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Attitudinal, Awareness, and Perceptional Differences in Virtual and Offline Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The education industry was completely transformed by the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. The industry has upscaled itself to cater to millions of consumers. The purpose of this paper is to understand the attitudinal, awareness, and perceptional issues in virtual and offline learning, especially during the pandemic, as well as to study the academic industry in total and adopt a combined approach. The use of technology and the increased use of the Internet in the last few years have made various new interventions in the industry. This paper also highlights the alteration and dissimilarities between modern education and the traditional mode of education. This study was undertaken to understand which mode of education is more preferred by the students, through the use of primary data and secondary data. One of the findings is: a majority of the people in this research are conscious about virtual education, but prefer the offline mode of education. This paper has also tried to categorise the trials faced by the stakeholders of the industry, in terms of the attitude of the faculty as well as the students, awareness regarding the technological advancements, and perceptions regarding the same. The researchers conclude that all the stakeholders have to bring about huge changes in their skills and attitude to make blended learning a reality.

Keywords: COVID-19, E-Learning, Attitude, Awareness, Perception, Offline Education, Blended Learning

Introduction

Educational institutes across countries were ordered to close temporarily with the emergence of COVID-19, a novel corona virus disease. All the institutes imparting education came to an operational standstill, since they had to save students from the virus exposure, which was likely among the highly socialising student community. Earlier, in the February 2020, schools in China and other affected countries were closed to safeguard everyone from the increasing contamination. Nevertheless, almost all schools/academic institutions across the globe, of nearly 75 countries, realised or declared their closure by mid-March. As per the data received from UNESCO, by the end of April 2020, approximately 186 countries executed countrywide closures, disturbing about 73.8% of the entire registered learners (28th April 2020, UNESCO). To break the chain of transmission and slow down the spread of the virus, lockdown and social distancing norms were implemented. However, the closure of educational institutes affected a large number of students. There was a need to complete the syllabus; the schools and colleges were closed for a long period. To address this, both students and educational institutions started experimenting with various new ways of finishing the prescribed syllabi in the required time frame. It was not at all easy for both students and teachers to adapt to these changes easily; there were a lot of inconveniences, but they took it in a positive way. This also encouraged new examples of educational innovation and experiments using digital intermediations, which were considered an optimistic lining on a dark cloud, considering the lethargic speed of improvements in educational organisations in terms of old lecture -based approaches in teaching, fixed institutional biases, and obsolete classrooms. All the educational institutions shifted to creative approaches in teaching in a relatively short time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Webex, and Google Meet are some of the online platforms of teaching

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that schools/colleges used after moving from offline to online education. The online learning environment varies profoundly from the normal classroom situation, when it involves learner's motivation, satisfaction, and interaction (Bignoux & Sund, 2018). The Community of Inquiry (COI) framework offers a convenient baseline for intervening in online teaching and teaching (Garrison et al., 2001). According to the COI framework, the success of Web-based instruction is determined by creating a learners' group. In this group (analogous to the normal classroom situation), learning happens through three interdependent elements: (1) social presence, (2) cognitive presence, and (3) teaching presence. Adam et al. (2012) argued that there was no significant difference between online learning and face-to-face classes with reference to their gratification; further, they reinforced the fact that virtual classes were going to be as effective as traditional classes, if it is considered appropriately. These evidences clearly show us that online learning is a perfect ancillary for the traditional classroom learning, if they are designed appropriately. Educational institutions in India have also made a shift to the online teaching environment soon after the Union Government's decision to impose a nation-wide lock-down for 21 days, from 25 March 2020, which was later extended for 19 more days. Nevertheless, the central concern is about the standard of learning, which is meticulously related to how well the content is designed and implemented. Effectiveness of learning also depends on how the content is curated to the online environment, and also in understanding and communicating the limitations faced by students. In India, the system of online education has never been tried at this scale, hence the study is even more relevant, considering this as a sort of massive social experiment. Further, in the agriculture education sector, the curriculum of agriculture gives tonnes of importance to practical aspects, and adopting an online platform raised questions related to the effectiveness of teaching and learning. In this line, we have observed the Indian agricultural students' perception regarding online education, and various attributes which could make Web learning simpler and successful. The study's findings are significant for agricultural educational institutions for two reasons. First, the shift to online mode was unexpected due to the unprecedented lockdown imposed to manage the spread of COVID-19, and as a result, the institutes did not have time to style and adapt the course content for online mode. Scholarly experience, and hence learnings, are frequently utilised in this context to make online learning simple, efficient, and productive. Second, even when the COVID-19 pandemic is over, life will not be the same, and online learning will continue to exist. Since the length of the pandemic and the likelihood of reinfections are unknown, social isolation may become the new normal. As a result, all tutoring schools must be prepared to shift a majority of their course content to e-learning platforms, and adapt course structure and curriculum accordingly.

Objectives of the Study

- To study the students' perceptions about e-learning.
- To know the most preferred mode of education.
- To recognise the importance of e-learning.

Literature Review

Sr. No.	*Author*	*Arguments Regarding Online Education*
1	Hiroshi (2005)	Trainees who were working in public health and environmental hygiene pointed out the advantage of e-learning programmes; 60% of the trainees preferred e-learning.
2	Newhouse	The outcome shows that students felt that the use of laptop-assisted teaching helped them in learning easily, by providing improved access to resources, and helping them be self-governing and better prepared.
3	Cappel	This study considered students' perceptions of incorporating online modules in two undergraduate business courses, where students finished online learning components prior to class discussion. The consequences show that students of the elective course graded the virtual modules meaningfully better than other offline modules.
4	Reddy	The main aim of this survey was to analyse the attitude/behaviour of the learners towards resource-based learning, and to critically observe the utilisation of the resources provided by the university. As per the results of the survey conducted, it was noticed that 68% of them could construct their own knowledge base; 60% of them enjoyed the flexibility in study; and 46% enhanced their study skills through online education.

Sr. No.	*Author*	*Arguments Regarding Online Education*
5	Jamlan	The outcome reveals that faculty members perceive e-learning as a positive force in helping students achieve their learning purposes.
6	Ferriman (2013); Schlosser et al. (2009); Moore (1990); Keegan (1980)	They have used various terms for online learning in their paper. They have named it as distance learning, online education, and distance education.
7	Pappas	Distance education was the term used in 1892 for the first time in United, in a brochure of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Caleb Phillips promoted a correspondence course in the Boston Periodical paper, and this acted as a primary foundation of Web-based Internet learning in the US (1728).
8	Banas and Emory, (1998)	Pennsylvania State University announced a correspondence education programme, as there was only partial access to advanced education because of the huge distance between students and educational institutions until 1892. This fact was shared in this paper.
9	Miller (2014)	The University of Chicago became the principal organisation of higher schooling to conduct courses over the radio in 1922. Three eras later, in 1953, the University of Houston offered the first on-screen university classes.
10	Katy, Anderson (2006); Pai (2013)	They have discussed in their paper that there is little change in the perception of face-to-face mode of education, when compared with online education.
11	Allen and Seaman (2013) and Nazarlou (2013)	Online learning was perceived to be inferior to offline courses. They discussed the perception of academic leaders and students with regards to online courses versus offline classes.
12	Summer et al. (2005); Kartha (2006)	Their paper discussed student satisfaction, and it was found that it was lower in the case of online learning than among the students who opted for offline classes.
13	Brown (2016); Neuhauser (2010); Murdock et al. (2012); Pai (2013)	The performance of the online (distance) students was very similar to those who visited campus regularly for studies; this was the conclusion of this paper.
14	Katy and Anderson (2006)	There was no difference in the performance of the students (both online and offline) who joined a small business management course in a university.
15	Farmakis and Kaulbach (2013)	This paper states that if an online course is well structured and designed properly, it could lead to the same level of excellence as in traditional courses.
16	Murdock, Williams, Becker, Bruce, and Young (2012)	This paper discusses the skills procurement of students enrolled in face-to-face and online counselling courses. The authors found that online education could be as operative as traditional classroom teaching.
17	Pai (2013) and Neuhauser (2010)	They discussed in their paper that there was no important modifications in learning outcomes between traditional and online learning, even when gender and differences in learning styles were measured. The discussions about the advantages and disadvantages of online learning versus the traditional mode of education were based on an assortment of parameters.

Research Methodology

Research Design: Experimental and descriptive research design.

Source of Data: The source of data is primary data and secondary data.

Population: Researchers selected students of Navi Mumbai city for the survey.

Sample Size: The sample size is 50 students.

Data Collection Tool: For the purpose of data collection, the researcher used a questionnaire as a tool.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

- Around 52% are aware of online education and the remaining 48% are unaware.
- About 66% prefer offline education and 34% prefer online education.
- Around 48% say it is an effective way of learning and 52% say it is not.
- Approximately 30% strongly believe that online education offers an incentive mode of education.
- About 32% agree that online education provides ease of access of information related to the course.
- Roughly 44% agree that virtual education enables learning anytime and anywhere, and they like the concept of blended learning.
- Around 54% strongly agree that online education fails to connect students with teachers, and hence, they consider it an ineffective mode of education.
- About 36% agree that technical skills and computer knowledge are required for effective online education.
- Approximately 38% respondents agree that online education will change higher education problems, while 30% neither agree nor disagree with the statement.

Findings

Most of the people in our research were aware about online education; however, there are people who are still unaware about it. Most people think that online education is an operational way of learning; at the same time, some people prefer offline education. In our research, most respondents favoured the offline mode of education and only 40% preferred online education. Only a few people think that online education is an effective way of learning, and most of them still prefer offline education. The respondents who prefer online education as an effective way of learning gave the following reasons: offers an interactive mode of education, ease of access of information, and enables learning anywhere and anytime. The respondents who believe that online education is not an effective way of learning gave the following reasons: there is no connection between the students and their respective school or college, there is lack of interaction with classmates and instructors, and there is lack of real-time feedback to questions and assignments.

Conclusion

There are pros and cons to both online and offline education. The increased presence of people on the Internet encouraged us to formulate a research paper on online education. Throughout the paper, the researcher witnessed that people prefer online education because of ease of access of information, anywhere and anytime; however, they will not get real-time interaction like on campus. Online educations has a lot of advantages; students have the opportunity to learn while working. Most respondents even agreed that it will improve the quality of higher education, which is lacking right now.

In conclusion, we can say that online education and offline education have their own advantages and disadvantages, according to the requirements of the student, because some students want to learn while working, and some students want to learn full-time. So, both have different priorities. A few of the respondents also said that online education will help overcome the problem of higher education, like expensive fees, full-time study, attendance issues, poor infrastructure of colleges and schools, and so on. Only a few people agreed that online education will be acknowledged and accredited the same as offline education by employers and professional bodies, as it would be easier to a get certificate of education than through the traditional education system.

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