Higher education students means the students belonging to medical, management and engineering colleges.
- Online education: In present study, the term means the learning instructions which is delivered using online platforms like Google meet, Zoom, Webex etc.
- Coronavirus pandemic: The COVID-19 pandemic, also known as the coronavirus pandemic, is an ongoing global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. The World Health Organization declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 20 January 2020, and later a pandemic on 11 March 2020. As of 2 April 2021, more than 130 million cases have been confirmed, with more than 2.83 million deaths attributed to COVID-19, making it one of the deadliest pandemics in history.

Attitude: In present study, the term refers to the attitude towards online learning during lockdown period.

Objectives of the study
1) 1.To analyse the attitude of students towards online learning in higher education programmes.
2) To study the attitude of students towards online learning in higher education programmes with respect to their economic status.
3) To study the attitude of students towards availability of resources facilitating online learning in higher education programmes with respect to their economic status.
4) To study the attitude of students towards online learning in higher education programmes with respect to types of course .

Hypotheses of the study
1) There is negative attitude of students towards online learning in higher education programmes.

2) There will be no significant difference between the attitude of students towards online learning in higher education programmes with respect to their economic status.
3) There is a significant difference between attitude of students towards availability of resources facilitating online learning in higher education programmes with respect to their economic status.
4) There is no significant difference between the attitude of students towards online learning in higher education programmes with respect to types of course.

Delimitations of the study
This study is limited to :
1) Higher education students studying in Management, Medical and Engineering only.
2) Indian higher education institutions only.

2. Review of Related Literature

Arnab Kundu and Tripti Bej (2020) conducted a study on "COVID-19 response: students' readiness for shifting classes online", the purpose of which was to investigate **Indian students'** perception of readiness for this sudden shift and at the same time, report a possible approach of good institutional governance to respond to such an unprecedented crisis. Findings of the study revealed that students were neither satisfied nor ready for this sudden shift toward online education rather they felt fear, uncertainties, and several challenges owing to a deep digital divide to adapt to this unprecedented shift. They were found absorbed in memories of F2F(Face to Face) mode before the COVID outbreak and take this online shift as a temporary adjustment owing to respond to the pandemic finding no possible alternate.

Amit Mittal, Archana Mantri, Urvashi Tandon and Yogesh K. Dwivedi (2020) studied A unified perspective on the adoption of online teaching in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study aimed to develop a theoretical model that highlight the determinants of the adoption of online teaching at the time of the outbreak of COVID-19 by adopting a time-series analysis to understand the factors leading to the adoption of online teaching. In the first phase, data were collected from those faculty members who had no experience of conducting online classes but were supposed to adopt online teaching as a result of the COVID19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown. After two weeks, a slightly modified questionnaire was forwarded to the same group of faculty members, who were conducting online classes to know their perception regarding the adoption and conduct of online teaching. The findings of the research suggested that there were Significant differences in the perceptions of faculty members regarding before and after conducting classes through online teaching.

Dr. Ishmirekha Handique Konwar in 2017 conducted a study on "A Study on Attitude of College Students towards E-learning with Special Reference to North Lakhimpur of Lakhimpur District, Assam " whose objective was to study the attitude of college students towards e – learning with regard to gender and locality. The research was conducted on all the college students of North Lakhimpur of Lakhimpur district. Sample of 200 college students were randomly selected. The findings of the study revealed that the college students have positive attitudes towards e-learning and there exists no significant difference in attitude towards eLearning between male and female college students as well as between urban and rural college students.

Dr. K. Nachimuthu in 2020 studied the "**Student Teacher's attitude towards online learning during COVID-19**". The purpose of this research was to determine the attitude towards online learning by the student teachers in the Covid-19 Period. In this research, the Survey type of tool was used as Google forms. Online learning supported instruction was taken as an independent variable and student attitudes towards online learning through computers were dependent variables. As a data collection instrument used was an online learning attitude scale and the sample consisted of 130 student teachers. According to analysis, conclusion was drawn that, "normal classroom practice does not affect attitudes of students towards online learning and there is no significant difference between the male and female attitude scores of student teachers toward online learning practice in Covid-19."

Lily Wong and Michelle Fong in 2014 conducted a study on **"Student Attitudes to Traditional and Online Methods of Delivery".** The aim of the analysis of student attitudes was to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between face-to-face and online learning options and preference for online learning technology between gender groups. The sample taken was the students from various lecture streams and tutorial groups. The data was collected through survey method via questionnaires. The results from Wilcoxon Rank Sum tests show that there were no significant differences between face-to-face or online learning options and preference for online learning technology between male and female students studying first-year accounting.

3. Methodology of the study

In present study, online survey will be conducted with the help of Google form.

Population of the study
The target population of the study is students pursuing Masters of Business Administration(MBA) from Faculty of Management Studies(FMS) - University of Delhi, Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) and students pursuing MBBS and BSC in community health from Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Ranchi and Institute of Public Health (IPH), Ranchi respectively and students pursuing Bachelor of Technology form various private and government engineering colleges.

Sample
Purposive sampling technique will be used for selecting the participants. The distribution pf sample can be shown as follows-

Type of courses	MBA	Medical	Engineering
Tools	40	40	40

Tools

For present study, the researcher will develop following tools: –

1) Online questionnaire for assessing the attitude of higher education students towards online learning .
2) Online questionnaire for assessing the attitude of students of higher education students towards resource availability.

Data collection procedure

The researcher will develop two questionnaires for knowing the attitude towards online learning and resource availability. The questionnaires will be prepared with the help of Google form and the link of the Google form will be distributed in all the aforementioned types of institutions by taking their permission.

Data analysis procedure

The collected data will be analysed with the help of descriptive and inferential statistics.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic forced a swift transition to online education across higher education institutions in India, affecting students pursuing diverse fields such as MBA, medical, and engineering programs. The study revealed varying attitudes among students, with some perceiving online learning as challenging due to the abrupt shift, digital disparities, and limitations in resource accessibility. However, it also highlighted the potential benefits, including increased digital literacy, growth in ed-tech start-up's, and exposure to international institutions. As the world grapples with uncertainties, the importance of online education remains undeniable. Private sector engagement, platforms like Google and Microsoft, and initiatives like YUKTI by the Ministry of Education have played pivotal roles in supporting virtual education. While challenges persist, every failure in this journey brings us closer to success, as education adapts to the new normal in an evolving world.

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