ATTITUDE OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TOWARDS ONLINE LEARNING DURING COVID-19

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Abstract

The attitude of students towards online learning can vary depending on several factors, including their personal preferences, previous experiences with online education, and the quality of the online learning platform or resources provided. Online learning became the primary mode of education during the pandemic, and understanding students' attitudes helps identify how well they adapted to this new learning environment. By studying their attitudes, researchers can gauge the effectiveness of online learning methods and identify areas for improvement. To study the attitude of Himachal Pradesh University students towards online learning during covid-19, an online survey method was conducted. Here questionnaire is designed in Google form and sent to 227 university students via social media like WhatsApp, email, and Facebook. Participants for this study were selected using convenience sampling. The students' Attitudes towards Online Learning Scale by Jyothi and Vijayabhinandana (2021) was used in this study. Percentage analysis was used to find out the attitude of Himachal Pradesh University students towards online learning during covid-19. It was found that 27% of university students were experiencing online learning for the first time during COVID-19 and 58% of university students felt that COVID-19 harmed their study. Further, 63% of university students found online learning more difficult than face-to-face. The most common negative impacts as agreed by most of the students were hard to interact online with peers (62%) and teachers (61%). However, almost half (49%) of the respondents agreed online learning is less time-consuming than face-to-face learning. In total, 60 % of university students indicated that their home environment supported online learning. Further, 55% of participants are confident with their computer skills; further 55% of participants believe that academic dishonesty is more in online teaching and learning.

Keywords: *Attitude towards online learning; COVID-19; university students; online learning*

INTRODUCTION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, students around the world experienced significant changes and challenges in their academic lives. The pandemic necessitated the implementation of various measures to ensure the safety and well-being of students and the wider community. One of the most significant changes was the transition from traditional in-person classes to remote learning. Schools, colleges, and universities rapidly shifted their teaching methods to online platforms, such as video conferencing tools and learning management systems. This transition posed challenges for both students and educators, including technical issues, lack of reliable internet access, and difficulties in adapting to virtual classrooms. The pandemic disrupted the routine and structure of students' lives. Many had to adjust to studying from home, which often blurred the boundaries between school and personal life. The absence of physical classrooms, libraries, and study spaces also affected students' ability to focus and maintain a disciplined study routine.

The attitude of students towards online learning can vary depending on several factors, including their personal preferences, previous experiences with online education, and the quality of the online learning platform or resources provided. Many students appreciate the flexibility and convenience that online learning offers. They may enjoy the ability to learn at their own pace, access materials from anywhere, and have a more personalized learning experience. These students often embrace the online format and are motivated to make the most of their virtual learning opportunities. Some students may have a neutral stance towards online learning. They may not strongly prefer or dislike it, but they are willing to adapt and make the most of the situation. These students may recognize the benefits of online learning, such as flexibility, but may also miss the social interaction and hands-on experiences of traditional classrooms. Certain students may have a resistant attitude towards online learning. They may prefer face-to-face interactions and find it challenging to stay engaged or motivated in an online environment. These students might struggle with the lack of physical presence, reduced opportunities for immediate feedback, or limited access to resources. They may view online learning as a compromise or a less effective alternative to traditional classroom instruction. Some students may have a mixed attitude towards online learning, where they appreciate certain aspects while being critical of others. They may find certain subjects or learning activities well-suited for the online format, while others may be more challenging or less engaging. These students may appreciate the flexibility but also feel the need for more interaction and support from teachers and peers.

Gehan & Nahid (2020) studied E-learning During COVID-19 Pandemic. The results revealed that overall, 61.6% of students had negative attitudes towards e-learning. There was the highest level of total obstacles present among academic students in the first year (67.6%) and the lowest level of total obstacles present among academic students in the fourth year (55.7%) that faced nursing students during using e-learning. The most common dimensions of obstacles to e-learning were infrastructure and technology, technical and management support, and instructors' characteristics (87.1%, 85.2%, and 82.9%, respectively). Afroz, Rahman, & Zerin (2021) revealed that cost and time-effectiveness, safety, convenience, and improved participation were the most frequently cited positive aspects of the online learning experience, while distraction and reduced focus, heavy workload, problems with technology and the internet, lack of ICT knowledge, and poor network infrastructure, limited availability of educational resources, low attendance of learners, uncooperative learners and insufficient support from instructors and colleagues were the most recurrent negative aspects. Akcil, & Bastas (2021) observed that there was a positive relationship between digital citizenship behaviours and e-learning attitudes. In addition, it had been observed that the negative anxiety of students due to the pandemic is reflected in their e-learning processes.

Boca (2021) surveyed students' behaviour and attitudes towards online education during the pandemic period at the Technical University of Cluj Napoca, Romania. Results showed that 78% of students found online education beneficial for them in a pandemic situation, whereas 41.7% of students appreciated the teachers' teaching skills and the quality of online courses since the beginning of the pandemic, and 18.7% of students appreciated the additional online materials for study to support their education. However, students found online education stressful but preferred online assessment for evaluation.

Hussein & Sami (2021) found that the overwhelming majority of the students had a negative attitude toward online education. Similarly, they preferred and considered on-campus education more effective. The findings also revealed that the overwhelming majority of the students stated online education does not suffice their learning satisfaction. Mushtaque et al (2021) revealed that students have an enthusiastic attitude toward using the online medium and would like to use online learning in the future or after the pandemic goes away. The highlighted issues include an inappropriate study environment, a disparity of gadget availability, inadequate online study content, no access or slow internet speed, and electricity load shedding. The above problems

negatively affect students' studies in terms of minimum or no student involvement and proxy attendance in the online class. In addition, the health of students is also reported as being seriously affected by attending online classes. Students had weak eyesight, increased weight, sleep deprivation, and behavioural problems. İbrahim & Ömer (2022) concluded that the majority of students (82.2%) preferred face-to-face education over online learning environments, although almost half of the respondents (55.6%) indicated that their institutions were prepared to offer lectures online. According to the majority of participants, the most significant impediments to online learning were an unreliable or non-existent internet connection (87.6%), a lack of motivation (75.3%), and an unsatisfactory home environment for learning (75.6%).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The shift to online learning has had a significant impact on the overall learning experience of university students during COVID-19. The pandemic has significantly disrupted education system worldwide, with most schools and universities resorting to remote learning or hybrid models. Studying the attitude of students towards online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic can provide valuable insights and understanding of the impact of this abrupt shift in educational delivery. Online learning became the primary mode of education during the pandemic, and understanding students' attitudes helps identify how well they adapted to this new learning environment. By studying their attitudes, researchers can gauge the effectiveness of online learning methods and identify areas for improvement.

Students' attitudes towards online learning can affect their engagement and motivation levels. By examining their perceptions, researchers can identify factors that influence students' interest and participation in online classes. This understanding can help educators design better strategies to enhance engagement and motivation, leading to improved learning outcomes. Online learning has the potential to exacerbate existing inequities in education. Studying students' attitudes can shed light on how different demographics, socio-economic backgrounds, and learning needs are affected by online learning. This information can guide policymakers and educators in developing strategies to ensure equitable access to education for all students, including those facing challenges in the online learning environment. The sudden shift to online learning during a global pandemic has had significant psychological and emotional impacts on students. Exploring their attitudes towards online learning can help researchers understand the relationship between this mode of education and students' mental health and well-being. It can inform the

development of support systems and interventions to address any negative effects and promote student well-being. Online learning has become a prevalent mode of education beyond the pandemic. Studying students' attitudes towards this mode of learning can provide insights into their preparedness for future digital environments and their development of digital literacy skills. This information can inform educational policies and initiatives aimed at equipping students with the necessary skills for the digital age.

METHODOLOGY

To study the attitude of Himachal Pradesh University students towards online learning during covid-19, an online survey method was conducted. Here questionnaire is designed in Google form and sent via social media like WhatsApp, email, and Facebook. It is a descriptive type of research. Its objective is not only to analyze, interpret and report the status of an institution, group, or area to guide practice in the immediate future but also to determine the adequacy of its status by comparing it with established standards and means to improve the existing status. The survey method is used because it suits best the nature of the present study.

SAMPLING

The population for the study consisted of all the students of Himachal Pradesh University. The sampling unit in this study is any student of Himachal Pradesh University those were taking online classes. Once potential participants were identified, the researcher Whatsapp the Google forms as per the objectives of the study to the selected sample. Online Google forms were used for data collection, with n=227 university students. Participants for this study were selected using convenience sampling. All university students who at the time of the data collection were approachable participated in the study. Throughout the data collection, participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and that their participation was voluntary. To protect the participants' confidentiality, all information through which their identities could be revealed was removed.

TOOL USED

Students' Attitude towards Online Learning (A modified version of Jyothi and Vijayabhinandana's Scale, 2021) was used in this study. Due to the non-availability of a standardized scale to measure the attitude of students towards online learning in the present situation, it was felt necessary to construct a scale. At this point, a scale was constructed to measure the attitude of students towards online education using an equal-appearing interval scale

developed by Thurstone and Chave (1929). Twenty statements were included in the final scale. Out of twenty statements nine most appropriate items reflecting Students' Attitudes towards Online Learning were analyzed by the researcher. The content covered the affective component encompassing feelings; the behavioural component encompassing the effect of attitude on behaviour; cognitive component encompassing belief and knowledge. As the scale satisfied reliability and validity, hence can be used to study the attitude of students towards online learning.

STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES USED: -

Percentage analysis was used to find out the attitude of Himachal Pradesh University students towards online learning during covid-19. To achieve the objective of the present study, the obtained data from university students were organized and responses are summed up in the table given below.

Table 1: Attitude of University Students towards Online Leaning during COVID-19

Sr. No.	Items	Response	%age
1.	During COVID-19, online learning is new to me?	61/227 (YES)	27%
2.	During COVID -19, learning online is difficult than face-to- face.	143/227 (AGREE)	63%
3.	During COVID-19, I find it hard to interact online with teachers.	138/227 (AGREE)	61 %
4.	During COVID-19, I find it hard to interact online with peers.	141/227 (AGREE)	62%
5.	Online learning is less time consuming than face-to- face.	113/227 (AGREE)	49%
6.	My home environment supports online learning.	135/227 (AGREE)	60%
7.	I am confident with my computer skills.	124/227 (AGREE)	55%
8.	COVID-19 has/ had negative impact on my study.	132/227 (AGREE)	58%
9.	In my opinion, academic dishonesty is more in online teaching and learning.	125/227 (AGREE)	55%

As Table 1 shows that 27% of university students were experiencing online learning first time during COVID-19 and 58% of university students felt that COVID-19 harmed their study. Further, 63% of university students found online learning more difficult than face-to-face. The most common negative impacts as agreed by most of the students were hard to interact online with peers (62%) and teachers (61%). However, almost half (49%) of the respondents agreed online learning is less time-consuming than face-to-face learning.

In total, 60 % of university students indicated that their home environment supported online learning. Further, 55% of participants are confident with their computer skills, further 55% of participants believe that academic dishonesty is more in online teaching and learning.

DISCUSSION

Despite the general downsides to online learning and the student's general unpreparedness to receive their education online, online learning seems to be the most effective way of conducting teaching during exceptional circumstances like the COVID-19 pandemic. Attitudes toward online learning students are thought to affect their desire for continuing education. The high-quality learning experience of students does not only result from the efforts of teachers in e-learning (Haznedar & Baran, 2012). The readiness and characteristics of students are extremely important (Simonson et al, 2009). It can be said that one of these important characteristics is digital citizenship behaviours. Considering this, it is critically important that university should equip their students not only with the technical, theoretical, and academic skills specific to their chosen study areas, but also the more broadly applicable social, cultural, and non-technical skills such as communication, teamwork and problem-solving (all of which are essential components for most professional employment contexts) which will help them to find relevant work and thrive in India and Abroad workplaces. Those who can do so will be best positioned to produce work-ready students who can seamlessly integrate into the workforce.

From this, it can be concluded that with the transition to digital devices, it must be acknowledged and accepted that the virtual classroom cannot have the same flow of teaching as that of a traditional one. Moving towards a "blended learning" model - a mix of some real-time interactive online sessions and some offline engagements to reinforce or dive deeper into the concepts – could be a successful approach.

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