

Online Learning- The Problems and the Prospects

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of the technology has drastically changed our lives. In the present time we feel we are nowhere without the gadgets in our hands. Everything has become readily available in the tip of our hands, so as knowledge. Gone are the days when it was thought that formal educational institutes are the only means to acquire knowledge and degrees. And the lockdown period due to Covid-19 pandemic has changed the scenario totally. The online educational apps are rising in their business. Not only that even the schools of remotest area are with no option other than opting for online apps to continue the process of teaching learning. The lockdown period was hard for most of the people may be financially or mentally. And the students are the worst sufferers. At that time most of the teachers at all levels tried their best to keep motivated the students and continue their teaching. Teachers were bound to learn new technologies so that they can reach their students. Students on the other hand also had to learn and adapt to new technologies of learning. No doubt online learning has helped the students and teachers yet the sudden shift could not be beneficial equally for all students. In this study an attempt has been made to investigate the perception of the students towards online learning and the problems faced by them during learning through online mode. A total 139 students of undergraduate level from different colleges of Kamrup district were taken as sample for the study. A self structured questionnaire pertaining the benefits and issues they are facing in online mode was administered. The main finding of the study is that learning through online mode has both benefits and loopholes. The main thing that is to be kept in mind is to planned and gradual application of blended mode of learning.

Keywords

blended learning, onlinemode, perception, problem

Introduction

Online learning implies the use of internet for delivering the content to the learner which is also known as e-learning. It provides opportunities to the learner to learn from anywhere, anytime. Fallon & Brown (2003) stated that online learning provides wide learning facilities to the learner to select diverse learning styles from Multimedia e-learning system. This learning system or the mode of delivery can be synchronous which is real time learning, where the learners and the teachers can interact with each other in real time setting or the asynchronous mode of delivery where the which is not time bound and the learner can learn at their own time. The need of online learning at the present time is unquestionable as it helps the learner to learn whatever he/she likes at their own time and convenience but at the same time, it requires effective content management, learning management systems basic knowledge of technology. The sudden outbreak of the pandemic left no choice for the Educators, teachers and the students but the online learning for the continuation of the learning. And it was the time when the teachers and students faced difficulty in terms of online learning as most of them were the first time user of the various online apps and there was no time for training and orientation. Not only that for effective teaching learning process a sound environment, effective electronic devices, good internet connectivity etc. are necessary which is a luxury for many people in the countries like India. As per the report of World Bank collection of development indicators, compiled from officially recognized sources, rural population in India was reported at 65.53% (2019). Again India has been ranked 46th out of 100 countries on the inclusive internet index 2020 released by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). Economical condition is also an important indicator of education which

may become constrain in online learning. Apart from these, in online learning students may face many challenges like lack of motivation and interest, problems in learning practical subjects like engineering, medical etc. Though online learning has many disadvantages, we can't ignore the importance of technology enhanced learning in this 21st century. Pandemic like covid19 has raised significant challenges in the continuation of classes in face to face educative environment. In such situation online learning is the only option remaining in hands. Online learning is very much helpful where students can easily access the material, get opportunity to learn from various experts of their own fields through technological application.

Various studies have been done regarding students' perception towards online learning. One study that is confined with the perception of students towards online learning at Midwestern University (John A. Huss and Shannon Eastep) which focused on the attitudes and perceptions of students at Midwestern university who were enrolled in at least one online course on or before 2012. Result of the study has shown that the students enrolled in that particular online course because it was not available in offline mode. Consequently, dropout rates in online courses are extremely high (Dietz-Uhler, Fisher, & Han, 2008). The main purpose of the study is to know about the perception of students on online learning because its success entirely depends upon students' perception. Perception refers to a process of interpretation and informed construction of information received from sensory organs. Human beings perceive their world in terms of their motivation, expectations, cognitive styles and cultural backgrounds. Perception influence how we focus on, process, remember, interpret, understand, synthesize, decide about, and act on reality. The perceptual process begins with receiving stimuli from the environment and ends with our

interpretation of those stimuli. The another objectives of the study are to analyse the problems faced by the learner in learning through online mode Research indicates that creation of E-Learning environment is not simply a technical matter rather demands the consideration of several human and social factors (McPherson and Nunes, 2004). Human perceptions about technologies determine their attitudes towards them (Aviram and Tami, 2004).

Objectives of the study:The pandemic has compelled us to depend on the online mode to continue our education. Though in many countries it is a common practice still the country like India it is luxury for many people as we are still to achieve the 100 % literacy rate.The success and failure of a system depend on the level of acceptance of the people and this acceptance is shaped by the perception and by their experiences.To have a clear idea on the effectiveness of the online learning the investigators has intended to find out the perception of the students towards online education and the problems faced by them in the process of learning.For the present study 139 students from different institutions of Kamrup District has been selected from different colleges. Both boys and girls were taken as the sample for the study. And for the in-depth analysis 3 case studies were done. For collecting the data, a questionnaire has been constructed by the investigators which pertains to the perception of students towards online learning and the issues related with it. The questionnaire was made on the google form and sent to the students and some students were given the hardcopies of the questionnaire to fill up. The data gathered from the responded were tabulated and analysed using simple

percentage. To present a clear view of the results graphs has been used.

Sl. No	Statements	Strongly agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree
1	Online learning improves	40 (28.78 %)	85 (61.15%)	14 (10.07%)
2	Online learning improves generalisation skill	40 (28.78%)	83 (59.71%)	16 (11.51%)
3	Online learning Improves learning quality	44 (31.65%)	68(48.92%)	27 (19.42%)
4	Online learning is challenging than face to face teaching	85 (61.15%)	41(29.49%)	13 (9.35%)
5	Online learning is more time consuming	57 (41%)	53 (38.12%)	29 (20.86%)
6	The contents of online learning are not up to the mark	36 (28.05%)	79 (56.83%)	24 (17.26%)
7	Online learning is an isolated learning system	57 (41%)	57 (41%)	25 (18%)
8	Online learning develops confidence	47 (34%)	48 (34.53%)	44 (31.65%)
9	Its is better to learn online than going to traditional classes	21(15.10%)	30 (21.58%)	88 (63.30%)
10	Online learning has provided rich resources of learning	63 (45.32%)	52 (37.41%)	24 (17.26%)
11	Want online learning after the pandemic ends	21(15.10%)	47 (34%)	71 (51.07%)

Table 1: Perception towards online Learning

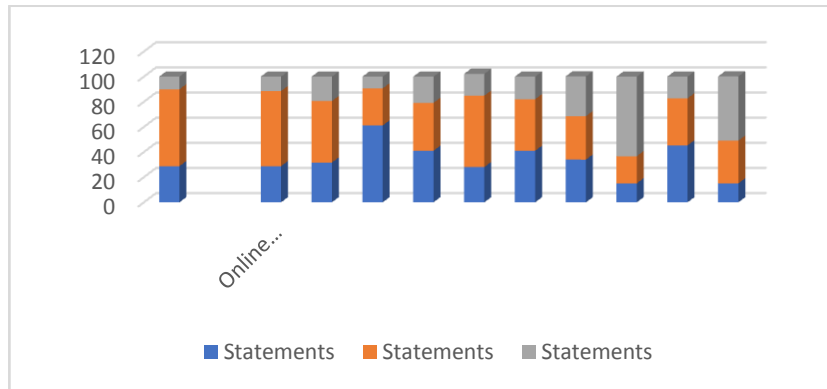


Figure 1: Perception of students towards online learning

From the table 1 it can be inferred that 28.78% students thinks that online learning improves integration skill among the students but 10.07% students disagreed with the statement. 28.78% students strongly agreed with that online learning has improved their generalisation skill to some extent. 31.65% students strongly agreed that Online learning has improved the quality of learning as they are getting the opportunity to learn from various sources. Online learning will give opportunity to everyone to learn anywhere. Various companies and websites has been developed -Khan Academy, Udacity, edX, and Coursera are some of the most prominent ones—are built on this premise, and many well-respected scholars and entrepreneurs have high hopes and expectations for online learning, particularly for massive open online courses (Bowen, 2013; Fisher, 2012; Koller& Ng, 2012; Lewin, 2012; Selingo, 2013). On the other hand, 61.15% students responded that online learning is more challenging than the face to face mode. Comparing face-to-face learning with online learning brings forth significant deficiencies in the online mode such as lack of human connect, absence of opportunities of collaborative learning, teacher supervision and the most glaring being lack of opportunities for hands-on learning in complex subjects such as science and mathematics.As the students have to face so many challenges while learning. 41% students agreed that online learning is more time consuming than the face to face mode. Students agreed this statement owing to many reasons such

as connectivity problem. 28.05% Student thinks that the content of online learning is not up to the mark. During lockdown it was seen that many people started their own YouTube channels, it became a trend. Many people started various apps to play the role of online tutor. Among 139 students most of the students that is 41% students thinks that online learning is an isolated process. They lack the emotional touch of classrooms. For them face to face interaction is very important in the teaching learning process. 34% students reported that online learning has developed their confidence. It may be because students had the opportunity to learn at their comfortable zone. Many of the students fear to speak when others are nearby. But during the process of online learning they got the opportunity to speak without any hesitation. Though they agreed that online learning helped n building their confidence yet 63.30% students denied the statement that it is better to learn online than going to traditional classroom. There are many reasons attached to this denial that is Poor instructional material, limited Faculty, lack of technological infrastructure, materials and assignments are difficult to understand (Falih M. Alsaaty¹, Ella Carter¹, David Abrahams¹ &Faleh Alshameri¹ 2016) 51.07% students said that after the pandemic ends they want to go back to their traditional classrooms.

Table 2: Problems faced by students during online classes

Sl. No	Statements	Strongly Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree
1.	I have sufficient knowledge of handling electronic devices	43 (30.93%)	79 (56.83%)	17 (12.23%)
2	Due to network issues, I don't get to listen to online classes properly	93 (66.90%)	29 (20.86%)	17 (12.23%)
3	I do not get proper chance to clarify my doubts in online classes	62 (44.60%)	52 (37.41%)	25 (17.98%)
4	Teachers don't have the proper skill to take online classes	17 (12.23%)	62 (44.60%)	60 (44.11%)
5	Many of my friends don't have smart phones for online classes	48 (34.53%)	47 (33.81%)	44 (31.65%)
6	Teachers only provide reading materials instead of live classes	23 (16.54%)	62(44.60%)	54 (38.84%)
7	I am not able to cop up with the online classes	37 (26.61%)	70 (50.35%)	32 (23.02%)
8	I have only one smart phone at home	35 (25.17%)	19 (13.66%)	85 (61.15%)
9	I learnt better in face to face mode of teaching	116 (83.45%)	17 (12.23%)	6 (4.31%)

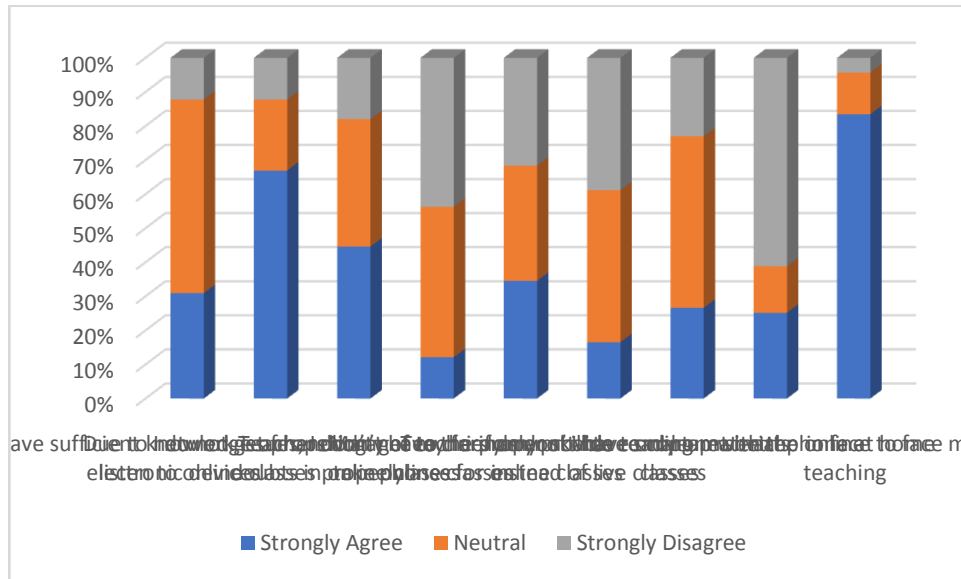


Figure 2: Problems faced by the students during online learning

From the Table 2 it is found that 56.83% students replied that they are unsure of using various apps for online learning. As e-learning is currently widespread, academics who are not equipped technically to handle developments of materials and delivering online modules are hampering progress, and they require extensive skills development (Ellis, O' Reilly and Debrecey, 1998). This response may be because of they are not introduced to many apps like Google classroom, Google meet etc. and It is alarming to note that though there was sudden shift from the face to face mode to online mode 66.90% students replied that there are severe network issues due to which they are not able to listen properly to the online lectures. The data packs are also too expensive for most of the students. 44.60% students agreed that they do not get proper chance to clarify their doubts in online classes. There are many reasons for this. Most of the students face network issues and many of them doesn't know how to interact in the online class. 44.60% students are unsure about the teaching skills of teachers who are teaching online. 34.53% students replied that many of their friends don't have the smartphone. We are giving importance to providing equal educational opportunities to all but the digital learning has brought a dividend in acquiring the equal educational opportunities. 44.60% students are unsure if they teachers are providing online reading materials or are doing live classes. Because most of them are not able to join the online classes due to various reasons. Some students reported that due to lockdown their family faced financial problems so it was difficult for them to manage data packs for internet. 26.61% students replied that they are unable to cop-up with the online classes. There is a low-level preparedness among the students concerning the usage of Learning Management Systems (Parkes et al., 2014). 25.17% students replied that they have only one smartphone at home, which makes it difficult for them to attend online classes regularly. Because that smartphone is to be shared by all the family members. And it was interesting to see that though we are shifting towards digital

India, Education sector is also in the run of the digitalisation yet 83.45% students responded that they learnt better in face to face mode of teaching. It reflects the situation of online learning in India. face-to-face instruction provides dynamic learning attributes not found in Web-based teaching (Kemp and Grieve, 2014).

For the in-depth analysis of the study some of the selective students were interviewed personally and taken as cases for the study to have a better understanding on their perception on online learning and the problems faced by them.

CASE A: In the present study Case A is a female studying at UG 5th semester in a provincialized college of Kamrup. While interviewing the case A it was found that the sudden shift from the traditional mode of learning to online learning has created a problem for her. Due to financial problem she was unable to bear the cost of Internet which is necessary for the online learning. Case A also informed that she had to engage in earning to support her family which affects her learning. It was also reported by the student that she doesn't have the proper skills for online learning such as she has poor skills in typing in word files, she doesn't know how to send e-mails etc. She was also unaware of the various platforms of online learning from which she can be benefitted.

Case B: Case B is a male student of UG 3rd semester. This student is not interested in online mode of learning. In online learning the initiative of the learning depends on the students themselves. As the particular student is more interested in co-curricular activities so he in most of the times remained absent in the online classes as there was no compulsion for attendance as they have in the face to face classes.

CASE C: Case C is a UG 5th semester male student. The student responded that he has network issue in his area and for attending classes he had to go to near Namghar (Prayer

Hall) of their village. He also reported that he doesn't have the basic skills for handling various applications for online learning. He also stated that they have only one smartphone at home which has to be shared by his brother and he for online classes.

Way Forward:

For the successful online teaching and learning it should always be kept in mind that teachers not just need to develop their skills in handling various applications or gadgets they should also focus on transacting the curriculum in a proper pedagogical way (Morley, 2010). Some other researcher feels that teacher not only should understand the online written text of the students but also the group dynamics along with the individual need (Turvey, 2008; Loveless, 2011). Though the Covid-19 pandemic has forced us to take this alternate way of processing our teaching learning yet this trend of learning online is going to be an integral part of our teaching learning system. The shift from traditional mode to online mode needs strategic planning specially for the countries like India. The learning process in online mode should be followed by proper evaluation.

The technological challenges also pose a serious threat in optimising the benefits of online learning. The problems of the speed, errors and inability to customise the features of various applications according to the learners need have been standing as an obstacle. According to Taylor (2002) academics are only good as much as they can adapt to the new technology; this is a challenge for most academics. The skills that required by the teacher and the students in operating online applications are also important. Teachers and students should be oriented for using online platforms. The ability and familiarity of the teachers with technology are important for the positive learning experience.

It is also important to identify the learning styles of the learners for the effective online teaching learning otherwise the teachers feel to remain in the darkness while teaching. Burd and Buchanan (2004) suggest four distinct learning styles: imaginative, common sense, analytic and dynamic. Also they recommend "to be effective, teachers need to communicate with non-participants privately to encourage discussion (p.24)".

There should be proper infrastructure for technological assistance in the educational institutes. As from the study it can be inferred that many students face financial problems and online learning incurs a great deal of money it is of utmost importance to provide the facilities. Otherwise forced and sudden change in the system will hamper the educational development of the country. In the future scenario marked with the increasing role of digital technology, the biggest challenge is the digital divide that exists not only among students but even educational institutions as they do not have the necessary resources or infrastructure to continue remote learning/teaching activities. In addition, to improve upon the necessary resources and infrastructure, the capability building of educators and training of teachers also need to be ensured so

that they can effectively use digital platforms and technology solutions to deliver quality education and impactful skill development.

Conclusion

The modern day system of education demands innovative and advanced techniques, strategies of teaching and learning. In the era of the development of Science and Technology, one cannot have confined to only following the traditional ways and means. To upgrade oneself and to be competent in this era the students should have basic digital literacy skills. Online learning demands basic knowledge of computer and its application, a positive mind-set, proper internet facility and network facilities. The present study is confined with online learning and its benefits. Students perception is also taken into consideration. During the study the investigator studied students' perception, problems and opportunities getting through online learning. Though online learning is an old concept for advanced countries but developing countries like India, it is comparatively a new concept and it requires proper planning, training, effective implementation and evaluation.

The researcher collected the data from the students of undergraduate level of various colleges of varied backgrounds. After the analysis of data, it has been observed that students learnt better in offline classes than the online class. Again various aspects like environmental, economic, technical, attitudinal have affected the process of online learning. After analysis of result, it has been found that most of the students have neutral viewpoint. Therefore, a positive perspective should be presented among the students regarding online learning and its necessities. No system is completely perfect, there are certain merits and demerits, therefore a planned and systematic effort is needed to meet the demands of the present day system of education. In the era of competition, knowledge exploration and explosion, one can't completely avoid the online education. But virtual learning can't replace the offline mode cum chalk and talk method of learning. Therefore, a planned system of blended learning may be adopted.

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